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"You shouldn't wish to be a courier:" Experiences of Workers in the Platformised Goods Distribution Activity in Portugal

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Master in Political Economy

Supervisor:

Professor Doctor Renato Miguel do Carmo, Associated Professor,  
Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

October 2022



CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS  
E HUMANAS

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## Acknowledgements

This road has been long and intense, and it would not be possible to finish it without the support and strength given by the most important people around me.

First and foremost, I would like to start by thanking every courier that trusted me and confided in me with amazing testimonies in our interviews, such as thanking them for how well received I was among them, and how available and happy to help me and integrate my research. This work would not be possible without them. It is about them, but also for them.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Renato Miguel do Carmo, for sharing my love for this field, and so much knowledge with me, not only through this research process but also through the numerous talks and debates shared. To my master's director, Paulo Marques, for always encouraging me. To all my colleagues who walked this path with me, enriching it with different perspectives.

On a personal note, my biggest gratitude is to my mom, the most important person. For raising me with unconditional love and showing me the greatest example of strength and persistence. My biggest role model in life, thank you for going above and beyond for me and for my dreams. A thank you my stepdad, for loving me as his own.

I cannot go through life without thanking my older siblings, and my partners in life. Thank you to my sister Vanessa for believing in me when I couldn't and inspiring me with her dedication, and for being available and kind to review this work with me. To my sister Sara, for teaching me to face life strongly and never give up despite the odds. To my brother Emanuel, for teaching me to live lightly and enjoying the simplest things. You three are the reason I am who I am today. Thanking you three will never be enough.

I must thank my two best friends in life, Márcia and Laura, for walking and sharing this academic road with me since day one supporting each other. It would not have been the same without you.

This is so much more than thanks for supporting me in my master's. It is also for being an inherent part of me and for helping me improve day by day as a human and a professional.

This road has been long and intense, but it is worth it.



## **Abstract**

The changes in the political and economic panorama in the last decades promoted the valuing of labour flexibilization. Alongside technological and digital evolution, the economy was *platformised*, i.e., economic activities conducted through digital platforms, like the on-demand goods distribution one, with a high impact on societies. The current dissertation regards the experiences of the workers in this *platformised* activity in Portugal, which can be described as an expression of the *uberisation* of labour. The purpose was to explore the effect of both labour and relational aspects associated with it. To accomplish the goals, qualitative research was performed, with interviews conducted with couriers, in the Lisbon metropolitan area. The results obtained suggest that despite enjoying the activity they perform, they are submitted to a set of conditions, dynamics, and interactions that fragilize their situation, creating a dangerous and unstable physical, social, financial, and psychological experience. With that, these research findings build ground to suggest that this economic reality might represent a means for the reproduction/perpetuation of pre-existent social inequalities and discriminations, enabling the analysis of the concrete experience of precarity that stems from the practice of labour *uberisation*. This dissertation and its findings constitute scientific significance in 3 different aspects: highlights the importance of discussing legislatively the creation of a new intermediary category of workers for the *platformised* couriers; discusses courier's typologies regarding different job conciliation; and lastly highlights the importance of analysing the role of entrepreneurship, interpreting their discourses.

**Keywords:** *uberisation*; precarity; gig economy; labour market; *platformisation*



## Resumo

As mudanças no panorama político e económico nas últimas décadas promoveram a valorização da flexibilização do trabalho. A par da evolução tecnológica e digital, a economia foi *platformizada*, i.e., atividades económicas realizadas através de meios digitais, como a atividade de demanda de distribuição de bens, com elevado impacto na sociedade. A presente dissertação aborda as experiências dos trabalhadores nesta atividade *platformizada* em Portugal, podendo ser descrita com uma expressão da *uberização* do trabalho. O objetivo foi explorar o impacto das dimensões laborais e relacionais a ela associados. Para cumprir os objetivos foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa, com entrevistas realizadas a estafetas na área metropolitana de Lisboa. Os resultados obtidos sugerem que, apesar de gostarem da atividade que exercem, os trabalhadores estão submetidos a um conjunto de condições, dinâmicas e interações que fragilizam a sua situação, gerando uma experiência física, social, financeira e psicológica perigosa e instável. Com isso, os resultados da pesquisa fundamentam o argumento que esta realidade pode representar um meio de reprodução/perpetuação de desigualdades e discriminações sociais pré-existentes, possibilitando a análise da representação concreta de precariedade decorrente da prática de *uberização* do trabalho. Esta dissertação e seus resultados têm relevância científica em 3 aspetos diferentes: destaca a importância de discutir legislativamente a criação de uma nova categoria intermediária de trabalhadores para os estafetas de plataforma; discute diferentes tipologias de estafetas em relação a diferentes conciliações de trabalho; e por último destaca a importância de analisar o papel do empreendedorismo, interpretando os seus discursos.

**Palavras-chave:** *uberização*; precariedade; gig economy; mercado de trabalho; *platformização*





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# 1. Introduction

The social, political, and economic dynamics of the human world are in constant mutation. With a gradually more integrated and interconnected world, comes new dynamics and needs of people to change their day-to-day life. Technologies have been becoming the centre of human dynamics and relations due to their easier and immediate characteristics, providing on-time access to goods, services, and connections anywhere and at any time. This access, despite on-time and growing, is still unbalanced and unequal throughout society, considering some groups do not have the financial and material conditions to have the technological devices and services necessary for such access.

The changes in the political and economic panorama in the last decades, taking a turn on the neoliberal agenda era, and later alongside the 2008 subprime crisis, promoted the use and valuing of the labour flexibilization, accompanied by the *platformisation* of different sectors, that resulted in the *platformisation* of the economy. With that and among other changes, came the *platformisation* of the on-demand courier services for goods distribution and delivery. This service provides the distribution for the companies and delivery to the customers' location of multiple sets of services and goods all through a digital platform, generally at that same time or in a short period.

The dissertation regards the *uberisation* of work in the *platformised* on-demand courier goods distribution and delivery activity in Portugal, more specifically the Lisbon metropolitan Area, focusing on Lisbon and Setúbal, concerning digital companies like *UberEats*, *Glovo*, and *BoltFood*, as are the ones with higher incidences, and many others alike. Exploring the local impact, specifically in the labour dimension, of this emergent activity, its focus, and fundamental research questions, are the different experiences that these workers—couriers—have and how those experiences are translated into their life, considering their different backgrounds and dynamics; and to what extent are existing social inequalities perpetuated and/or enhanced through *uberised* work, framing it all in the current political and economic state worldwide.

Just like seen with the *McDonaldization* of society (Ritzer, 1993)—life in society understood as working like the production in a fast-food restaurant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—where this is conceived as an outcome of processes of transformations in the structures and dynamics at the macroeconomic level, also in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can find processes like such according to the structures and changes we experience now: the set of all of characteristics and conditions mentioned previously with the type of gig services bundles up in one concept called *Uberisation* (Webster, 2020).

This technological evolution could be understood as beneficial but there are some aspects of these services that concern not only the workers themselves but as well as the people who

study the labour market. In the majority of these platforms, the workers do not have a contractual employment bond/agreement – they are hired as a service provision. While a contractual employment agreement recognizes the workers as employed by a specific firm, worthy of labour and (un)employment rights, structures, conditions and protections, a worker under a service provision, often hired through an outsourced way, is recognized as an independent worker simply providing a specific service in a specific time and place, disregarding any of the previous.

Learning about the European context for this activity, one thing is certain: These “new ways of labour” need, among others, two specific conditions to proliferate and grow rapidly: a considerable number of consumers and a big amount of available worker force (Leonardi and Pirina, 2020), especially a cheaper one. This cheaper working force tendentially comes from youth looking for jobs and/or different marginalized people that are normally excluded from the rest of the formal labour market (Huws, 2020)—both more easily found in high-density capitals.

Portugal represents positive fertile soil considering its sociodemographic characteristic and legislative situation (Leonardi and Pirina, 2020) which was then enhanced even more with the Covid-19 pandemic. Although companies like *UberEats*, *Glovo*, and *BoltFood* have proliferated in other places, Portugal represents a new and different reach for this business by one simple factor added: Portugal is the first European country to pass the “Uber Law”, regarding only the TVDE sector, where it allowed these ride-hailing operations by digital platforms (Leonardi and Pirina, 2020). This pioneer legislative action that has been taken in Portugal is significant because it gave room and allowed for these companies to establish themselves more comfortably in Portugal and grow very abruptly, while at the same time studying the possibilities of implementing other services provided by their companies, such as the *platformised* goods distribution and delivery one.

Nowadays, these platforms and services are common and present in people’s lives. Besides the general importance of social sciences research in better understanding and interpreting the world and its phenomena to act upon it, where this phenomenon is not excluded, this current research constitutes 3 more ways why is this relevant. Primarily, this phenomenon is on the rise abruptly and as was just mentioned, a very emergent one in all corners of the globe, which was even more enhanced with the development of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. When compared to its emergency and growth—and even though there is research already— there are still not enough studies on it. Aggregating to it is the relevance of the places and contexts where it is being studied: Lisbon and Setúbal focused. One of the studied cities, Setúbal, is a less urbanized context, despite still being an urbanized city with considerable industry development, when compared to the capitals that are commonly investigated and like the one here studied, Lisbon. Lastly, there is the approach that was taken in this research: it is not merely an analysis of the labour components, dynamics, and overall

dimension of this phenomenon, but it is also an analysis of the transversal dimensions of life that come with this reality, namely the impacts of this activity on the couriers' life, such as intersectional discriminations, harassments, and hostilities.

Taking into consideration what was just laid out and the overall casing for this investigation—further developed in the Empirical chapter—the goals that were established are:

1. Analyse the labour and work relations, processes, and dynamics in this activity
2. Examine how those regimes and intersectional hostilities are experienced by different groups
3. Analyse the perception of the workers of their condition in this activity and of the labour market
4. Interpret the possible reproduction of speeches about entrepreneurship among workers.

To accomplish these goals and to answer the research question, a qualitative approach was chosen. Performing semi-structured interviews with the workers, alongside some participant observations of the dynamics and a “day in the life” of these workers to an intense analysis of speeches and observation of practices, dynamics and their inherent conditioning and impacts on the life of the workers.

With all the possible obstacles due to Covid-19 and other factors that may condition this process, as well as with caution regarding biased guiding of interviews and saturation of information, 17 interviews were conducted. The sample consisted of 7 women and 10 men, from different platform companies such as *Glovo*, *UberEats* and *BoltFood*, essentially from the city of Setúbal and the city of Lisbon, allowing for the observation of heterogeneities in the experiences. After that, to produce the critical analysis, a content analysis was conducted.

In the next chapter, the review of the literature takes place with the assessment of the main crucial concepts and arguments that ground the foundation for this investigation. This review approaches the literature regarding the specific theme of the gig economy and the *uberisation* of work and its impacts on labour. After, is presented the Empirical Chapter to better understand the whole course and path that the present investigation has taken and how it developed throughout the year. Then, before the presentation of results and discussion, is a chapter regarding the social, political, and economic framework, approaching the most crucial moments in the world panorama, namely the rise of the neoliberal era and later the 2008 subprime crisis, to build a path to the critical discussion of changes in the labour market dimension and dynamics and from then on to discuss and interpret this research results. The following chapters regard the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the results, to produce a critical discussion. Lastly, some final considerations about the process and, mainly, about the case of study, with the return to the original goals and research question to finalize.

The name chosen for this dissertation directly stems from a strong statement by a courier that participated in the research and its interviews. The statement combines and resembles accurately the perceptions and experiences shared by the couriers interviewed, as will be seen throughout, therefore seemed suitable for it to name the dissertation.



## 2. Literature Review

This chapter is dedicated to the exploration of some crucial literature regarding the concepts and phenomena that make part of this study regarding the *uberisation* of work/labour in the *platformised* economy. The casing of the investigation is built up gradually with the unroll and analysis of the existing literature to structure the argument in place and its overall contextualization, which will then be solidly presented and described in the following Empirical chapter.

The present section starts with a brief presentation of the theme that the dissertation regards and the problem to approach. Then, the rise of the gig economy and the *uberisation* are the focus of the review, for a better comprehension of the changes in the global and local labour markets and how it generated and reconfigured new structures and forms of work rising from different needs and technologies, followed by a discussion on the labour and life impacts, namely revolving around the concepts of precarity and precarious.

The *uberisation* of work in the *platformised* on-demand courier goods distribution and the delivery phenomenon has been on the rise in the past decade because of the continuous growth of neoliberalism and expansion of capitalism—and with the evolution and expansion of information and communication technologies—creating new ways and reconfigurations of work and labour (Fontes, 2017; Leonardi and Pirina, 2020). The concept of *uberisation* of work, a name that directly comes from the name of one of the most famous gig economy platforms—Uber—, regards the process through which a certain economic service or activity is commodified through digital platforms and at a fast and reduced reach to the customers (Webster, 2020). In this reconfiguration, next further approached, the worker uses their private means to provide a service to customers and the work is usually guided by the demand of the market, not existing contractual bonds, pre-established schedules and employee rights (Webster, 2020) In this, the core workers have enhanced salaries and benefits, and the founders are amongst the richest people in the world while, at the opposite end, the outsourced workers have much inferior and precarious working conditions (Webster, 2020). This concept came to rise in the academic context firstly regarding the TVDE people transportation activity but later applied also to the food and other goods courier distribution and delivery services.

This reconfiguration of work has an impact on societies, producing transformations in the dynamics and habits of goods and services use and consumption, as well as in the labour organization, namely on the workers. Vulnerability and precarity seem to be the two strong words to define the courier workers' experience, according to research already conducted, while at the same time an entrepreneurial mindset seems to follow and be shared by them (Barrat, Goods and Veen, 2020; Leonardi and Pirina, 2020). With that and considering the emergence of such a phenomenon, studying it is not only interesting but also enlightening.

Regarding the Portuguese context, other studies have been conducted, that are inevitably used throughout the course of this present work. Highlighting here the 2 main ones, despite regarding the TVDE people transportation, represent important analysis in the Portuguese context. In Allegretti, Holz and Rodrigues (2021), the authors conducted a study to analyse the Lisbon reality, with a focus on the identification of emerged ambiguities associated with the Portuguese platform capitalism, contextualizing it within the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and its impacts on problems associated with platform capitalism. In Leonardi and Pirina (2020), the authors, on the other hand, focus on the actual emergence of the Portuguese gig economy within the European *platformisation* of work context, while analysing through Lisbon the convergency of Portuguese panorama with the trends of the European Union dynamics regarding this economic reality.

## **2.1. Gig Economy and *Uberisation***

The gig economy saw its emergence and boom alongside the Great Recession period and, therefore, the subprime crisis of 2008 (Vallas and Schor, 2020), with the loss of bargaining power of the workers and rising unemployment (G. Friedman, 2014). As of now, it is growing to be one of the most present and influential spheres of the economy worldwide, with an expectation of reaching \$455 billion in 2023, representing a growth of 17.4% when compared with 2018 (Broda, 2022). It currently represents “an important and strategically consequential branch of global capitalism”, playing an important role in domestic and global labour markets (Vallas and Schor, 2020).

Everybody is talking about the gig economy. From newscasters to taxi drivers to pizza deliverers to the unemployed, we are all aware of the changes to our jobs, our professions, our economies and our everyday lives wrought by the gig economy. (Woodcock and Graham, 2020, p. 1)

The concept of the gig economy advocates for the part of the labour markets characterized by independent contingent contracting arrangements developed and carried through digital platforms (Woodcock and Graham, 2020). Being essentially founded on and performed through digital platforms, the gig economy was, and is, even more, enhanced by the constant ICT evolution. Vallas and Schor (2020) define two types of branches, *per se*, in the gig economy: within the conventional economy, where already established corporations digitalize businesses with others; and the new consequential branch where various companies are already born and created in digital platforms. These types of firms provide different services and activities just from our cell phones and/or computers (Kenney and Zysman, 2016).

In the same way that the gig economy brought up new dynamics and ways we experience life, it also brought up new challenges, especially in the labour market. Flexible labour arrangements that were gradually more common were the only alternative for some workers, and that created a space for those same arrangements to prosper even more. Such

arrangements can be found in different corners of the economy and labour market, but for this analysis, the gig economy is the focus. Despite the benefits that technological and digital transformations can bring; it is inherent that it also comes with new challenges. Therefore, the constant actualization of understanding and knowledge of this new era is necessary to have better, more accurate action taken towards those challenges the new dynamics pose. There are several challenges that these new dynamics pose. One of the high and important challenges regards the environmental dimension. This niche of the economy assumes the intensive and enhanced use of digital platforms and technological and physical devices that highly impacts the environment on a global scale. Socially it represents an aid to people's daily dynamics, but it also represents an intensification of the resources used: what Khavarian-Garmsir, Sharifi and Abadi (2021) show regarding TVDE people transportation can also be used in the courier service. The most straightforward impact is seen in the increase of cars and motorcycles on the road due to these activities, increasing gas emissions and the use of fossil fuels (Khavarian-Garmsir, Sharifi and Abadi, 2021).

However, one of the most determinant changes to this research, and, in a way, challenges are, in fact, the new labour and work (re)configurations, alongside the liberalization of the labour market, as was previously discussed. Therefore, this economic branch and its labour platforms must be analysed and discussed as a different economic form from markets and firms as we know them (Vallas and Schor, 2020). The work arrangements found in the gig economy are generally not permanent and are defined, mostly, as freelance and entrepreneurship (G. Friedman, 2014; Woodcock and Graham, 2020), typically working on what is called contingency work, either on part-time and/or on-call (Healy, Nicholson and Pekarek, 2017). They are also, in most cases, precarious and unpredictable, due to fluctuations in income, performance rates (Woodcock and Graham, 2020) and other external factors. Therefore, despite spreading and emphasizing the idea of independent contractors with work flexibility, this more flexible liberal reconfiguration shifts a lot of the risks and challenges from the companies solely to the workers to endure, making their social and economic situation more uncertain and riskier (G. Friedman, 2014). This is possible because this configuration doesn't attribute the workers with the employee status and all the conditions it means in each country's labour code, therefore, the companies and firms are not obliged to provide common but crucial rights and conditions associated with direct employment (Healy, Nicholson and Pekarek, 2017). Characterizing themselves only as a means and platform of use and exchange, rather than an employer, these firms still hold a lot of control over the work and dynamics developed by the workers, such as the incomes and earnings, the conditions, and the allocation of work, through the minimum standards imposed to the workers and the rates they gain from the costumers, influencing either bonuses and/or disciplinary actions (Healy, Nicholson and Pekarek, 2017). In some cases, these workers develop and do the same

work as the ones on conventional labour arrangements, but with a considerable different bond to the firm they work in, creating this idea of a new configuration of work that is important to discuss. As such, the connection between worker and employer is rare and, in some cases, non-existent.

Notwithstanding, the gig economy also has and produces its more negative effects as mentioned so far—poor, dangerous, and precarious working conditions—and to understand them and the gig economy itself is the first step in improving it. Despite the accentuated rise of new forms and reconfigurations of labour in the past decade, with ICT evolution that gradually shapes our life, this is not the first time we see that phenomenon nor are all of them completely new and different. One of the many ways that the gig economy represents itself is in the on-demand goods distribution and delivery activity, through couriers. This activity in the gig economy is the prime example of a current reconfiguration, in the form of the *uberisation* of work, that is gradually discussed throughout.

The reconfiguration we analyse in the present research, the *uberisation* of work, can be considered not entirely new, therefore the use of the word reconfiguration instead of a new configuration. What is currently very much observable, and a reality worldwide was, in fact, previously pointed out and better studied and defined by Karl Marx. Marx (1867) pointed out how this economic system would commodify variable different dimensions in life and the *uberisation* of work proved how, in the platform work, the commodification of the overall life of the workers is a reality (Cant, 2020; Rodrigues, 2020; Roque, 2022).

Currently, there are some studies on this considerably new phenomenon that is these on-demand courier services, even considering the need for more exploration and information on it. If we look at the main research that has been made about this activity, it is safe to say that overall, around the globe, the different platforms in different places tend to have a very similar type of structure and operate the same, with non-remarkable differences. Starting there, we can observe that in most platforms of these services, the couriers, either drivers or riders, have the same relation/bond with the firm: they do not possess a contractual employment agreement, thus being considered independent workers (Ferrer and Oliveira, 2018) hired as a services provision:

From the theoretical point of view, the risk is that these activities are not even recognised as work. Indeed, they are often designated as “gigs”, “tasks”, “favours”, “services”, “rides” etc. The terms “work” or “workers” are very scarcely used in this context, and the very same catchphrase “gig economy” epitomizes this, as the term is often used to indicate a sort of parallel dimension in which labour protection and employment regulation are assumed not to apply by default (De Stefano, 2016, p. 5)

This *uberisation* of work, although it may confine the worker with a certain level of independence, confines in them the whole risks and responsibilities for their social and

physical protection (De Stefano, 2016), as well as externalizes some other work costs to the workers, (André, Silva and Nascimento, 2018; Rodrigues, 2020). This leaves workers in a highly vulnerable and unprotected working situation, thus making these workers' work gradually lose value over time (Vosgerau and Comar, 2019). As research shows, this category of independent worker follows the work flexibility and liberalization of the neoliberal agenda of self-employment, where fixed working hours do not exist and they can work, to some extent, when they want (De Stefano, 2016).

Without a contractual bond, these services do not account for employment and unemployment benefits and insurances, no accidents insurances, no fixed minimum salaries—meaning they earn accordingly to their days of work, that is, to the number of deliveries they do, and the distances travelled— and no support regarding the travel and vehicle expenses (Rogers, 2015). On top of that and despite the flexible and independent ideas, there is also the need to perform an excessive number of working hours, to receive what they conceive as decent earnings, considering most of these services do not account for or guarantee sustainability for the life of the workers, especially with compensations being low due to competitiveness in the sector (De Stefano, 2016).

## **2.2. Precarity and Precarious Work**

The different impacts and consequences of this activity can be analysed through different lenses. Here, the most suitable one is the following. One crucial question that imposes here after knowing and analysing existing knowledge on this matter is “to what extent are existing social inequalities intensified through gig work?”, a question very well posed by Healy Nicholson and Pekarek (2017), that served as a base and inspiration to the research casing. To try and not only find an answer to this question, but as well as to understand the scope of such, it is necessary to have an analysis just like the one conducted in this research, but also a reflection and discussion around the understanding of the different concepts present, along with the concept of precarity. This concept alone is not linear or simple to analyse, being a complex concept (Campbell and Price, 2016; Carmo and Matias, 2019). It can, and it does, involve a lot of dimensions, understandings, and “types” of applications. Here, the meaning will inevitably be the more labour-derived one, not neglecting, quite the opposite, the daily personal life, its dimensions, and implications, such as social vulnerability and long-time plans (Carmo and Matias, 2019).

The concept of precarity is strongly tied to the feeling and experiencing employment and contractual instability and uncertainty recurrent from low income, and poor conditions that partial and temporary bonds usually provide, creating a feeling of fear and risk of a job loss (Carmo and Matias, 2019; Ferrer and Oliveira, 2018). This builds the bubble of reproduction of unstable, provisional, and inconstant reality (Soeiro, 2015). Soeiro (2015) sums up three

main pillars quite illustrative and accurate in the present study, to assess precariousness, especially considering the discussion touches upon these pillars: 1<sup>st</sup> one being the discontinuity and fragmentation of time in what concerns both the daily dynamics and tasks of the work, as well as the working time/schedule; 2<sup>nd</sup> being correlated with the lack of social rights and protections, consequence of poor labour contracts or the inexistence of them; and lastly, the low and poor income (Soeiro, 2015). All of this has been a reality in many labour sectors.

A job's level of precariousness and one's level of precarity do not only depend on the remuneration of their activity. One activity can be considered well-remunerated in the context, and still represent precarious work for their employers if the other labour and living conditions don't follow up, not assuring certainty, security, and safety. Therefore, it is important to look beyond the numbers to study the true experiences and perceptions of a group of workers in a certain activity, and the consequences of such in their lives. In the words of the acclaimed Bourdieu (1998, p. 82):

It has emerged that job insecurity is now everywhere: in the private sector, but also in the public sector, which has greatly increased the number of temporary, part-time or casual positions; in industry, but also the institutions of cultural production and diffusion - education, journalism, the media, etc. In all these areas it produces more or less identical effects, which become particularly visible in the extreme case of the unemployed: the destructuring of existence, which is deprived among other things of its temporal structures, and the ensuing deterioration of the whole relationship to the world, time and space.

The rise of this new *platformised* era and its *uberisation* of work is inevitably associated with not only new forms of digitalized labour and mediation but as well with the enhancement of labour precarity (Rodrigues, 2020). The neoliberal agenda promises of flexibility, freedom, entrepreneurship, and security, are not compatible with the precarious conditions that these reconfigurations put the workers through (Matos, 2019). That is exactly the centrepiece here, the worker's experience in this so-called advanced form of labour (*uberised*).

To hear CEO Will Shu talk about Deliveroo, you would think it was a company defined by innovation, entrepreneurship, and flexibility. But from the point of view of workers, it's more about low pay, precarious conditions, and conflict. (Cant, 2020, p. 7)

Workers began to understand that we were compelled to do dangerous, difficult, and precarious work to make someone else rich. (Cant, 2020, p. 46)

The extensive work developed by Cant (2020) and very well exposed in their book represents the very common experience of couriers regarding their conditions. Tendentially, the individuals that endorse these types of activities in the first place are individuals that are, generally, already in a more vulnerable position, that being from lower classes, marginalized or long-term unemployed. Their decision to endorse such "self-employment" activity is made with the expectation of improving their lives and escaping other precarious working structures

in the conventional labour market, therefore entering the previously unknown/unexperienced world of deregulation (Vieira, 2021). However, this new reconfigured model of work can perpetuate already pre-existent disadvantages and vulnerabilities of their workers, making it impossible for their life to improve, while at the same time selling the idea that this activity is the right route for work freedom and entrepreneurship. Pursuing this idea, this strategy by the platforms to better control the workforce and force more productivity leads to a way of transforming the worker's situation even more precarious (Vieira, 2021). This understanding of one's own experience varies from situation to situation: if this *uberised* activity represents solely a supplemental income in one's earnings, the level of satisfaction tends to be higher and the conditions are not something people think about; as, on the contrary, if this represents one's main source of income for basic living expenses, the lack of satisfaction shows up more and these workers tend to experience less autonomy due to the need to work more and experience more precarity (Schor et al., 2020).

Major political, economic, and social events in history shaped the experiences and dynamics, with a focus on the 2008 crisis and then the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, *platformisation* and *uberised* work accelerated, consequently accelerating the flexibility, vulnerability, and informalization of work, therefore precariatizing the worker's experience (Roque, 2022). The enabling of seasonal hiring, intensification and fragmentation of the work rhythm, greater control through ratings and monitorization, constant online connection and all the other conditions in this line of work previously mentioned creates a more vulnerable and isolated group of workers that do not account for social protection and safety (Roque, 2022).

The daily reproduction of precarious work is a source of multiple consequences and impacts, most of them negative to individuals and, also, to society. Independent of the type of work or sector, the incorporation and the practice of a job that is considered precarious causes individual and social vulnerability, instability, and distress in many life dimensions; while, on the other hand, a stable, contractual, and protected employment bond is demonstrated to be a source of positive and confident effects on the workers (Wilson and Ebert, 2013).

Precarious experiences are not recent. However, this specific new and considerable recent era of *platformised* and *uberised* work, altogether, stands out from the rest of the precarious labour situations. The mechanisms and actions to take to account for their necessities and rights also differ from other activities in other sectors and especially in the conventional market. In this, all regarding the online universe needs to be considered.

There are different ways to describe workers: proletariat, working class, and precarious workers are, in general, accurate, however not complete, and not singular in their experience. Here, Standing's (2011) work on the new Precariat class can play an interesting and reflective role.

One theme was that countries should increase labour market flexibility, which came to mean an agenda for transferring risks and insecurity to workers and their families. The result has been the creation of a global 'precariat', consisting of many millions around the world without an anchor of stability. They are becoming a new dangerous class. (Standing, 2011, p. 1)

This is irreverently true when discussing the platform workers. The transversal consequences through overall life dimensions, such as social relations with friends and family, political connectedness, housing, sense of belonging and collective action (Wilson and Ebert, 2013), not only affect the workers only but also their direct-related ones that depend on them, make these workers represent an "isolated individuals living from job to job, without lasting financial or social connections to workplaces or to other workers" that can be classified as the precariat (G. Friedman, 2014, p. 185). In the words of Standing (2014), the precariat is nonetheless a group of people characterized by social, political, and economic uncertainties and chronic insecurities. Platform workers, tendentially, fall under this umbrella of characteristics.

Gig employment can create a class of isolated individuals living from job to job, without lasting financial or social connections to workplaces or other workers. Dubbed the 'precariat,' this class of individuals not only suffer from precarious employment and income, but they also lack the workplace social connections that bound together unionized workers during the capitalist Golden Age after World War II; the loss of these social connections is not only a problem for the health and income stability of the workers involved but threatens social cohesion and community stability in general (G. Friedman, 2014, p. 185).

The vulnerability and uncertainty consequential of the conditions provided by platforms to their workers transcend the labour dimension to all other dimensions in the social and individual life that inherently shapes the perspectives and hopes for the future (Carmo and Matias, 2019). Having no control or bargaining power over the rights and conditions imposed by the companies they work to protect and fight for changes and improvements, while having the need to endure in this activity to earn money and survive, these workers have no other option than to forcibly accept these conditions. Entrepreneurship can weigh in on this with the aim of self-employment and financial liberty, but not entirely conscious or dissociated from the conscious perception of their own precarious experience in this activity. This activity makes not only their work-life stressful and risky, but it makes their whole life experience as individuals socially and economically harder (Carmo and Matias, 2019; Wilson and Ebert, 2013), therefore considered to be precarious workers in precarious jobs, but mainly, life situations.

If in 2011 Standing (2011) stated the growth of this "new dangerous class"—precariat—, *platformised* and *uberised* work—enhanced with the pandemic with a more fragilized workforce diverging to this activity— brought up again this concept to the social analysis table, with research and reflection on it supporting the claim of such growth. Becoming one common reality, research needs to be made to act socially, politically, and economically.



The further bridge to be drawn here between Marx's argument in the 1800s and the present platform work of the 2020s was already touched upon by some scholars, namely Cant (2020) and Pires (2020). Recalling Marx's (1867) analysis of labour, we can easily spot this current reconfiguration as one of the capitalist tendencies discussed and foreseen by Marx.

Still living in a strong capitalist world economy nowadays, guided by neoliberal agenda, the resurgence of such a cycle is not misplaced—the piece-wage labour. How does this Marx's piece-wage labour relate to the case here analysed? The correlation consists of 2 main factors: labour intensity/acceleration; and freedom/autonomy, with a touch on the means of production and where it stands.

The first concept, labour acceleration, here seems to be of great importance to the analysis of the experiences of a worker in this activity. This concept regards, easy to notice analysing the already existing testimonies of these on-demand platforms, the daily dynamic of one day of work is based on rapidity and time efficiency, a continuous acceleration contributed by continuous technological and digital evolution (Carmo and d'Avelar, 2020). Rosa's (2003) lenses of social acceleration provide an insightful point: the aggregation of technological acceleration and the growing scarcity of time (Rosa, 2003). This acceleration translates directly into the intensity of the daily dynamics' rhythms (Carmo and d'Avelar, 2020), from the labour to the personal dimension, roaming different contexts of a day. This type of dynamic is not new and is experienced greatly by people in more vulnerable social positions with vulnerable work situations; however, the pandemic context and the transition to the household dimensions that were usually apart contributed to this (Carmo and d'Avelar, 2020). A dynamic like this acceleration was spotted by Marx (1867) in the piece-wage labour where the workers, working and earning "by piece" intensified their daily working rhythms to earn more. Considering that digital and technological devices and evolution enhance both physical and digital connections all around the world (Carmo and d'Avelar, 2021), and have entered the labour market mechanisms, then the work on-demand platforms seem to be one good example to analyse this acceleration.

The acceleration of the world dynamics in general, with bigger and faster proximity among people with other people and services, created this habit of acceleration and rapidity also on the customer's side. This, consequently, made the customers value the rapidity and efficiency of a service they request, such as this one, that, in its turn, imposed, indirectly, the will to work more and faster, not only to provide a better service but also to earn more, that is nonetheless also correlated with the evaluation of their services.

When studying and analysing other investigations, the concept of flexibility and freedom has stood out many times. This belief and cherish in/of independence, autonomy and freedom are found across different studies in the testimonies given by couriers, as one of the main benefits and reasons they chose and stood in this activity (Vieira, 2021). Also stated by Marx

(1867) analysing the piece-wage, this *platformised* activity being structured by “gigs”, this is, punctual services throughout the day, can also confine, in the same way as in piece-wage labour, a feeling of autonomy in their work.

The digital mediation in this activity may, at first sight, be taken as a form of autonomy on the part of the courier. Not having any direct bond with the company and having the freedom to choose aspects such as his schedule, means of transport, among others, it could be said that they are in a situation of relative autonomy - being "their own boss" (Rodrigues, 2019, p. 5, translated by the author)

Both concepts of acceleration and freedom/autonomy, and their oscillations and fallacious character, here briefly described, will be deeper explored in data analysis and discussion, as they are important to understand the experience of workers. Besides being extremely present and shaping its existence, they also allow for a better outlook and comprehension of what are the new forms and reconfigurations of labour that have been rising from the past decade across the labour market, especially in this branch of it.

The use of these two structural concepts helps the analysis in the way they demonstrate not simply how some ideas preached may be fallacious, but they also and mainly show how the reconfiguration that is the *uberisation* of labour can intensify the bad labour conditions, exploitation situation, putting the workers in a vulnerable and complicated position in life. The new technological and globalized era, alongside neoliberal structuring, came to change completely the idea of work and labour that have been grounded throughout decades, and the gig economy and *uberisation* came to enhance and sustain that. What was once conceptualized, operated and our understanding of work, of a conventional labour market with a desired strong long-term labour bond/contract, and all the employer/employee characteristics it implies, with a considered regulation by the state, is now getting substituted with a capitalist neoliberal tendency of the exact opposite: “hired” for temporary jobs (“gigs”) with no regulations and structured conditions, following the entrepreneurial agenda, with the status of independent worker with no work bond (G. Friedman, 2014). This model of labour is inevitably supported by some, especially neoliberals, to meet their principles of one’s market and financial liberty, alongside the need and advocacy for entrepreneurial aspiration (G. Friedman, 2014).

### **2.3. Conclusion**

Social, political, and economic changes are almost a certainty in the world as different times go by. The most impactful events in world history in the last decades, respectively, the embrace of the neoliberal system, the 2008 crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, all gradually shaped the framework of the reality we are experiencing now. In the face of those changes, platform work and *uberisation* are growing non-stop, in different sectors of the labour market.

Regarding the case of the present research, such companies need, and still do, to expand throughout the world and they have been doing that, where in basically every part of the world we can find some platform that provides these services. Portugal was no exception. The labour market reconfigurations that keep up with the neoliberal agenda of flexibilization and liberalization of work have turned us to a new era in the labour dimension with the *uberisation* of work.

Despite representing an evolution in this digital era, with well-known benefits and improvements in the life of its users and beneficiaries, that is not always nor only the case for the workers. This new reality has proven to be very consequential with major negative impacts on the life of the workers of these specific *uberised* activities.

Therefore, it is of extreme relevance not only scientifically but also of social and political relevance to research these reconfigurations to better understand them and to better act on them politically and, in the long run, be able to provide and account for the needs of these workers and the improvements necessary. For such, it is mandatory to experience and study this phenomenon through the shoes and lenses of the most relevant actors in it: the couriers. That is the intent and what this exploratory qualitative research must add to this research field, thus the research questions that were posed in the foundation of this research both regard, directly, the workers' experiences, alongside the goals to try to achieve some answers and/or considerations regarding.



### 3. Empirical chapter

#### 3.1. Casing and Methodology

As discussed, in the last decades the world has been witnessing major and impactful transformations in many dimensions, with the 2008 subprime crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic intensifying such transformations more. This conjuncture makes social sciences contributions even more relevant.

This dissertation and its problem infer from there and is one example of a phenomenon that needs attention and even more due to the past decade's turmoil. *Platformised* economy and the phenomenon of the *platformised* goods distribution activity is one of them. Dating its first few appearances to 2013 and forward, in the years that were revolutionary to the world economy by the obvious reasons of the subprime crisis, this activity has seen an abrupt growth with the Covid-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic hit, this activity represented already an interesting a crucial phenomenon to look at through social, political, and economic lenses since it resembles these new realities and all that it embraces. Therefore, studies and research are needed not only to have a better understanding of the phenomena in question but also for institutions and governments to know better where and how to act upon these new structures in the labour market.

Portugal constitutes an interesting case to be studied because of the social, political, and economic framework and structures, especially regarding the labour market and workforce, that has, for the past years, been providing much more room and fertile ground for businesses in/through digital platforms to rise (Leonardi and Pirina, 2020), when compared to other countries in Europe, for example, and in the rest of the world.

This research stands out concerning the context and reality that it lays upon—Portugal as one case with this reality very much on the rise and not so much studied so far while considering the focus on the two cities of Lisbon and Setúbal, in Lisbon metropolitan Area, that have different levels of urbanization and industrialization among them and comparing to other studied European cities. These different contexts can bring new and/or complementary observations and considerations to the field. Nevertheless, the approach which this investigation has been carried through also somewhat differs from the existing ones due to its more transversal character of studying not only the labour dimension of the phenomenon and the political and economic aspects that interfere in the concrete life of workers but also studying the social component and impacts on the life of the workers, namely looking at the intersectional discriminations and hostilities existent in this activity. The focus of this study is also on the more entrepreneurial reproduction bubble that brings new contributions and insights.

Focusing on the thematic and phenomenon of the platform economy and the *uberisation* of work in the goods distribution activity in Portugal, the main research questions/starting points with this investigation are: How are the existing labour market conditions in the *platformised* goods distribution activity experienced and perceived by the couriers?; and to what extent are existing social inequalities perpetuated and/or enhanced through *uberised* work? To conduct a structured investigation, four main goals were set to guide the investigation and to achieve, as stated in the introduction, regarding the analysis of the whole labour dimension, as well as the relational dimension, complemented by the deepening in approaching intersectional hostilities and entrepreneurial reproduction. These last 2 goals are the more divergent goals and the ones that make this research stand out a bit from the ones that already exist, in the sense that they are the ones that guided the more transversal analysis of other important dimensions of this phenomenon. Complementing the research, they built an interesting ground to analyse the contradictions between the worker's experiences and the discourses and speeches that they reproduce regarding their job. People and their social experiences and interactions are multiple and complex; therefore, the analysis of such contradictions only enriches the social sciences field. The other goals were the foundation and contextualization for these dynamics and the overall market.

To achieve the goals of the investigation, an intensive qualitative study, in the format of a synchronic single-case study, was performed. For this research's nature and its general goals, a qualitative approach and methodology were the most suitable, to describe, reconstruct and analyse the phenomenon. Taking to account that this phenomenon is spread all over the country and that represents, gradually, a growing activity day by day and that there is still little knowledge of it in Portugal, a synchronic single-case study was shown to be helpful in the analysis and drawing out considerations about such activity. Consisting essentially of an intensive study of a particular case/phenomenon to enlighten a larger number of cases (Gerring, 2006), and possibly extrapolate some of the information gathered to a sort of population of such cases. In Yin (2009, p. 14), a case study is also defined as "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident".

Together with Gerring's (2006) definition, it perfectly corresponds to the general and specific goals of the present investigation of intensively analysing, describing, evaluating, and providing more information and knowledge about the specific reality of the workers of the good distribution activity and its diverse dimensions. Even though there are some studies regarding this activity around the world and it is becoming more talked about, Portugal is still currently an understudied part of it. Therefore, this type of study and methodology provides, unlike others, a high level of in-depth detailing and understanding of the phenomenon because being, tendentially, only one case to be studied in the sample, allows for more time, dedication, and

focus for the analysis of such, allowing for possible hypotheses and theory generating in the area (Willis, 2014), helpful overtime for the gradual scientific study and development of this sector.

It is important to distinguish between the two types of constructions possible in a case study that provides more than one observation: diachronic and synchronic (Gerring, 2006). For the former, the diachronic case study, observes and analyses, throughout a period the case or group of cases within a bigger case; while the latter, the synchronic case study, analyses the case within itself, meaning that the variation observed regards inside the phenomenon in question and not in time, thus the observation being at a single specific point in time (Gerring, 2006). In the case of the conducted investigation, the construction was synchronic considering the case of the *platformised* goods distribution activity that was studied at a single point in time—present—while studying the variations inside the case itself—through the different workers that participated in the study. The choice and use of a certain methodology need to come from within the goals of the investigation and in what will better provide for the accomplishment of such goals.

The necessary information was obtained through the lenses of the most privileged interlocutors, the courier workers themselves, and framing it with the neoliberal capitalist hegemony over the globe and in the studied context. These specific goals and the general intention of the investigation required an intense analysis of speeches but also the observation of practices and their consequential impacts on the individual life of the workers and the society and market themselves, with an exploratory character to it. This way, it is important to highlight that even though this qualitative investigation has specific problematic and antecedent established goals outlined, they were inevitably dependent and conditioned by and through the empirical dimension developed, resulting in some adjustments throughout the investigation. This kind of uncertainty is common in qualitative investigations considering the incalculable outcomes that might develop and influence the course of the work.

Therefore, semi-structured interviews with these specific workers were conducted, as a means of data collection for this intensive qualitative approach. This means of data collection is considered suitable since it allows to obtain rich information and content for reflection on the matter (Quivy and Van Campenhoudt, 1995), through the most valuable actors of the phenomena: the workers themselves. In this type of interview, interventions by the interviewer should remain low and happen only when extremely necessary, to insert new topics important for discussion or to help further develop something crucial the interviewee has said. These interviews provide the interviewees with room for unwinding and developing the topics and thematic at their own will and pace, being only slightly guided by the interviewer.

Three main dimensions structured the interview and the other three dimensions functioned as a complement to better frame the analysis. The four main dimensions were 1. Professional

dimension, regarding everything concerning the job and the day-to-day in this activity, such as incorporation, dynamics, conditions, schedules, and means necessary to perform; 2. The relational dimension concerns two main relational aspects of this activity, namely with clients and with peers and how such relations built and developed influence the activity performed and its dynamics; and 3. Future dimension concerns the existence and type of perspectives that these workers experience and how it is guided or not through the activity currently developed. Lastly, there was the Entrepreneurial Speeches dimension with phrases and slogan characteristics of flexibilization and liberal propaganda that were presented to the interviews for them to comment on at their will. The remaining dimensions concern sociodemographic information, introductory contextualization information to situate and characterize the worker, and lastly, a dimension on a more personal level regarding the perceptions of the workers about all the subjects approached throughout the interview. The full interview script is available in Attachment 1. Therefore, the collected information was of individual qualitative nature. The interviews were recorded, with previous consent given and anonymity of information guaranteed.

Existing methods better suited for studies than others, no method is 100% correct and ideal nor it is 100% wrong and bad. All the different approaches existing are legitimate and can be used and/or even complemented with each other to substantiate a well-outlined and thought-out research. The advantages and limitations of each one must be, respectively, optimized and compensated during the whole empirical part of such research to take the best advantage possible of the approach. Therefore, it is important to discuss the advantages and limitations of case studies.

The main advantage of such a method is, besides what is already implied by its definition, that it allows for a “nuanced, empirically-rich, holistic account of specific phenomena” (Willis, 2014, p. 4). It is very suitable and beneficial for the analysis of a reality that is less touchable for a less intensive and more superficial—in regards the depth of the information gathered—approach such as quantitative ones, for example.

One first limit important to mention here is, that even though the purpose and specificities of the works in which case studies are applied and that case study research can incorporate several cases, the sample/unit under analysis is not a representative one. To observe and analyse what can be considered as general in a phenomenon, it is necessary the observation a set of cases (Bertaux, 2020). However, the different actors and intervenient in the phenomenon will have, inevitably, different experiences and perceptions accordingly to their background and context. Considering that, the idea of a representative sample tendentially falls to the ground. But it is through those different experiences and perceptions—that alone doesn't account for the full comprehension of the phenomenon— that the researcher builds a sample of a set of cases that allows for the critical comparison of both similarities and



differences among cases (Bertaux, 2020). However, even considering this is a legitimate limitation pointed towards case studies and that a small  $N$  can be questionable regarding representation, it is important to keep in mind that these methodologies are more turned on the deepening and broadening of knowledge regarding the general population of a case or phenomenon through the analysis of a specific case or multiple cases.

Relying on interviews has a lot of benefits for research. However, it also has some limits, that were acknowledged, to try and counter them as much as possible. One of the most important (possible) limits is the refusal, uncertainty, and lack of trust of the interviewees in providing information and not feeling in a safe environment for exposure and, for that, it is important to build, firstly, a relationship with the participants before the specific interview, to build trust and discuss all the conditions, anonymity and data usage and also lay down possible topics that the participants don't feel comfortable approaching. Another example is that this method can be very time-consuming, thus a well-organized schedule of interviews at the same window of time combined with good preparation for the interviews will be aimed for. Regarding the content, this method can be considered biased considering the conduction of the interview and the topics/questions approached by the interviewer. To counter that, extensive work on the formulation of the interview script as impartial as possible is crucial.

With all the interviews conducted, it is possible to evaluate these limitations and if and how they were felt and counterbalanced. Starting with the last ones mentioned, as said, this method requires a lot of time. A time-frame window was established to conduct the interviews. Despite other obstacles encountered that will be mentioned next, that timeframe was accomplished within reach. On the possibility of biased conducting, the interview script was structured, reviewed, and restructured to guide the interview as impartially as possible, and the feeling is that such an aim was accomplished within what is normal and expected. Where some obstacles were most felt regards, in fact, the gathering of workers that accepted to participate in this research. The refusal was encountered in many situations, but rarely directly. After explaining the process to the couriers, most of them accepted and gave direct contact schedule the meeting and then the interview. However, after that, some of them stop responding or didn't show up. After asking about the situation, the couriers transmitted an insecure feeling of talking about their work life and some of them (2) confirmed they didn't feel comfortable doing so since they were recent to the country. The limit mentioned before the conduction of the fieldwork was, in fact, encountered but gladly not in the biggest percentage. The rest of the couriers, even if feeling overwhelmed or uncomfortable in the first interaction, quickly got more comfortable and willing to share their experiences, after getting to know the interviewer and knowing the goal and dynamics.

Overall, this methodology offers a lot of benefits for qualitative empirical research, especially in creating and providing more knowledge, hypotheses, and theories in and about

the fields and cases analysed in their own very specific contexts (Willis, 2014) and their environment. Nonetheless, researchers should be clear and aware of the existing limitations, just like in any other method, that need and can be offset by developing a “pluralistic mixed-method research strategy” (Willis, 2014, p. 5) being complemented with other methodologies and approaches. In this case, such complementarity to try and counter the limitations will be presented further ahead.

As a complement, some observations of a “day in the life” of the workers were considered beneficial to get a more complete framework and more details of what is and what happens in this activity and to these workers on a normal day of work that possibly, when being interviewed, the workers might not recall or even consider mentioning. Conducting some observations in the field and while the workers are in the activity itself can be very beneficial and complementary because it allows for the direct analysis of behaviours, practices, and interactions that otherwise wouldn't be easily described and/or reproduced. Notwithstanding, these observations are not the easiest to execute due to logistical issues regarding the means of work and transportation and the high intensity and acceleration of the work they develop. Regarding this, two different styles of observation were conducted. One more participant observation, where conversations with the couriers were made, as well as moments and dynamics, were shared. The other was made more from the outside, to observe possible interactions between the couriers and their dynamics. Both observations were conducted in the moments when the couriers were gathered and waiting for the orders.

Some method-related considerations are important to layout. In a more outside-the-field dimension, but here still considered a part of the methodology for such research—contrary to what some other scholars believe—, two other crucial tasks were performed that played a major role in the complementarity and accurate fulfilment of the goals of work developed. The first one is a well-articulated historical framework of the phenomenon itself as well as of the context it grew in that is being studied. This framework must account for major changes and evolutions in the social, political, and economic dimensions of Portugal—inherently correlated with the European path—and how such evolutions built up to the current situation of the country (with the specificity of the labour market) and the situation of the activity of the *platformised* goods distribution.

Then, the analysis of some relevant statistics is inevitably crucial to better complement not only the previously mention historical framework but also to better contextualize the phenomenon in the country in question and to better position it in a more global view. When conducting qualitative research as the present, to build a solid foundation and contextualization of the phenomenon, we know the historical framework is indispensable but so is the descriptive data we can get on it. It is very helpful to get a more quantitative overlook of the evolution of

various dimensions of the phenomenon in analysis to complement and even to better understand and build the historical framework that provides mainly qualitative context.

### **3.2. Sample and Data**

The goal of this study was to approach and analyse two different territorial contexts in the Lisbon metropolitan area, them being Lisbon and Setúbal, with an aimed sample of workers of age (+18) from companies that provide this service—always aiming for gender, ethnic, and age diversity. The first-moment choice of these specific contexts regarded essentially one factor: the first being the analysis of two different contexts, one being a city less urbanized studied, and the other being a big and more urbanized capital. An important disclaimer was also set, as awareness, regarding the interviewing process correlated to the current pandemic context, interviews held virtually will be a possibility. The participants for the study were achieved in 3 different ways: the snowball effect of some workers introducing others to the study and the researcher; through the researcher going to specific spots of gathering and working of the drivers and getting to know them; and through reaching out to workers to Facebook groups of couriers. The possible negative effects of each method were always considered and fought against, especially to guarantee diversity and representation in the sample. In the end, the sample resulted in, among the interviews conducted, a total of 17 to be used, where 10 of them were men, and 7 of them were women. In our fieldwork, 8 of the people interviewed live and work in the Lisbon area—covering a larger area such as the different municipals in Lisbon and surroundings—, while the other 9 live and work in Setúbal. Further sample information and description will be presented in the Results chapter. The testimonies directly used in the research were all translated from Portuguese to English by the author.

After the data was collected, the content discourse analysis was performed. A first selection was made with the content obtained to isolate the most relevant data, and then, with that, a strong foundation was built to analyse the phenomenon approached. The goal was to interpret speeches, representations, perceptions, and practices, to qualitatively analyse those that are shown to be important to the understanding and answering of the general goals of the study, whether through similarities or differences, drawing some final contributions and considerations on the matter.

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Methodological pluralism should take an important and active protagonist in scientific research (Clift, 2014). As it is inherently known, there is no better or superior approach, but there are in fact approaches that make more sense than others while, considering their flaws, can and should be complemented with other approaches. The very important takes during a pluralist methodological approach are the acknowledgement of the strengths and weaknesses of the methods chosen and the clarity and foundation of the choices made (Clift, 2014). In sum,

and with the foundation of it being the interviews, this study will consist of a multi-step methodology to try and obtain the most possible broader knowledge and understanding of this new work sector and dynamic.

## 4. Social, Political, and Economic Framework

The big structures and institutions that rule the world and its paths are in constant mutation and transformation, in ways to meet, most of the time, the wants and needs of evolution, while, at the same time, shaping and conditioning the further and possible metamorphosis of society.

There are a lot of different stages where this reflection and discussion could start, but the starting point must be concise and of somehow greater impact than the rest, and here, the most suitable and considerable starting point seems to be the 2008 subprime crisis that hit Europe, with an effect on the rest of the world. However, it is acknowledged that the turning point and the emergence of the neoliberal era, starting in the crisis of the 1970s and going up to the span of worldwide hegemony of the neoliberal agenda (Harvey, 2005) we still experience today, is the build-up to this.

The 1970s represent a big turmoil in the social, political, and economic picture and it changed the way people lived life. The 70s decade was filled with events that marked history but the main shift and the one most important here was the secure arrival and foundation of the neoliberal agenda worldwide. Neoliberalism is simultaneously an economic doctrine as an economic practice (Paes Mamede, 2011). It has been around before that, but it was in the 70s that that political agenda took force and impact worldwide (Harvey, 2005). As known, the 70s represented a darker time in the US economy with a set of events that eventually led the country to stagflation (Harvey, 2005). The rise in oil prices, unemployment rates and overall inflation made the organs in charge rethink the political and economic approach that was being taken, considering the country was reaching its limit. A crisis of capitalism made a necessity to “overcome” the Fordist economic model to a different one, one that allowed for a more flexible and unregulated production mechanism (Soeiro, 2015). There and then, a group of neoliberalism avid saw their chance to secure the effectiveness they claimed their agenda had on economies and they took that chance. The turn to neoliberal policies in the country’s economy and international relations was the shift in the paradigm in the US (Harvey, 2005). Briefly, with the knowledge of what is neoliberalism, its beliefs and agenda, its practices revolve around free-market, low state intervention, and deregulation (M. Friedman, 1951), while at the same time turning the role of the state from regulator to being put at service to the market (Paes Mamede, 2011), and the market and its stakeholders (firms) in control of regulating themselves (Hayek, 1960; Harvey, 2005), as the route and solution for all social and economic phenomena and problems, gaining ground in the following decades (Paes Mamede, 2011). Rapidly, it became more present and recurrent worldwide—with the compliance of other policymakers and governors in other world potencies (Harvey, 2005). Aiming at privatization and free-market, neoliberalism also promotes, strategically, the privatization of public pillar sectors in society, that impact directly people’s life, nonetheless well demonstrated in the 2008

crisis. These free-market policies and practices affected all forms of life and shaped the next decades ahead. There is still nowadays a following of strong neoliberal policies and overall structure, political and economically. The capitalist neoliberal system still affects, currently, different dimensions, such as the labour market, and was directly related to the debt crisis that completely shook the world and that was the 2008 subprime crisis.

There is a reason why the subprime crisis of 2008 is still debated and present currently: its impacts are still felt to this day in the most different dimensions of life. What started as a prosperous economic era, turned into one of the most traumatic economic worldwide events that have yet to see a proper end and closure. The prospering of big flows of capital and financialization, not only throughout Europe but as well as worldwide, didn't last as expected and it resulted in the collapse of financial institutions and very high government debt in different European countries. These borrowing-lending movements between different countries (Frieden and Walter, 2017) led to big flows of capital and goods from current account surpluses countries to current account deficits ones and the overall economy was growing.

Those movements got to an exaggerated point. This created an unpleasant cliff-hanger situation: the borrowing countries were in a highly indebted situation without being able to pay back the loans to their lenders and unable to borrow from any place else (Frieden and Walter, 2017) and, consequently, the lenders' countries weren't having their loans paid back due to the first countries incapacity. Altogether, it inevitably led to the build-up of debt in different countries, with emphasis on the ones that had borrowed and weren't able to pay it back, making it gradually more difficult to turn their situation around.

Even considering that this crisis had major impacts on all the countries involved, it is a fact that the countries that were, beforehand, in a more critical and vulnerable position felt those impacts harder. Inevitably, they were the ones to endure most of the hard side of the solutions found by the economic and political institutions that were in command of the programs to turn the crisis around. This crisis was, and can still be considered, one of the best examples and demonstrations of the relations of power between countries worldwide and how that not only creates but also perpetuates social and economic inequalities. The solution adopted in the context of the European Union to deal with this crisis —a combination of both internal adjustment and financing, where the countries in debt eventually repay their debts and suffer internal adjustments, along with temporary financing and expansionary monetary policies— had high social impacts. The countries that were once borrowing were already in a loophole of debt they could not pay back and then, with such measures taken, found themselves forced to adopt and implement strong neoliberal austerity reforms (Wyplosz, 2014) in their countries to meet the goals of the solutions while having no considerable debt reliefs in return. Their social and economic situation was not getting better. The major countries, namely the “core countries” that have a bigger power of decision among the European institutions, were able to

gain back balance of their economy while the peripheric countries were not only left to deal with the consequences and burden of the crisis, as well as with the difficult task to turn their economic state around. The consequences and impacts of the crisis spread rapidly throughout, especially in the labour market, where we can find major impacts on employment and unemployment in the euro area, however with substantial differences across different countries (European Central Bank, 2012). As the overall framework states the loss of almost 4 million (European Central Bank, 2012) jobs in the labour markets of the euro area after the start of the crisis in 2008, the decline of jobs was less than 1% in countries such as Germany, Luxembourg, and Belgium; while at the same time the decline was more than 10% for Greece and Spain and more than 15% for Estonia and Ireland (European Central Bank, 2012). Tendentially, the origin of such is attributed to different factors during the evolution of the crisis, them being essentially related to sectoral developments, the nature of the shocks, differences in labour hoarding practices, and even employment elasticity (European Central Bank, 2012), producing different outcomes.

During the peak crisis, a group of countries was described as the ones to be at fault for what happened due to their “weak and poor structured economic systems”, namely the more Mediterranean countries, later to be nominated, specifically by financial Anglo-Saxon press firms, as “PIGS:” Portugal, Italy (in other cases, Ireland), Greece and Spain (Brazys and Hardiman, 2015). At the same time, these countries were also the ones to struggle the most to get out of the spiral of the crisis their country got into, altogether with the goals to be achieved according to the programs implemented to try to counter their debt. Austerity became a dreadful reality, as the answers and mechanisms adopted to fight the crisis all revolved around the adoption and implementation of austerity measures and structural adjustment programs.

In a neoliberal system, austerity was imposed through a moral discourse on the countries in crisis by the institutions in charge as the only way out of those situations. This implemented program had different meanings for different groups of countries. For the core ones, this seemed mostly beneficial: They didn't have to cut expenditures nor help reduce the debt; while for the peripheric ones, huge negative social and economic impacts were felt. The sovereignty of the countries that were considered the creditors was evident in the option for austerity because they could, comparatively, endure much more easily the impacts that had on the overall European framework, mainly because their own country was more protected and even benefited from it.

The austerity turn on the indebted periphery of the Eurozone may be interpreted as a strategy by creditors – banks and other financial institutions – to secure their financial and political positions, combined with the right-wing political intention of precipitating an institutional restructuring of welfare regimes in Southern Europe which could not be obtained by democratic means. (Caldas, 2012, p. 3)

Austerity only worsened the internal crisis of these countries and their overall political, social, and economic framework, not only contributing to the widening of the national inequality gap but also enhancing the differences and structural inequalities. It was a big part of the “path out” of the crisis for Portugal, through the Economic Adjustment Program. This program’s goals were to turn the crisis around through the adoption and implementation of austerity measures such as spending cuts in various areas such as the national health and the public education systems, and tax and revenue increases alongside structural reforms and the gradual privatization of some firms and services (Caldas, 2012; Gurnani, 2016), and internal devaluation such as “wage repression, precarious employment and mass unemployment (Matos, 2020, p. 142). With the justification for these measures being the spending of Portugal above its means, the ruling coalition saw itself with little to no other option than to comply with such measures and be what was called “the good pupil of the Troika” (Caldas, 2012)—Troika being the decision group, constituted by the European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund and the European Commission, with the role of managing the aftermath processes of the 2008 crisis—, believing that their enthusiasm on Memorandum of Understanding—signed by Portugal and the 3 institutions that constitute Troika—, allowing the implementation of policies that aren’t passed through the voters, namely regarding labour, health, and education, was going to be fulfilled (Caldas, 2012).

With this program focusing on and impacting specific already marginalized groups of the Portuguese population (Matos, 2020), this produced mainly a strong recessionary impact (Gurnani, 2016). The promises that were once made regarding implementing austerity failed to be fulfilled and Portugal suffered intense and devastating economic, political, and social impacts. Most records show that even after austerity and the Economic Adjustment Program were implemented, the public debt kept rising and the deficit saw no control:

The austerity measures adopted since March 2010 are having a strong recessionary impact. The second quarter of 2012 is now the seventh quarter of GDP contraction. The reduction of real GDP from its peak in 2008 till the end of 2012 is estimated by Eurostat to reach 6.5 percentage points. (...) However, the most paradoxical result of austerity is its impact on the government deficit. Since the beginning of 2012 government revenue has been declining (3.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2012 relative to the same quarter in 2011) and government expenditure has also decreased. (Caldas, 2012, p. 4)

Amongst these consequences, there has also been found a rise in the migration out of Portugal, whether from former immigrant workers or qualified young Portuguese people (Caldas, 2012). Regarding labour, with the intention “to boost the country’s long-term growth by reforming labour and product markets and by improving the business environment”, creating jobs and increasing labour market flexibility (Gurnani, 2016, p. 9) strong measures were taken. The most notable measures regard wage cuts and overall limitations in employee protection and a reform of the labour code, all allowing and facilitating dismissals, flexibilization of labour



time, limitation of the amount and duration of unemployment benefits and reduction of national holidays and paid leave days (Caldas, 2012; Gurnani, 2016). All these measures as a group, especially the cuts in major pillars of the public services sector as well as privatization of some, inevitably lead to the degradation of the welfare state that was being built until then, being one of spheres most affected by austerity, and the most dangerous one to degrade, as it strongly impacted the life of the more vulnerable social groups. The intention and goals that were promoted sounded beneficial, however, with time, those measures caused more social and structural harm than expected. Portugal got into a deep recession, turning a lot of families into a poverty or nearly poverty situation with the overall reduction of the household incomes, simultaneously with the increase of the goods and services prices. The consequences on the labour market stand out from afar. Eurostat data shows that up to the first quarter of 2012, unemployment rates have reached their highest heights of 15.6%, with youth unemployment reaching 36.3% (Caldas, 2012). Compared to the Eurozone framework, as of 2013, Portugal was experiencing the third-highest unemployment rate (17%), only following Greece (27,8%) and Spain (26.1%; EUROSTAT, 2022).

These numbers and changes in the labour market have an origin and among a set of factors is the flexibility of the labour market in Portugal, a different approach and reconfiguration to the labour market at the time of the crisis, that caused the reaction to the crisis to be more negative (Pedroso, 2014). Before the crisis, changes and adjustments to the Labour Code were made throughout the years to promote the internal flexibility of the workforce (Pedroso, 2014), putting the workforce at a more vulnerable status in the labour market picture. This scenario was present before the crisis hit and it was only more enhanced when it did. The flexibilization of work existent combined with the austerity turn made to deal with the crisis, with severe labour and wage cuts and easier dismissals (Matos, 2020; Pedroso, 2014) set foot to the shredding of the Portuguese labour market as was seen: a cheap, precarious, and disposable workforce. In this scenario that affected Portuguese people, the ones that inevitably felt the hit more were the ones that were already considered to be in precarious situations, where their job loss was easier and more rapid than the—more social and labour protected—“core” workforce (Pedroso, 2014). Even considering the liberalization of the labour market wasn't the best feature to have during a crisis, that characteristic didn't leave the Portuguese context and throughout the following years of dealing with the consequences of the crisis and trying to get back up, the vulnerable and jobless population saw themselves with little to no alternatives in the labour market besides those more flexible and unprotected—to some extent, even allowed in the Labour Code—job opportunities, that were already low and difficult by themselves. And that perpetuated over time. A few people were able to gradually get back into the labour market, but their economic and social situation remained very fragile and poor.

Still recovering, politically and economically, from those crisis years, Portugal, as the rest of the world, faced the Covid-19 pandemic, that retarded such recovery (Roque et al., 2022). This period was characterized by some employment growth, with unemployment fall, but analysing the scope within these changes shows that the employment that was generated consisted strongly of precarious low-quality employment, based on a lack of protections and temporary work (Almeida and Santos, 2020).

The pandemic had huge impacts worldwide as is undeniable, impacting all dimensions of life, not only public health. Due to its contagious character and necessity for isolation and confinement, and with growth from 6,9% at the end of 2019 to 7,3% at the end of 2020 in the unemployment rate (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2022), this pandemic directly affected the labour market, and the economy. Different data and reports show, so far, that the impacts oscillate accordingly with different factors such as geography, age, sector, and type of labour (Almeida and Santos). Despite those asymmetries, the impacts were most felt in regions and sectors dependent on tourism and external sectors, as well as the sector of manufacturing factors (Almeida and Santos: Paes Mamede, Pereira and Simões 2020); both considering the closing of the borders and the fall in people's mobility with the pandemic and the measures taken to fight it. Regarding the social groups affected, records show an emphasis on young people with unstable labour relations and low-paid jobs, highlighting here the case of women and immigrants (Almeida and Santos, 2020). What this pandemic crisis and the reports support is that the most affected groups were the ones that were already in a social, political, and cultural vulnerable and disadvantaged position prior to that, and the high feminization of activities not only related to social and health-related but also related to the informal domestic work, by the pandemic enhanced through the more time spent at home and schools closing (Paes Mamede, Pereira and Simões, 2020). The consequential cycle of the pandemic breakthrough, throughout 2+ years, contributed strongly to the enhancement and acceleration of what was already an ongoing process, as above mentioned, of the growth of the *platformisation* of work, labour market and economy, unveiling "new forms of exploitation, vulnerability, and social exclusion, leading to intermittent, informal and precarious life trajectories" (Roque, et al., 2022, p. 11); Almeida and Santos, 2020).

This abrupt hit and change in the labour market scenario conditioned the path and dynamics to happen from then on regarding labour and employment, changing some aspects and enhancing others. If prior to the pandemic, this ongoing globalization and *platformisation* process was already solidifying and reproducing "flexible" labour bonds characterized by short-term and unstable and unprotected structures, the pandemic and its consequences served as one more ignition point for this neoliberal labour universe.

## 4.1. The Case: *Platformised* On-Demand Goods Distribution Activity

### 4.1.1. What are the On-Demand Platforms?

The gig economy brought to life a whole new era of experiences and dynamics throughout the most different aspects of life. The abrupt emergence of new forms of work was one of them. These on-demand apps consist of “the instant delivery services [that] provide on-demand delivery within two hours – by connecting consignors, couriers, and consignees via a digital platform” (Dablanc et al, 2017, p. 204), using vehicles that are normally theirs, and sometimes rented, like bicycles or motorcycles. This type of distribution and delivery has been around for a long time now but, in this era of *platformised* economy, what makes it different from the already existent is the fact that they are fully digitally mediating infrastructures that create the bridge between the three parts involved: customer, service and courier, with a fast delivery for a low or even free price, to accommodate for the customers gradually more sophisticated demand (Dablanc et al, 2017; Rodrigues, 2020).

The first formats of these services can be traced back to the beginning of the 2010s decade, highlighting here some of the most famous and used platforms like *Deliveroo*, founded in 2013 in London, *UberEats*, founded in 2014 in California, and *Glovo*, founded in 2015 in Barcelona, among others, and have spread and keep spreading throughout other cities in the globe. The rise of such is inevitably associated with the endorsement of the gig economy and the even more developed information and communication technology, and the overall tech innovations experienced in this century (Rodrigues, 2020). These phenomena have been experienced and popular in so-called developed economies due to their “zero-hour contracts and on-call labour” character that allows for companies to mobilise and demobilise the workforce on-demand, as the name suggests, without any bond to follow and comply to (De Stefano, 2016). This possibility is appreciated by some workforce that needs to conciliate multiple jobs and activities, and, online platforms provide, to an extent, job opportunities to workers in areas with scarce opportunities and to workers of disadvantaged and marginalized groups that have more difficulties in entering other “traditional” forms of work (De Stefano, 2016).

### 4.1.2. Worldwide Framework of On-Demand Platforms

Despite gradually more common and popular worldwide, there is still little opening regarding numbers and statistics for these activities. The numbers that are accessible give us a good and clear view of what this market is becoming and what may be in the future. In general, the on-demand labour market is expected to grow by 18,5% every year in the next 5 years, while the on-demand food delivery market, specifically, is expected to hit \$161.74 billion by 2023 (Saxena, 2022). This niche in the economy is also engaging 22.4 million users a year into

spending \$57.6 billion on these real-time services (Saxena, 2022), with already more than 28 million people in the European Union working on these platforms in the different services they provide, with the specific estimative of companies like *UberEats* and *Glovo* to reach a number close to 43 million just by 2025 (RTP, 2021).

Growing and prospering, as one might say, this niche is still the actual representation of the neoliberal premise of no state action and self-regulation of the firms, therefore it doesn't account for much labour regulation in most places. Focusing on the European Union specifically, the last year was one where this part of the economy received even more attention from the organs in charge and law and regulations proposals are being taken and debated. The focus and bill in discussion currently is the reclassification, recognition and attribution to the workers that endorse in these platforms the just and accurate status that better represents their role and real work in a company (Euronews, 2021). For that, there is a set of 5 criteria to determine if a certain platform is considered an employer and, if at least two of those are fulfilled, the platform is considered an employer and, consequentially, the people that work in that platform are confined with the "employee/worker" status and all the rights and duties that status accounts for in each country legislation (Euronews, 2021). However good the existence of this discussion and the probable future implementation of such, that is still not the reality lived.

#### **4.2. Case in Analysis: Why Portugal?**

In Portugal the tendencies found in other countries continue.

The relevance of the Portuguese case lies in two major factors: the first that stands out is exactly the context in which this research takes place, Portugal, even with the already existent literature, the role and relevance that Portugal has taken in this activity, mentioned previously, alongside the accentuated emergence and growth of this activity in Portugal after the Covid-19 pandemic hit, all of this asks and needs for more research and knowledge for further comprehension and action development; and the second due to the type of research approach being taken, differing from others, with analysis and study of not solely of the labour component and its impacts on the workers but as well of the transversal dimensions of intersectional discriminations, harassments and hostilities, thus allowing for a simultaneously social analysis with the labour political and economic one.

In 2018, Portugal held the 3<sup>rd</sup> place in Europe in work dependent on digital platforms, with 10,6% of the adult population being involved and dependent in these activities, falling behind only the United Kingdom (12%) and Spain (11,6%; Ribeiro, 2018). As of currently, despite the unknown exact numbers, these numbers have suffered a growth with the years passing, and then, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic, unemployed people saw platform work as their escape.

In a still resentful and fragile situation due to the crisis, with a high percentage of unemployment, people searching for and needing jobs, especially the youth population—with an unemployment rate of 34,3% in the second quarter of 2013, thus representing the group with the biggest fall in employment, considering all age groups (Pedroso, 2014)—foreign companies saw a fertile soil to implement, in some cases, their recent/trial companies, while attending to their main needs: a high available and cheap labour force in need (Leonardi and Pirina, 2020). This was a reality overall, but some of those companies were *platformised* on-demand services, namely transportation, distribution, and delivery services.

Understanding why Portugal was one of the countries these platforms chose to implement their businesses enables a better understanding of the processes and dynamics. After the peaks of the crisis, Portugal dealt with the aftermath in a set of different ways. Investment in the tourism sector was one of the paths followed to recover economically around the country. Combining a set of factors, Portugal represented, and represents, to tourists, and other types of mobility, a cheap and pleasant destination, alongside measures implemented by organs in charge to attract and encourage foreign investment from different parts (Roque et al., 2022). Inevitably, those strategies worked gradually, and Portugal saw the rising of different businesses coming from outside, among those businesses was the *platformised* labour market (Roque et al., 2022). Gig economy started growing inside Portuguese borders and the prospect was for continuation.

Years after that process was initiated, the Covid-19 pandemic hit. As mentioned prior, this pandemic had several different impacts on different spheres of life, both positive and negative. The tourism sector inevitably suffered (Paes Mamede, Pereira and Simões, 2020) due to its physical and travelling character. However, with borders closing and people confining, a lot of sectors and businesses were negatively impacted. On the other hand, here the platform work had even more fertile soil and the opportunity to grow exponentially (Roque et al., 2022). People spending a lot more time at home deprived of many outdoors goods and services, saw themselves recurring more to the digital world to sustain different wants and needs, whether in necessities, labour, leisure, or luxuries. Prior to that, recurring to digital platforms for services already happened, but the pandemic made that more of a habit than an exception, thus building an unconscious dependence on the digital world. The firms that provide such platforms took advantage of this context and its characteristics to implement more and induce growth, in their businesses. This was not specific and solely a phenomenon in Portugal, but it was one strongly felt here, when accompanied with the other set of factors discussed prior and the ones next mentioned, building a big and spread *platformised* market, contributing for and reproducing *platformised* work.

When learning about the European context for this activity, one thing is a fact: These activities and these “reconfiguration of labour” need, among others, two specific conditions to

proliferate and grow rapidly: a big number of consumers and customers, and a big amount of available worker force (Leonardi and Pirina, 2020), especially a cheaper one. This cheaper worker force tendentially comes from youth looking for jobs and/or different marginalized people that are normally excluded from the rest of the formal labour market (Huws, 2020)—both more easily found in high-density capitals. Portugal, and considering the Lisbon metropolitan area here, account for those conditions easily.

As the type of activity is, regulation is usually not in the picture. In the case of Portugal, this activity has seen debates and law proposals/bills being discussed. The current legislation state regarding this activity plays a crucial role, among others, in the implementation and abrupt growth of these platforms in a country like Portugal. Although companies like *UberEats* and *Glovo* have established and proliferated in other places, Portugal represents a new and different reach for this business by one simple factor added to the ones already previously mentioned: Portugal is the first European country to pass the “Uber Law”, regarding only the TVDE sector, where it allowed the ride-hailing operations by digital platforms (Leonardi and Pirina, 2020). This pioneer legislative action that has been taken in Portugal is significant because it gave room and allowed for these companies to establish themselves more comfortably in Portugal and grow very abruptly, while at the same time studying and analysing the possibilities of implementing (even more) other services provided by their companies, such as the *platformised* goods distribution and delivery one. As Leonardi and Pirina (2020) called it accurately, Portugal represented, this way, a “laboratory for platform capitalism”.

One thing interesting to reflect on here is how “Uber Law” and all that came after with it can represent, or can induce, a process of—governmental—legitimation of the precarisation of the *uberised* labour forms, considering it allows for the reproduction and growth of this activity without accounting for all labour, life and digital dimensions that need to be somewhat. It is factual that platform work waves the flag of flexibility and deregulation to pursue more freedom. A middle ground here seems necessary to be found between flag while, at the same time, reducing the precarious positions this activity puts its workers in. Understanding the perception and will of the workers is crucial to meet their needs when taking these debates to the local and country-wide organs in charge.

The main goals of some parties in this discussion are the recognition of these workers as a form of dependent workers to fall under the social protections foreseen in the Portuguese labour code and, simultaneously, insert this reconfiguration of platform work in the labour code accounting for its specificities. This, together with the debate of legislation and regulation going on at the European level, discussed in the sections above, may be the beginning of a path in shaping the structure of this activity, with a central goal of improving workers’ experiences and conditions.

However, the reality is still other. This political and legislative present structure still account and allow for the more unregulated and precarious working experience of the workers. In this context, the couriers are entirely independent workers. they do not have a work bond recognized and therefore no access to the rights associated with a contractual relationship by the Labour Code (Rodrigues, 2020). The sociodemographic of the couriers in Portugal consists of an already marginalized and vulnerable niche of people, configured intersectionally by nationality/ethnicity and gender (Rodrigues, 2019). In the Portuguese reality (Rodrigues, 2020), as found in the UK by Cant (2020), most of the couriers are immigrants in the country they play this role, and some of them are even in an illegal/undocumented situation. To work as a courier, although there is no labour contract, one does need to have activity open in the Finance for that work developed to be accounted for and go through the discounts and legislations in force in Portugal. Therefore, in the cases where the couriers are immigrants and do not have their paperwork taken care of, they must rent accounts from other people to be able to work as a courier, otherwise, they can't (Rodrigues, 2020). The detail of mobility also plays a role in this activity, when observing the Portuguese reality. Considering the earnings depend on how many deliveries one can make in a period, the ability and knowledge of the locations and routes can make or break the number of deliveries one can make in a day—the more one is familiarized with the location, the faster one can get through on point to another (Rodrigues, 2019). This activity is strongly present in Portugal, currently.





## 5. Results

The present chapter will be divided into 6 sections. Starting with the contextualization of the workers, it presents relevant descriptive and demographic data. The second section consists of the results and analysis of the labour-related dimension, then the relational dimension, followed by the prospects, the entrepreneurial dimension and, lastly, the section regarding the overall feeling and perception of the activity.

### 5.1. Descriptive Demographics

Firstly, regarding individual information, the interviewed couriers, 17 in total, consisted of 7 women and 10 men. Despite their age ranging from 19 (youngest) to 61 (oldest), the most common ages stood from mid-twenties to late thirties, with an age mean of 32,6 years old. To be discussed ahead, the nationalities (Figure 5.1) of the couriers represent an interesting aspect of the sample. Of a total of 17, 10 of them are Brazilian, representing 59% of the sample, 5 are Portuguese, and the remaining 2 have dual nationality, Portuguese and Mozambican and Portuguese and Spanish, respectively. The level of education (Figure 5.2) in this group of workers is considerable homogenous, with 12 couriers having completed high school (equivalent to secondary school), representing 71% of the sample, with the other 5 having bachelor's degrees.

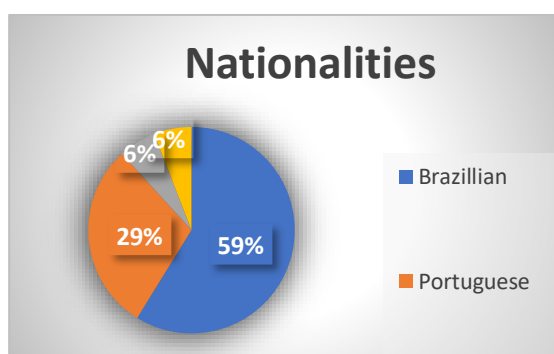


Figure 5.1 Courier's Nationalities

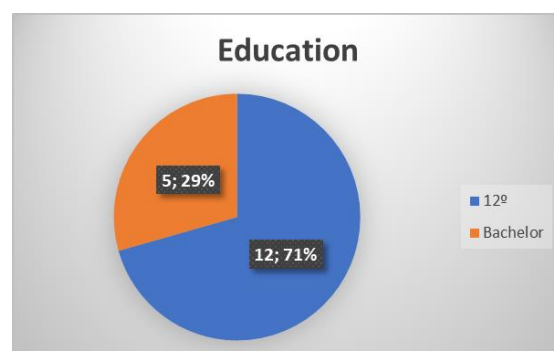
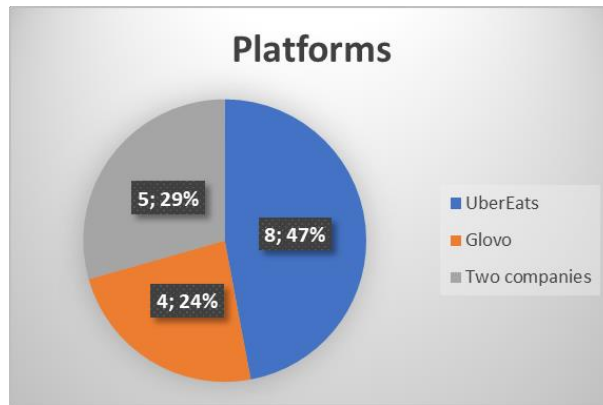


Figure 5.2 Courier's Education

With the focus on the Lisbon metropolitan area, the workers currently work in that area, despite having lived or worked in other areas, previously. Therefore, 9 couriers work in the city of Setúbal, while 8 work in Lisbon. The area they can and/or chose to work in inevitably conditions the work they develop as, at the same time, the platforms they work for conditions the areas they can work in. In Portugal, there are currently different platforms that provide this same service, with the same general goal, but some slight differences, like was just mentioned. The most used ones are *UberEats* and *Glovo* (Figure 5.3).



**Figure 5.3** Used Platforms

The descriptive information here presented though simple is of extreme relevance for the characterization and interpretation of the results. Even considering the current sample, and the nature of the research, is not representative, some considerations can still be drawn out of it. Despite inevitable oscillations among workers, some patterns are observable. Looking at the overall sample, the biggest and most prominent slice points to a pattern on what can be the most common worker in this activity: the mid-thirties Brazilian courier male. In this research the number of men and women is not far off, however, with the field conducting of the research—including the observations and the interactions of gathering couriers to participate—it is stated that this activity is heavily male-dominated. Growth in the participation of women has been occurring, according to the workers themselves, but the observable difference is still considerable.

And then it's all men! All men. If I come across with 5 or 6 is a lot.

(Woman, 35 years-old)

Our group was very mixed in both cities, but the rate of women in *UberEats* is much lower

(Man, 39 years old)

Observations made along with couriers' testimonies state that these characteristics are the most common reality among the workers in this activity. Most of the people that indulge in this work are immigrants, not only from Brazil, but also from India, Nepal, and Pakistan.

In the case of couriers, there are a lot of Indian, Brazilian, and Portuguese! But when I say Indian, I include people from Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and those nearby.

(Man, 38 years old)

The majority are emigrants, either Brazilian or Indian. Around that.

(Man, 43 years old)

You see a lot of foreign, Pakistani, and Indian people doing this job.

(Man, years old-old)

When compared, it is stated that this activity is highly immigrant-moved, with a lower number of Portuguese workers, for several reasons that are also experienced in other countries. The most frequent and important reason and motive the couriers give to have

entered this activity regards the ease of getting in it. Being most of them immigrants, the choice to indulge in this activity came from it being the most simple and immediate job activity they could find and fit in, reporting the difficulty in having all the documents fast and rightfully asserted to be feasible for labour contracts jobs in the conventional labour market. At the same time as the documentation obstacle, reports of the couriers show difficulty in being accepted in other jobs due to social and cultural motives, even when having superior education.

Tell me how a Romani woman enters the labour market, already at this age, without experience! If getting a job is terrible for anyone, imagine for someone in my situation.

(Woman, 35 years old)

If someone were to hire me somewhere else... but everyone takes a risk by hiring someone without documentation, I understand. It's a necessity.

(Man, 38 years old)

For health reasons, I stopped working in the area for a while, and as I had no source of income, I decided to open an *UberEats* account and start delivering food to earn income.

(Man, 32 years old)

Just like other studies, some workers have reported their attempts to get jobs as not being successful because of nationality and documents obstacles, arguably. The second most relevant reason mentioned by the workers is correlated to the belief of being able to make more earnings in this activity when compared to other activities in the conventional labour market that they can get in, directly associated with the possibility of working a lot of more hours than in the latter.

I work in a hotel in Troia. It's just that my salary is the minimum wage, so I decided to do *UberEats* on my days off. I saw that *UberEats* gives me a good income, and I'm going to change professions, I'm going to change the hotel for being an *UberEats* courier.

(Woman, 38 years old)

The other side of the sample consists, with slight differences between them, of people that somehow want to earn money as a complement whether to their main job/source of income or their academic life.

It was just part-time. Even after school started, just to make some money. I don't want this long-term.

(Man, 19 years old)

But I started this to take advantage of the gap that I had between May and August because my master's was going to start in September. I continued to earn some money.

(Man, 24 years old)

I joined just to have some extra earnings. I wasn't unemployed.

(Man, 39 years old)

These experiences leave these workers with fewer options for work, that correspond to their needs and that accept them. Therefore, the sample of the current research demonstrates

that the *platformised* courier activity can represent here as an easier alternative and escape to contour such challenges lived and specific needs, compared to the conventional labour market.

Another strong reason highlighted by the couriers relates to the flexibility and freedom this activity offer, reported in sections ahead.

5.1.1. Worker’s typologies

As data suggests that there are distinct reasons why the couriers have started performing in this branch and there are different experiences about the conciliation of platforms.

Besides that, reports show that there are also conciliations with other conventional jobs outside the *platformised* activity, going from the ones where courier work represents a smaller level of importance in life subsistence, to the ones where it represents the highest level of importance in subsistence. With that, it is possible to distinguish several types of workers according to each possible conciliation, as demonstrated in Figure 5.4 below.

**Figure 5.4** Job Conciliation

		Platforms Use	
		One platform	More than 1 one platform
The endorsement of jobs in conventional the labour-market	Endorses	<u>Typology 1</u> 3 couriers	<u>Typology 2</u> 2 couriers
	Does not endorse	<u>Typology 3</u> 9 couriers	<u>Typology 4</u> 3 couriers

As described in Figure 5.4, the most common typology found in this research is Typology 3 – The use of one platform while not endorsing any other conventional job, with 9 couriers in this situation, while the other 3 typologies have around the same number (2 and 3) of couriers in the sample. Analysing the table, it is interesting to reflect on how most couriers are focusing on this courier activity solely and only in one platform, thus receiving their entire income through one source only. This result might show a growing relevance of this job in the perceptions of the couriers, as well as might corroborate the argument by other studies posed, and by couriers reported, that the workers that endorse this platform activity have a harder time endorsing in the conventional labour market.

Out of the 5 couriers (Typology 1 and 2) that endorse the conventional labour market, 3 of them are in this activity as an extra to their income, not making it a priority as they have stable jobs and consequential stable incomes in their conventional job.

Comparing the 2 different groups of works just described, it is perceptible that the experiences from one group will tendentially differ from the other, as in the first one this activity represents a main source of income, thus more responsibility and importance is put on it; while in the latter, this activity only represents an addition to what is already the household income, not being a priority nor an ultimate necessity.

These findings are important in demonstrating what this activity means and represents in the life of different workers. With the realization that these different conciliations translate into different experiences and aspects of the workers' life and labour dynamics, such as schedules, investment, time-spending, and importance/relevance given to the activity, the creation of different typologies of workers, about job conciliation, was important to better interpret this phenomenon. The different conciliations made by the workers depend, as data suggests, on their necessities and their goals, being mutable over time and over progress.

## **5.2. Labour Activities**

### **5.2.1. Platform Characterization**

To accurately understand this activity, its dynamics, and consequential results, it is first necessary to know how most platforms work in general. The next figure (Figure 5.5) summarizes the main aspects of the platforms, providing an easy comparison between them, their differences, and their similarities.

For such comparison, 4 different characteristics are considered. The first one regards the working area, meaning the contingency definition of the perimeter radius that the platform allows a courier to work within. Each platform has a different mechanism of choice in this matter, accordingly to their contingency plans and where they prefer to act and provide services. The second characteristic indicates how the payments are conducted in the different platforms, both the frequency and the calculus of the earnings. The earnings by order are not a fixed value, as it is calculated through different aspects of the delivery. Next, the attribution of order to each courier as it is of great relevance to the daily dynamics of the workers and strongly shapes their experiences and their capability to work. Lastly, the table presents the types of contributions made by the couriers, according to the platform they are inserted in and to the existence of intermediary fleets, representing a big aspect as it is one of the prime scopes through which the couriers choose which platform to work on.

**Figure 5.5** Main Platform Characteristics

	<i>UberEats</i>	<i>Glovo</i>	<i>BoltFood</i>
Working area	Larger areas (AML, Algarve)	By specific city (Setúbal, Lisbon, etc)	By specific city
Payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly</li> <li>• Order value + distance to destination</li> <li>• Compensation for high demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biweekly</li> <li>• Kms to restaurant + Order value + Kms to destination</li> <li>• Compensation for weather</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly</li> </ul>
Order attribution	By proximity + number of deliveries	By ratings – Permission to schedule hours to work	Ambiguous
Contributions	Mainly through a fleet: 10% to the fleet, fleet does the contribution If alone: 25%	Individually: 25%	Individually: 25%

Despite existing mechanisms (as shown in the previous Figure 5.5.) behind the attribution of orders, the reports show a feeling of uncertainty and ambiguity by the workers. Workers claim the attribution of orders is not linear and that they’ve had different experiences within the same circumstances, identifying the different strategies of each platform used to manage the number of workers available in a specific area and time. The irregularities experienced in getting orders attributed to them cause a feeling of uncertainty about their daily earnings and, consequentially, compromises inevitably their daily dynamics and what this activity represents in their life. Both the ambiguity felt, as well as the supposed attribution mechanisms, as we can see in the following testimonies, are reported as somewhat unfair to their will and hard work in the activity, considering it is not compensated. Impactful terms used by the workers, such as “slavery”, “jungle” and even “beliefs”, demonstrate how the couriers criticize these mechanisms and question their transparency, or lack thereof, as in the following testimonies.

*Glovo* is different, you must kill yourself for 15 days or a month working like crazy... this is a network of slavery. You have no idea. You must work for good long days for *Glovo* to see that you are worthy! And then they give you hours, for them to control the flow of couriers on the street to avoid having too many couriers on the street because if there are many couriers on the street, it's less money you make... *UberEats* is a jungle. If there are 300 people on the street, it's 300 people on the street! And we are more and more.

(Woman, 35 years old)

To this day it has not been proven. Sometimes there are 5 couriers in the same place, and one comes from outside and takes the order. To this day, no one has been able to understand how

*UberEats* works. You've been waiting for an hour for orders, it's 3 and 4 and soon a motorcycle arrives and picks up an order that should be for whoever was closest there, right?

(Man, 26 years old)

There are many beliefs about the score... Many believe in a lot of things that don't even make sense. The score is evaluated every 100 evaluations, an average comes out. This average, *UberEats* says, reflects on our daily activity. From what I understand, it's more a belief than truth. I've had friends who are 100% in the evaluation, mine being 97 and 98%, and I even prefer it, not that I'm rude, but there's always someone who will give a less positive evaluation, it's normal, it's common.

(Man, 35 years old)

The rates and evaluation process plays an important role in this activity. Not only do they directly relate to the order attribution as was just said, but this system also influences possible earnings and special awards/compensations considering the work developed. However, as mentioned prior, this system is not appreciated by the workers. Besides what was already said, the rating process—where the customers rate their experience and the courier—despite its importance in the assessment of the activity, can also and is, in many times, not exactly fair to the couriers. Reporting experiences of receiving bad ratings that directly affect their job, whether in the order attribution or in the levels reached (that allows for some awards and/or discounts in gas), workers claim that most of them are unfunded and/or not the couriers' fault (e.g., delays in the delivery due to restaurants delay), while also disliking the fact that they do not have access to the content of written comments given by the clients.

The rates... it's all very broad, it could be for cultural reasons, mainly miscommunication.

(Man, 35 years old)

They can like or dislike it... and they can make comments, but we can't see it! Only those who ask, make a request, can see... I never asked. But we can't, we can only see the likes and dislikes.

(Woman, 26 years old)

They put that we took a while or that something messy came and things like that... often those things they say don't happen, you know. It can happen, I'm not saying it doesn't happen, but most of the time it's more of a way to harm people. That lowers our score. We are no longer seen as a person who do the right job. It gets restricted.

(Man, 26 years old)

Sometimes we receive "congratulations, you received this tip," which is also good for us. Tips also count for the score. The score has several items.

(Woman, 61 years old)

From the moment I go to get food at H3, and I see that they are taking a long time, you can immediately give a negative evaluation, and you can give a negative or positive evaluation to the customer and the restaurant.

(Man, 24 years old)

The likes also decrease over time... if you have 5 dislikes and 70 likes, then if you reach 80 likes, the dislikes begin to decrease. And we also get a discount on gas.

(Woman, 26 years old)

On the other hand, the support service that these apps provide to the couriers, despite them not recurring to it much, is interpreted as well-functioning and sufficient for their needs.

During a high-peak time, the response tends to be slower, and the problems are not always solved, but this does not necessarily represent a problem for the couriers and their performance.

Let's say, you're working, and you have an accident, you have your button! On the call, to ask for help, they ask what's going on, they send another courier to meet you, collect your order and deliver it to the customer and you do your own thing, get the bike fixed and then they cancel your schedules and try to solve it. There are things they don't solve, anything... the workers are not to blame, but they could have more autonomy for some things, at least that's what we think.

(Man, 39 years old)

Sometimes we have a problem, and we need to talk to them, on delivery and we can't talk to him. And the time we waste trying to talk to them is a lot. This is the issue. Some customers complain, but I don't have much to complain about.

(Woman, 32 years old)

Contrasting the two main platforms, the workers consider *Glovo's* mechanism to enable a better personal organization and general contingency, however, feel that the process to have a good rating to schedule working hours is harder; while, on the other hand, *UberEats'* mechanism enables workers to be working at any time and how many time they want, but due to that orders might take more to be attributed, creating a lot of dead-time during the working hours.

*Glovo* also has another advantage over others- Sometimes if I'm at Cascais shopping and they send me to Sao Domingos de Rana, I don't come back empty-handed, they already give another order from there to here. Not at *BoltFood* and *UberEats* eats, you go and only when you come back do you get another one.

(Woman, 61 years old)

In the case of *Glovo*, you schedule hours to work, at *UberEats* you just stay online. At *Glovo* I set the hours I want to work. If I booked from 12 pm to 5 pm, it's because I'm available for them.

(Man, 43 years old)

Another factor distinctive is the platform manipulation that is recurrent, nowadays in *UberEats* and not in *Glovo*. Conducted through digital means, it is easily targeted to digital manipulation. Workers have reported knowing about different forms of algorithm/platform manipulation during their experiences in the activity. Firstly, there was what the couriers knew as the "signal-block", which essentially was a type of app that one has on their phone to block the internet signal in the phones around them to not get orders. The other one, more abundant and in high use at the time of the research, is the "fake GPS", used specifically on/for *UberEats*. Targeting the *UberEats* universe that depends on distance for the order attribution "fake GPS" is an app that one courier can have on their phone that when activated and in use, manipulates the algorithm into recognizing that that courier is in a (strategic) location nearby certain establishments, while they are far away doing other delivery. This manipulation, thus, makes the user of the "fake GPS", as the workers call and describe it, receive more/faster orders, compared to the non-users of such an application.



Then we have those who use fraudulent applications to make more money over others. There is the fake GPS. This is: I have an order to deliver in 3 or 4 km, but if I have it active, for the *UberEats* platform and the restaurant, my location is there, in the restaurant, it never leaves there. Fake GPS deceives the application, it says that the person is still there. So, while I make the delivery, I already have another order guaranteed. There was the signal blocker that blocked the internet signal to people around, to block colleagues.

(Woman, 35 years old)

I don't work with robots; I don't need them. I don't want to harm my account or others. Because there are colleagues who live off this, I thank God I don't need this, and I think it's dishonest.

(Woman, 30 years old)

### 5.2.2. Beginning and Incorporation

These platforms prime globally for their easiness and autonomous characteristics as major slogans. The incorporation process does not fall behind such statements. Experiences from the interviewed couriers all point to the current non-existence of any incorporation process or aid from the different platforms in Portugal. The beginning is autonomous and through the app directly. Most of the couriers either got to know this activity and/or were helped in the beginning by other couriers. After that first sharing, the learning and adjustment process to this activity is done by practising directly, by trial and error. This is the current reality reported by the couriers.

There was no incorporation. They sent me a message saying, "you already have the account open good luck". Then, I learned. I made a lot of mistakes as you can imagine. The application is intuitive. But I had a lot of help here!

(Woman, 35 years old)

I had help from the couriers, I'm friends with almost all of them, and they helped right away, even before I opened the account, they gave me an idea of what it was, and how it works daily. They explained it.

(Woman, 23 years old)

To start with, it was just courage, really wanting to learn. Adventurous spirit. But I don't think it's difficult, I think it's easy.

(Woman, 38 years old)

Despite being advertised as a job for anyone, the applications to the platforms do need to be accepted and that process is not linear. Some reports show cases where the acceptance was immediate, while others take some time, even months, to be accepted. The reasons behind this mechanism are ambiguous and/or unknown to the workers applying, therefore not knowing how long it will take for their account to be accepted.

I applied, but the problem is that they take a long time to accept, it depends on the demand of the city. It took me 2 and a half months to be accepted and only then to start working. They let me register, we buy the backpack and only after everything is taken care of and they think they need more people, they open the positions. People think it's like that, register and start right away, but no. When they ask me on the street, I say it took me 2 months, there are reports of people waiting 7 and 8 months... it's not something you can leave another job and start on this one, because it takes time!

(Woman, 32 years old)

Had to open an activity in finance, send the documents to *UberEats*, and then be able to access the application. almost 1 month waiting for my account to be activated.

(Man, 32 years old)

Now regarding things that I think could improve, what I would have liked was to have arrived here and been able to open my account. That it was a little easier, that it was less bureaucratic...

(Man, 38 years old)

This is not the only reality. To open an account on these platforms, one must have open activity in finance. Due to not having all the necessary documentation valid or being in a fragile social position—more common in the case of immigrants, as well as people with scholarships or receiving social supports that cannot afford to lose, respectively—opening an account becomes an obstacle. With that, people started renting accounts from people that are eligible for it but don't work on it. As we can see in the next testimony, eligible people saw, in this reality, an opportunity to earn money without working.

So of course, I wouldn't want to rent an account. I would like to get here and have my name. But unfortunately, it costs, you must do the NIF, the NISS, and make the residency application, you must do all this which takes a long time, I'm doing all that, but it takes time and costs a lot. For you to have an idea, there are even women who work with a rented account from men and vice versa! People take the risk.

(Man, 38 years old)

The most common alternative for people that cannot open an account, is to integrate what is called a fleet. A fleet works as an intermediary between the platform and the courier, being the entity that declares that work and makes the necessary contributions, generally without any other responsibilities, not providing the workers with insurance nor means to work (transportation, bag, etc), The other reason that weighs for couriers to choose or not to integrate fleets lies in the contribution exactly: in the fleet, they contribute 10%; while, if they work completely on their own, the contribution is 25%. Fleets are responsible only for managing payment dynamics.

I joined and we both chose to be in a fleet because, once again as I am in my mother's household, now that I am a source of income, sufficient or not, that help from my mother and the pension from my father are withdrawn.

(Woman, 35 years old)

One of the reasons for not doing *Glovo* was the need to open activity and I can't open it, otherwise, I lose my scholarship. I am associated with a fleet.

(Woman, 23 years old)

Either you work directly for *UberEats*, which means opening an activity, making discounts, social security... or you work for a fleet, where you only get a 10% discount and nothing else, you are on your own. You don't discount, you don't declare.

(Woman, 35 years old)

It compensates more to be in a fleet... we already have a lot of costs, the motorcycle, and maintenance... so 23% was still high. When I arrived in Portugal, I bought my motorcycle but when

I came to Lisbon, I sold my motorcycle and now I am renting a motorcycle. The fleet does not provide motorcycles... does not provide anything. Just transfers the earnings, the biggest attraction is just paying 10%.

(Man, 36 years old)

### 5.2.3. Daily Dynamics

The daily dynamics experienced by the couriers are similar among them. Despite each day inevitably depending on and being shaped by the demand and availability of the workers, an average tendency stands out.

The workers describe their working days as long and extended throughout the day, intense and normally busy. Recalling that some workers combine this activity with either other jobs or school activities, the intensity, and the level of busyness are enhanced. Reports show an intensive recurrence of workers working more hours than they would normally work and would like to work, barely being home and only taking days off when they find it to be extremely necessary and inevitable: the typical 8-hour workday is far from being a reality for these workers. Throughout the interviews, this incessant working rhythm seems to be the norm. The reasons workers feel their days are like that relate to the poor earnings by each delivery and, therefore, need to make more; while, at the same time, not stopping because they know if they work more, they earn more. To contour or better organize this, the workers autonomously stipulate daily and weekly monetary goals to achieve. This helps them not only in controlling the working hours but also in guaranteeing a considerable and safe income at the end of the month. These stipulated goals and daily labour intensity also come from a feeling of needing and wanting to earn more, where the workers refer to, and supported by the testimonies below, an “addictive” feeling of earning money. This supports how the different platforms implicitly entice the workers into working more for them with this possibility of earning more and more.

The volatility, a word used by some workers themselves, felt by them is associated with the oscillations in order flux and with the oscillations in the number of couriers working at the same time. This volatility represents, inevitably, one threat to the workers' life.

It's very volatile. One hour it's a lot of work, another day we have no work for hours, but then suddenly the movement can start, there's a peak in deliveries, you know? Sometimes I can handle it, but other gets strange. This is bad. We leave the house and can come back with 17 euros as well as 60 euros. It's one of the only parts that I see that is bad about working as a courier.

(Man, 26 years old)

What I notice is that a lot of people end up losing care for themselves, even in terms of schedules. If I worked all day at *Glovo* I would have to take an hour for lunch, Dinner... some people eat on the run... I think it's a necessity because they must earn and help the family, maybe it's more noticeable in the immigrant couriers. I think if it was open 24h they worked 24h... They would take naps on the motorcycle. There it is, in that aspect, we are behind, there's no regulation... I think you're starting to take a few steps, but slowly, slowly... it's always towards the end.

(Man, 39 years old)

From 11 am to 9:30 pm/10 pm. A day without stopping... as we see the money coming in, we do it and we don't think about it... to be honest, it's really like that. It ends up becoming addictive, we don't even remember to go to the bathroom. There are days when I don't even go, I don't even remember that I must go to the bathroom. We see that money comes in, and money, and money, and you go... the more you do, the more you earn.

(Woman, 32 years old)

#### 5.2.4. Social and Labour Conditions

The structural, dynamic, and overall labour conditions shape the whole experience as a platform delivery service courier. It is a very vast and dense field to get into, and for that reason, it will be divided into 5 categories that summarize the main results obtained.

##### a) Physical security/vulnerability

This activity requires the workers to spend a lot of time in the streets constantly driving and interacting with people and situations. With that, the couriers inevitably face different adversities and conditions that, most of the time, they have no control over. Some of those adversities and conditions are tightly connected and directly impact what the workers perceive as their physical security and vulnerability. The ones most referenced and highlighted in the reports are traffic and road accidents—with the insurance being the workers responsibility, and not the companies—, where both traffic in peak hours and weather conditions are the main adversity causing it; and robberies, not only but specifically with the ones that work in the platforms that allow physical cash payment, where the couriers must carry cash in their day. Both these scenarios can constitute threats to the worker's security, enhancing their feeling of vulnerability, and as reported by the workers, a physical and psychological exhaustion.

Like it or not, that is, dangerous work. A lot of people think it's just sitting on the bike delivering food... do it for a week and you'll see how you change your perception about it. We deal with pressure, we deal with the opinions of others, with traffic stress. We are always in a hurry and working and at that point, the probability of an accident is very high. (...) Money is very complicated. It's better on digital, the person already pays, and you just go to the restaurant to pick it up and deliver it to them. And walking with money enhances the possibility of getting robbed.

(Man, 26 years old)

The danger we face whenever it's traffic, especially on a motorcycle, in Brazil we say that the motorcycle's bumper is the motorcyclist, so I know that danger.

(Man, 38 years old)

When it's cold and raining, it's bad and dangerous. The floor is smoother. I've had enough scars, thank God I didn't fall, I hope I don't fall. I work for it; I go slowly because I've always been terrified. It's very vulnerable.

(Woman, 26 years old)

It requires a lot of attention. I try in various ways to emotionally balance myself to be on the street, one bad thought, something that takes my attention away, takes seconds until I'm in a risky situation.

(Man, 36 years old)

##### b) Transportation

The means of transportation are not all the same and, inevitably, strongly shape the workers' possibilities and dynamics, while at the same time are chosen according to the workers' choice. Therefore, the main factors considered when reflecting on transportation are the traffic and parking, the type of areas that are covered, spending on gas and weather conditions. The means usually vary between cars and motorcycles, with higher use of motorcycles mainly because it allows for more easy parking, escaping the traffic better and has low gas consumption. However, car users mention the possibility to work on rainy days and the bigger safety the car allows. The most different aspects regard electric motorcycles or scooters, that condition the reach a courier has, not being able to deliver in high points of cities or perform bigger distances.

I'm in a car. I like to drive. I have more difficulties than the other couriers who are on motorcycles because we get a lot of traffic jams. The only advantage I have is when it rains, they can hardly work, but I can.

(Woman, 61 years old)

I do it by motorcycle or car. If it's raining or very cold, I'll go by car. It's more comfortable, but it takes longer, parking and such... the motorcycle I put anywhere, the car is more complicated!

(Woman, 36 years old)

Also because of my limited distances and slopes. For example, going to Viso is using up all the battery. I end up being a little limited.

(Woman, 23 years old)

### c) Demand

The demand for the orders is one of the biggest fragilities in this activity, felt by the workers, due to its high level of unpredictability and oscillations. The demand level oscillates accordingly with a set of characteristics, namely: the different times of the year according to seasons, where some people resort to this service more than others; times of the month strongly related to salaries payments and the customer's purchasing power; and lastly on the number of couriers available to work, where if the platform allows for more couriers to be working at the same time, fewer orders will each have.

People started ordering more, with the pandemic they couldn't go out anywhere, to restaurants, or even going to pick them up, and this caused a very large increase. Even at the level of couriers, it increased a lot during the pandemic There were times when we were practically alone on the street!

(Man, 39 years old)

Because we are in a phase of low demand, due to summer, there are a lot of people on the street, on the beaches, and in restaurants... almost no orders.

(Woman, 61 years old)

Depends... the periods of payments (salary), the beginning of the month is always nicer, everyone has money, on the second it starts to be average, on the 3rd when the bonuses on the 15th started,

the social security payments, who work with pensions and such...New accounts are being opened, there are many couriers and few fish in the river, isn't it?

(Man, 43 years old)

#### d) Rights and Duties

The rights and duties framework may be the biggest scourge in this activity and is very much complex. With reports showing ambiguity and uncertainty regarding what the workers are entitled to or not, where companies don't fully expose and explain information to the workers regarding possible insurance and protections in specific cases, this supports that there is no accountability and responsibility by the platforms and fleets regarding rights and duties. These findings support the shift of responsibilities fully to the worker, based on the self-employment status and what it means legislative-wise.

The app doesn't help. It does not count as an accident at work. It's like I told you, there's a good side and a bad side. This is one of the bad ones. You must work while thinking about everything that could happen. You must have a little money saved in case something happens to pay for a doctor and medicine, motorcycle fixing...

(Man, 26 years old)

It's one of the things we've been trying to get couriers to be recognized as company employees to have these rights.

(Man, 39 years old)

I believe it would be interesting to have labour rights because we spend hours on the street, hours... The Platform earns so much from us and in such a free way that we are harmed by it. We don't have subsidies and we need them.

(Man, 36 years old)

#### e) Earnings and Contributions

The earnings are made differently by each app, with different values of payment not only between apps but also between parcels of the activity, like a payment for the order specifically, another for the kilometres travelled, and rewards. The contribution, on the other hand, depends on whether a worker is associated with a fleet. With proportional earnings to the order they make, the money represents the main driver for the workers to accept working a bigger number of hours than they would if they were in a conventional job.

But here you earn more than the minimum wage. The minimum per day, let's say it's 30 or 40... if we work every day, it takes more than 713, which is the minimum wage... it compensates because of that.

(Woman, 38 years old)

Grain to grain, the chicken fills the mouth [Portuguese expression]! If we make 10 orders for 1km, it will already give €2, between 12 pm and 2 pm, for 1km, let's suppose it gives €2, in two hours you made 10€, not bad.

(Woman, 30 years old)

#### f) Stability and Volatility

When considering all the factors above listed and the other aspects of this activity mentioned, the data supports that the workers feel labour and life instability and uncertainty directly correlated to the volatility of the activity and its lack of safety nets. With that, reports show

different expressions of wanting more and better confirmation and guarantee of stability, through more properly implemented rights.

But I can honestly say, I've realized, if I left my job here [Hospital], I think, and worked only at *Glovo*, maybe my monthly income would be higher, much higher. But I don't know what tomorrow will bring, and at least this part here is always guaranteed and the other one is extra... In terms of income, it would be worth it, without a doubt, but it has no security, zero, nothing.

(Man, 39 years old)

### 5.3. Actors and Relations

As a type of customer service and provision, this activity inevitably translates into a high number of interactions made by different parts and, with it, relational constructions. These relations constitute an important role part in the mechanisms and functioning not only of the service itself, but as well as in the strengthening of the necessary social structures and ties, and their meaning in people's life. For that, 3 different types of relationships were approached: courier with the different establishments that provide the goods; with their pairs; and, lastly, with the clients. After, a reflection on discriminations and hostilities that are transversal to the three types of relationships built.

#### 5.3.1. Establishments

Interactions with the different establishments that are associated with this service are inevitable. The workers report that this is the most important relationship for their professional performance and daily dynamic, considering that the performance of the establishment directly affects the workers, and, in turn, that same performance is affected by the relations built, this is, reports show, it is improved and more pleasant when the relations built are also pleasant. The workers highlight the effort made by both parts for the job of both parts to flow better and faster.

My experience with restaurants has been good. I arrive at the establishment and talk, if I see that the person is nice to me, I return it. If not, I stay in my corner, give that initial education and then I leave. It's been going well.

(Woman, 23 years old)

I went there and said that I would go without any problem, but I said that they had to learn to respect us, that we are partners, and no one is anyone's competition. For their work to flow, we need to do ours and vice-versa. So, if one of the two fails, doesn't work.

(Man, 43 years old)

#### 5.3.2. Pairs

The relations with the pairs are the strongest and most meaningful ones for the couriers. The workers heavily highlight the importance of interactions with colleagues in the enjoyment of the working day and the impact on their life in general, transcending most of the time the labour sphere. This relation is also reported as highly significant when approaching the incorporation in the activity and the mutual help, as was mentioned previously in the section. It can also be understood through the lens of immigration, considering a lot of couriers are immigrants and

are either alone in the country or have almost no family with them. Therefore, the colleagues represent that affective dimension necessary in human life. Despite the different languages that might constitute an obstacle, there is still effort to overcome it and in general, all couriers have pleasant interactions with each other.

We have a WhatsApp group where we share what is happening to us, customers, questions, and requests for help...

(Woman, 35 years old)

There are people who develop friendships! Especially, people who come from, I notice, the Brazilian community, for example, because many of them already know each other, and even if they don't know each other, as they are in a foreign country, they end up coming together, being together...: everyone who is of Romani ethnicity is almost always all together. (...) Some have some difficulty speaking our language, so they also get together because they speak their language among themselves and are better off. But that's the way it is, even those who speak less, who don't interact as much, are also interacting.

(Man, 39 years old)

In the logic of any other profession, if I asked where a good point was for another colleague, logically he wouldn't tell me, because I'm competing with him. But usually, they say, it's a good particularity.

(Man, 38 years old)

We human beings live in tribes. We find our tribe, we identify ourselves and when we see it, we are already there forming a family. Portuguese and Brazilian cultures have a lot of that. So, our tribe is usually very mixed, there are Brazilians, and Portuguese, all very close together. Being a courier, we have things in common, we work, and we begin to align our thoughts and connections. A group of people that will evolve towards a more affective side, of help, of a real connection. When we come from another country, we are alone here, so we have already started looking for families in case you fail to be there to help.

(Man, 36 years old)

### 5.3.3. Clients

Lastly, the relationship with the clients is one to be less heavy in the activity balance, as opposed to what common perceptions might affirm, mainly due to the very short time of interaction. Despite that aspect, this interaction is the one that worries and causes the most stress to the courier due to the weight of the responsibility of providing good service that is not always within their reach. The experiences in this research are generally pleasant, but with reports of negative experiences for a set of reasons, also approached in the following section.

When we go to the customer, they rarely greet us with a frown, only occasionally... they sometimes don't realize that the delays are not our fault, but usually, the customers are pleasant. Sometimes we deliver to the same client, and they already know us, they start to get closer, and they think we have time to talk to them... I like to give them this time!

(Woman, 61 years old)

There are clients who are super polite, and charismatic, but there are some who are hostile, who treat us with indifference, as if we were mere employees, we are not hired by them! Now imagine... We already work in an environment of tension, of being on the street, in traffic, of being honked, being cursed, being mistreated... so many times we are already defensive towards these people.

(Man, 38 years old)

We can't generalize the bad ones by the few that there are, there are many good ones! There are some that tell us to have a coffee with them! They are friendly, they tip, and they are the coolest



part of the Adventure... I see it as a form of gratitude. You served and he liked it and says "this is yours!"

(Man, 43 years old)

#### 5.3.4. Hostilities and Discriminations

The results show that the overall relation experience of the couriers is tendentially perceived as positive. However, cases of hostility and discrimination are also a reality. Unpleasant situations are experienced by all kinds of workers, but in this research, two specific groups stood out in this and therefore will be the ones described and later interpreted: the immigrants and women. Socially, these groups are already more vulnerable and marginalized in comparison to others and here the results showed the same tendency: this activity is also, therefore, a frontline of reproduction and reinforcement of biased and prejudiced beliefs and misconceptions in and through this activity, and, consequently, making once again these groups the ones that may experience more hostilities.

##### a) Immigrants

Immigrants are a great portion of these workers, and as in other situations and contexts, they may be a target of prejudice, intentionally or unintentionally. In this activity that also happens. The workers that reported this type of situation acknowledge that this is not most of the encounters they have but do strongly highlight that it is still a more present reality than they would think and like, reinforcing the necessity to break with these prejudices and stigmas around immigration.

With that, reports show unpleasant situations of discrimination and/or harassment, despite the quality of the service they just provided, with base solely on the nationality of the workers in a negative way.

People see that you are Brazilian, and they already treat you differently. Sometimes I feel t. I've had some bad experiences, not all of them, but some. From what I've heard, when we get here and we're looking for a job, people abuse the immigrant a lot more... so this was an escape valve, not to deal with these people and still get money. Many people come here with a dream, with a goal of achieving something, of having a better life and sometimes they get a job in a place that promises a contract, document and such and they don't give that... and the dream ends up becoming a nightmare!

(Man, 26 years old)

I think there is always a little bit of discrimination. You can see many foreign, Pakistani, and Indian people doing this work until they get a better deal, they stay on this and there is discrimination.

(Man, 32 years old)

people who are not couriers don't like couriers very much... also because maybe most couriers are Brazilian, and maybe people have less empathy for that.

(Man, 19 years old)

With customers you can see in the expression when we say good afternoon or good night, you can see in the expression of the customers that it changes when they see us and know that we are Brazilians. So far, I have not been harmed but this is not a nice thing... imagine you're working and

you're nice, say good night and the person looks at you from the side and thinks "look, it's a Brazilian, unfortunately", it's kind of bad, isn't it.

(Man, 26 years old)

But I've known colleagues who've had bad experiences. Mainly because we are Brazilians. There are people who still have this prejudice. For example, when an order takes a while and it's not our fault, it's the establishment's fault, they say "ah it had to be Brazilian", that kind of thing is not appropriate! Baseless.

(Woman, 38 years old)

## b) Women

Just like in the previous social group, women also tend to have different and specific experiences when compared to other more privileged groups, especially considering that this is a more masculine activity and context, this is, with more men working than women. Vulnerable to different hostilities, these couriers account and report experiences of gender harassment and "catcalling", and overall, a higher feeling of physical unsafety regarding robberies., referring to themselves as "easier targets". On the other hand, the present reports do not show experiences of professional discrimination or different treatment for being a woman.

It's complicated. A woman alone in a car is a very easy target. because this thing about being a woman sometimes comes up with a nerd or two...Now, for the clients, I went through a situation... that nowadays, despite having been just a short time ago, I'm already able to talk about it in a more relaxed way, but at the beginning, I couldn't even talk about it. It left a lot of traumas... it turns out to be a trauma because today I no longer make this type of delivery, I stopped making them, which are alcoholic drinks... In that situation, I take my things out of my backpack and turn around to leave, and the person says, "I don't know you anywhere"? A man my age or older. And I told him no. I wanted to get it over with as soon as possible, drunk people talk a lot, and I must work. I never think it will become dangerous. I'm leaving and he insisted on asking questions and start complimenting me. I thank him and leave, and he insists and grabs me by the arm. Prevents me from entering the elevator. Pulls closer to him and asks to see my hair up close. I froze. He could do whatever he wanted at that moment, pull me into the house... I was petrified. When I get down there, he goes to the balcony and started screaming for me desperately, he saw my name on the app and screamed... I've suffered from clients and colleagues... from colleagues, it's catcalling... but as we already know each other, they don't even try very much... it's like "are you tired, I also want to go home, well, it would be good to have a woman next to me, you know" this kind of uncomfortable conversation... we are women and we know that they don't have this conversation between men... or do they think that João goes to Francisco and say it would be cool to have a woman scratch his back or kiss his ears.. no, no!

(Woman, 35 years old)

I had to go to a social neighbourhood up there and when I opened my wallet to give the change, it was full of money because it was the end of the day, I felt that people were looking, I was alone in the car, alone as a woman, At that time of night with money in my wallet... Then I saw that it was not a good option for me.

(Woman, 61 years old)

### 5.3.5. Group Observations

In the more external observant experience, some interesting dynamics were testified, which also support the interpretation of the interview. What is known by common sense is verified: couriers from different companies gather, while waiting for the orders to come with their phone always in their hand, essentially around high-density areas of restaurants, especially if they are fast-food ones. Following this, the groups formed in the street, where conversations and other interactions are shared, also contemplate couriers from different companies altogether. This is specifically curious because besides sharing mundane conversations, these workers also compare their experiences across companies with each other. Thus, the different realities of the different companies are very openly and publicly shared by the workers amongst themselves, and even compared and discussed. The other interesting dynamic was the immediate inclusion of new couriers in that context in the group, despite possible language barriers. Such dynamics were observed on multiple occasions.

Another observation that stands out is the rush and speed that these workers live in. Despite gathering around, and talking to each other, it was possible to understand that they were almost always in a rush to get another order as that was in many cases the topic of the conversation. Once a possible order popped up, the interactions paused, and they rushed to the establishment.

## 5.4. Life Prospects

Regarding life prospects, a strong pattern can be found. The biggest portion of the couriers' interviews doesn't account for this activity in their lives and prospects. The workers present future intentions of leaving the job and moving to other experiences. These other experiences range from continuing studies to owning a business, some correlated with the activity such as opening a business of rental of motorcycles, for example, and others to completely different paths such as going back to the medical career once practised.

However, this dimension is particularly interesting to analyse and interpret regarding immigrants. Besides staying in Portugal and opening a business as seen as common in the reports, these workers also prospect their life tendentially in one of two ways: either gathering some money and better conditions to get back to their home country and re-start life there; or gathering money and conditions to move to a whole other country with the intention of improving, even more, their life. These prospects and ambitions are of particular interest in two ways. In understanding the dynamics and rhythm of being an immigrant in general; and, in reflecting on how this activity, due to its easy entering and no bond character, represents a tool and just a passage to another phase of life for a big portion of the workers that endorse in this.

Staying here, I won't go forward. My perspective is to continue in Portugal, to open something that can work and have my own network, which is my own.

(Man, 26 years old)

I want to be hired as a courier, but for some restaurant... there are some that are more interesting than the app, there are some specific ones that I don't remember the name you are hired, paid an amount that is what I earn, but only working 6 hours a day. I'll earn the same as I earn today, but for 6 hours, while here I work 14 hours. In the other hours when I don't have work, I can continue to *UberEats* for example. My 1st plan is to stay here for a couple of years, collect money and then do something there in Brazil with that money. Maybe open a business, maybe.

(Man, 38 years old)

The exceptions found regard the workers that already have a full-time conventional and stable job, representing merely an addition to the income; and a worker that declares they intend to keep performing this activity full-time with no perspective to leave it and change job.

I have had a good working harmony. Both my main job and this extra, and the family. *Glovo* doesn't interfere in my family life because I don't let that happen. If I can, I will continue to work at *Glovo*, yes.

(Man, 39 years old)

After we started working on it, now we seem to have found ourselves. Before we didn't really know what to do. We want to think about opening a motorcycle company, something we didn't even think about there (Brazil). And we don't want to leave this *UberEats* environment anymore, this motorcycle environment that we liked a lot. Expectations are very high, if God will, everything will work out.

(Woman, 26 years old)

## 5.5. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship as a concept and as a way of living has been continuously growing in the past decade. From the aftermath of the 2008 subprime crisis with the younger generations having little to no job opportunities and having to create their own, to nowadays with a culture of self-employment so intensive in the neoliberal agenda, it is something that cannot be avoided and contoured.

The value and highlight given to such the idea of flexibility start right at the companies. In the different documents and websites for these platforms, the concept and speech of flexibility are recurrently and commonly used. The use of such terms is not unconscious. These different ideas are strategically used to support and produce a feeling of alternative and hope in the workers, with the intent of enticing them to this activity with the independent entrepreneurial goal. Below are some of the most common sentences found on the official websites of some of the platforms

Deliver with *UberEats* No boss. Flexible schedule. Quick pay. Flexibility: Take to the streets and deliver whenever you want – for an hour, a weekend, or throughout the week. (*UberEats*, 2022)

Work when you want. Work with complete freedom. The choice of where you connect, and which orders you accept is up to you. (*Glovo*, 2022, translated by the author)

Earn extra income. Flexible working hours. Become a Bolt Food courier today! You decide when and how often you deliver. An hour? Evenings and weekends? The whole week? You're the boss! (BoltFood, 2022)

Make money on your own schedule with a motorbike, bicycle, or on foot. Work when you want to! (Deliveroo, 2022)

As one can see, the idea of freedom and flexibility are always present and interconnected, independent of which platform is being searched, and it is used by them to promote and collect more workers. This presence is also shifted and spread to the workers, as will be presented here. In the platform *uberised* work, the worker is not only more, said, autonomous in what regards its daily work dynamics and its responsibilities and safety, but also in what regards the means of production they inevitably need to perform such activity. The companies and the platforms they create, besides the allocation and income control, only provide the digital platform to which the activity is performed and connects the workers and consumers (Fontes, 2017; Pires, 2020), discarding everything else to the workers. This means that the other aspects necessary are the workers' responsibility and their costs, namely means of production such as the transport they use (car, bicycle, motorcycle, etc), the smartphone they need to have access to the platform and orders and even portable chargers to endure the many hours they are outside working, the different types of repairs, improvements, and maintenance (André, Silva and Nascimento, 2018; Pires, 2020; Rodrigues, 2019).

Whilst I was working at Deliveroo, there was one thing I couldn't work out. I provided the bike, the phone, the electricity, and the mobile data that I needed to work. How did that change things? Did it change things? I had had discussions with interested friends a few times, where I repeated the line that I'd heard other people put forward: 'I basically own the means of production, apart from the app.' Deliveroo is often used as an example of how capitalism is developing a tendency to accidentally hand over the means of production to workers themselves. But it didn't feel like I owned the means of production at all. (Cant, 2020, p. 47)

It took me 2 and a half months to be accepted and only then to start working. They let me register, we buy the backpack and only after everything is taken care of and they think they need more people, they open the positions.

(Woman, 32 years old)

The concept and practice themselves can be beneficial, but as was already mentioned in this work, they can also represent uncertainty and a false feeling of independence. Especially within this activity. Branded precisely as a self-employment alternative, with the ground on concepts such as flexibility and freedom, it was necessary to understand the workers' position and perceptions regarding this. Therefore, considering what was just said, three main positions are observable: a critical position towards this conception; the reproduction of such ideas and speech; and lastly, the ambiguous niche of both these sides. Figure 5.6 shows the main results in each category.

**Figure 5.6** Results Synthesis of the Entrepreneurial Discourse

<p>Critical</p>	<p>But I say for people not to work here because I know what we go through. We don't have hours to eat, we don't have hours to go to the bathroom, we don't have benefits like those who work with a contract, and we don't have vacations. It's uncertain, an uncertain thing That's why I say, it's good, but there's also the other side that's complicated. There are days we work 10 hours a day, it's a lot... If you can't work... stay at home and “order a <i>Glovo</i>” [expression from company]. (Woman, 32 years old)</p> <p>You become a slave of this... if you don't go out, you don't earn, but for you to earn, you must make a lot of orders... (Man, 43 years old)</p>
<p>Reproductive</p>	<p>I think this job became more requested because a lot of people came here. It's a job in that you are independent. (Man, 26 years old)</p> <p>But “would change <i>UberEats</i> for a regular job?” I say no because I earn less in the others. What I'm going to earn in a job, I can withdraw in 15 days at <i>UberEats</i>. The 2<sup>nd</sup> reason and I would even say the main one, I don't have bosses. I don't have bosses yelling at me, who talk to me badly in front of people and clients. (Woman, 35 years old)</p> <p>One of the reasons I went to <i>UberEats</i> was the ease and flexibility of schedules and that y I'm my own boss. The money I make is from my effort, my will and my wanting. And then how I'm going to start the internship is much easier with the flexible schedule. (Woman, 23 years old)</p> <p>It's a very good profession, I really like it, I like freedom, the fact that I make my own schedule. When we say that, they think we want to work less, but on the contrary, it's because I want to work more. (Man, 38 years old)</p> <p>Compared to other jobs, I prefer this one 100%. I make my own schedule, if I feel like going out, I do. (Woman, 32 years old)</p> <p>It's the environment that gives me the most financial as well as social freedom, a service contract wouldn't be important to me right now. (Man, 36 years old)</p>
<p>Ambiguous</p>	<p>This idea of being your own boss makes sense, and I know that if I work certain hours, I earn this. People can manage what they earn and the time they want to work... although I also tell you, at <i>Glovo</i> they can't work more than 10 hours a day, I think. (Man, 39 years old)</p> <p>Increase income I wouldn't say because it always depends on the orders that the person makes, there are days when the person only makes 1 or 2 orders and so the income will no longer increase. Flexible hours so far so good, there are flexible hours, there is no boss like other jobs like in others, yes. (Man, 32 years old)</p>

From the table, as well as reading the interviews, is easily detected an emphasis on the reproductive discourse, in comparison to the others. The workers refer to, sometimes more

directly than others, this belief in entrepreneurship as the main conductor and prime goal for their drive and endurance in the activity. The factor that most contributes to this reproduction is schedule freedom and flexibility. This is praised by the couriers especially because most of them conjugate this activity either with another platform/job or, as most people, with the family dimensions, allowing for more autonomy and control in that. That feeling of autonomy also allows the workers to have bigger control over their earnings, whether to not work much when their goals are achieved or as most reported, to work more than they would be allowed in conventional jobs to be able to earn more money each day, week and consequently, month. The analysis of the content of this part of the interviews indicates that the reproduction of entrepreneurship is not necessarily conscious and premeditated. This indication is observable in the speeches of the workers, where they don't account for and don't reflect directly on the concept and experience of entrepreneurship as a business ideal and route to follow, but rather just as an activity where they have more control on the schedules and work alone.

Opposing, the critical discourse was not much present among the reports of the workers and their experiences. However, when present, this discourse represents strong criticism of the neglect of the human necessities and integrity when discussing the conditions that the workers endure in this flexible route followed. The few critical positions that were taken by the interviewees support the perception of precarity that is experienced in this *platformised* activity and how the workers dive into that experience in hopes of a better outcome.

The ambiguous discourse took place in their constant reflection on how flexibility does not always hold, or not entirely. This position bluntly exemplifies the convergence of both critical and reproductive discourses, where the workers reflect on how some aspects aren't necessarily absolutes, such as earning how much a worker wants and working when a worker wants, while at the same time acknowledging that, despite that, this activity still offers more of that autonomy and flexibility than most conventional jobs previously, or currently, experienced by them.

## **5.6. General Feeling**

Lastly, after the interview and the different reports regarding different dimensions, the workers described their general feeling and perceptions toward the activity. The couriers show overall appreciation for their job. Among the reasons mentioned for this, the most recurrent ones are the possibility to work alone (own boss), schedule flexibility and working on the streets. For the workers, these reasons can, to a big extent, compensate the flaws felt and experienced in the activity.

Now I'm really enjoying it, it's a different experience compared to what I had at McDonald's. I'm learning to be my own company, knowing how to be with myself, and not being at home.

(Woman, 23 years old)

I like what I do, we talk to people, we go for a walk, see the waterfront, the landscape... it would be worse to stay in an office!

(Woman, 61 years old)

I would recommend it, yes. I always recommend it to people. It's something you earn more, something you seek your money for, and the more hours you work the more you will earn.

(Woman, 38 years old)

I really enjoy working on it. I can't see myself working on anything else.

(Woman, 26 years old)

Despite it being a general feeling, reports show some improvements and adjustments the workers would like to see fulfilled. The main improvements pointed regard labour rights, more specifically the existence of good, founded accident insurance, more fairness in the rankings and order attribution, and higher remuneration per order.

If I had to improve something, it would be to have the so-called labour rights! Not just being service providers. Let's assume that. By chance, *Glovo* supposedly even has insurance if you have a car accident. But I don't know if it's another type of accident, and we already know how insurance companies are... they want to put everything aside...

(Man, 39 years old)

I'd like to see them come back with insurance, we felt more confident.

(Man, 36 years old)

The only thing that improved was the job selection of the app itself. As there are a certain number of couriers, I think they should know how to distribute among all of us.

(Woman, 23 years old)

In terms of improvement, it's the earnings by orders for sure. I think they pay us very little.

(Woman, 26 years old)



## 6. Discussion

The intent of the present study has been clear from the beginning. Under the theme of the platform economy and the *uberisation* of work in Portugal, grounded on 4 specific goals, this dissertation aims at reflecting and drawing founded consideration on 2 main questions: how are that labour market reality and activity experienced and perceived by the workers and how it translates into their life; and to what extent are the existing social inequalities perpetuated and/or enhanced through *uberised* work?

Considering the previous chapter on exposure of the results, the main key results are easy to identify. The overall analysis of the reports obtained through the interviews suggests that the couriers enjoy the activity they perform due to labour-external factors such as the possibility to work in various places while enjoying the environment, the interactions and conviviality possible and very much common and the autonomy and flexibility it allows them in different dimensions, such as schedule-wise, working hours, “days-off” and work dynamic. The observed satisfaction does not exclude the fragilities and negative aspects that are felt and reported by them. The cases and experiences of the couriers analysed show that this activity doesn't give the easiest and most pleasant dynamics reflected in their life. There are a lot of challenges associated with this line of activity. Among the specificities of each dimension, the data suggest that the most felt fragility regards the daily working incessant rhythm, where the couriers work a lot of hours and a lot of continuous days. Correlated to this dynamic is the need felt to achieve the highest earnings possible not only to manage a good monthly income but also to guarantee a safety net in case of a negative eventuality. The data support that this last aspect is a constant and highlighted reality due to the oscillation and volatility that the activity represents workwise, therefore making the workers' life also unstable and unpredictable. This way, while still wanting to preserve the independent character of this activity—a characteristic that represents one of the reasons to have endorsed the activity—the workers still report wanting and needing more labour and safety rights, namely accident insurance and higher earnings as the main ones shown in the data.

The content also identifies the demographics of the workers as a type of pattern, where this activity is essentially carried out mainly by male immigrants that face difficulties in the insertion in the labour market and have this activity as their escape option to work.

Despite being a considerable recent phenomenon and not deeply and intensively studied, this reality has been researched. Taking into consideration the previous existing studies, whether in the same context or different, is of relevance for a broader analysis and understanding of patterns and divergencies. With the studies mentioned and used (see previous sections) in the present research, it is possible to build a strong bridge of patterns and similarities between the different contexts' experiences and realities. The daily dynamics

of these couriers around the globe seem to be consistent with the dynamics found through the analysed data, as well as the workers' perception of them. The reports here show that, like in other countries, the experience of couriers is strongly pouted by distraught, accelerated rhythm and volatility/insecurity, even if the workers enjoy the specificity of the activity and its surroundings. Standing side to side, both the reports from the current research in Portugal, as well as with previous in the same country and others, this platform activity represents a labour-flawed reality for already marginalized groups.

These workers experience first-hand the technological acceleration through their immediate work task in both ways of receiving and accepting the order through the platform and the delivery of it through physical transportation; while simultaneously they experience the wants and needs of performing those tasks more rapidly each day. This accelerated dynamic was spotted by Marx (1867) where the work earning by piece, as the name piece-wage indicates, dictates one's earnings, it inevitably shapes the daily dynamic and *passé* of a worker in this line of work: just like in the piece-wage, here in the platform *uberised* work if one earns by the number of job made, in this specific case, deliveries made, the intensity of the work dynamic is controlled by the worker and their wants, needs and goals (Pires, 2020). Work limits and boundaries seem to cease to exist, and this control made by the workers makes them intensify their working days to work more to accomplish their interest to increase their "wage", exactly as one can find in today's *uberised* work (Rodrigues, 2019). The implementation of this system today allows the companies the capitalist action of rising, themselves, the intensity of labour (Marx, 1867), considering the workers will comply with it due to necessity. Paradoxically, people have easier and faster access to everything, yet their needs seem to not always be fulfilled.

In this case, that one day in this activity is based on constant receiving and responding to orders and tasks, without the conventional work schedule and organization of the conventional labour market, results in the blurring the lines between those work activities with the personal ones, generating the "common perception that we are always working or cannot manage to stop working" (Carmo and d'Avelar, 2021). This constantly reproduced experience of acceleration contributes to the build-up of a precarious experience in the way that the dynamics and mechanisms that this requires, and that is possible, highlight the uncertainty in a worker's life and consequential instability (Carmo, 2022), that is not only reduced to the labour dimension, but rather through all life dimensions. This feeling and the "never stop working" cycle is, in fact, a cycle because, in most companies, for one to maintain its ranking and rates and, consequentially, its incoming orders, one must continue to work rather intensely.

By analysing the whole scope of the results obtained, one can, and should, interpret many perspectives. This recent work reconfiguration differs from the conventional labour market in a set of ways, already discussed throughout the research, either in the mechanisms and

structures/devices it is carried through, or in the social and economic starting points, outcomes and impacts it has. Such differences are almost absolutes. The translation of such differences to the workers' lives, their experiences, and perceptions of it are here the aim to understand if it also diverges, how so and how it impacts the workers.

The most crucial interpretation is of this platform activity as an escape for these workers. The testimonies given by the couriers themselves support the argument that this is a growing reality in the *platformised* labour market, and it highly and strongly represents an alternative and escapes labour route for the workers that endorse this activity: tendentially people excluded by some bureaucratic and/or social reason from the conventional labour market, or with more obstacles in doing so. Constituting this temporary, and in some cases more permanent, option of having a source of income, is comprehensive to find a feeling of enjoyment and pleasant among the worker's reports, especially when they compare to their previous more fragile situations, namely having no source of income. However, an important analysis regarding this, and that may not be necessarily explicit by the workers themselves, is how that feeling does not exclude the fragilities and disadvantages that this activity can carry through. The economic and labour principles and characteristics that shape this *platformised*, under the lenses of self-employment and independency that can be true to some extent, as suggested by the present data at some points, also shape, at the same time, the unregulated labour mechanism that reproduces the shifting of protection and responsibility away from the firms and onto the workers.

It is factual that workers do not have any type of obligation and/or fixed schedule and working hours to attend to and follow. The platforms do not impose rules on that matter. However, due to algorithms and the different rate processes, the platform performs a form of digital mediation and contingency control, and therefore workers do have some barriers, per se, to when (at what time and how many hours) they can work and to the (non) attribution of orders to them (Rodrigues, 2019). The workers may want to work more hours than the ones allowed by the platforms, and/or may want to work at a certain time of the day that the platform also does not allow them to, accordingly to those rates evaluations and contingency plans. Also, the idea of flexibility is inevitably connected to what this represents in the workers life: if it is a primary source of income, it allows for considerably less flexibility than if it is just a supplementary form of income (Kasliwal, 2020). That way, these forms of mediating and the centralization of the control of the labour processes (Fontes, 2017) go, to some extent, in opposite direction to the freedom and flexibility that is preached and wanted. Like Marx (1867) stated about the piece-wage earnings—a phenomenon in a different time very interesting for compared analysis—the *uberised* work performing and receiving (from) punctual services confines the worker with an idea of the autonomy of working when they want and earning how much they are willing to work. The acceleration discussed previously can also play a

determinant role in how such an idea is illusory. The intensification in the working days conducted by the worker, considering that it is, to an extent, controlled by them and their earnings necessities, ties them and forces them to perform a certain fast and intense labour pace to achieve goals. This needs a certain abdication of freedom and creates a form of indirect obligation.

The belief in the benefits of independence and entrepreneurship allowed in this activity can in some cases be considered accurate and acknowledged by the workers (Moraes et al, 2019), however, it also inevitably leaves workers in a vulnerable situation in most cases. Therefore, freedom, flexibility or autonomy do not always hold in their full essence, meaning that what is created and reproduced by the companies, and then perpetuated by the workers themselves can be fallacious, sometimes without the latter acknowledging that ambiguous freedom.

The workers on these platforms remain in an indeterminate status: they are self-employed, even though they are subject to working hours, hierarchical subordination and algorithmic management. (Roque, 2022, para. 41, translated by the author)

The direct consequence of being an independent worker in the *platformised* on-demand goods distribution and delivery activity rests on the normalization and constant cyclical reproduction of unstable, volatile, and incessant living experiences, considering it bursts the labour sphere into every other sphere in human life. This living experience alongside is also directly affected by the social and cultural aspects of this work.

Apart from the more labour-related disadvantages and obstacles, there are also the social and cultural disadvantages implicated, that directly condition the workers' experiences, and cannot be in any way dissociated and separated from the rest. Being in contact with so many people in their daily working days and having to always interact with them is not only socially and mentally exhausting for the couriers, as it is also a source of unpleasant hostilities originating on top of existing prejudices that result in discrimination, more obvious or more subliminal. Despite hostilities being experienced across the spectrum of couriers, it is more recurrent in more vulnerable and marginalized social groups: highlighting here the immigrants' and women's experiences.

Research has shown that in many countries, migration is very present and recurrent in this activity, consisting of a large section of the workforce, with the necessity for major comprehension due to its implications (Cant, 2020; Doorn, Ferrari and Graham, 2020), and the current research presented the same tendency. In the case of migrants, their inherent fragilized position in the country of arrival already creates a vulnerability not only workwise but overall, as human beings. In this sector, if the immigrant doesn't have still all the documentation regularized, they have difficulties in finding conventional jobs, therefore they turn to these

activities that are easier to get into but must subject themselves to work under the account of someone else considering they cannot have their own accounts (Rodrigues, 2020). When these people have all the documentation regularized, they still have trouble in the conventional labour market and in finding jobs with traditional employment relations and contractual bonds (Doorn, Ferrari and Graham, 2020) and even in the areas where they have education, guiding them towards, once again, to platform labour. Correlated to that, these workers encounter, also, the different language barriers in the attempt to enter other activities in the labour market that require more verbal interaction and, when stumbled across such obstacles, platform delivery work seems to be an easier escape and solution (Cant, 2020). Besides, working in an activity that is this exposed to the public and that deals with several customers daily, the social vulnerability to possible discrimination and hostilities is around the corner (De Stefano, 2016). The results in this investigation, thus, support and corroborate these affirmations and demonstrate that immigrants' experiences are strongly shaped by difficulty entering conventional labour, either by discrimination or by their irregular situation regarding documentation, as well as by being profiled and discriminated against by their nationality, during their daily courier interactions in the job.

For women, the experience holds a bigger feeling of unsafety due to interactions and sexist harassment, from their male co-workers, strongly differing both group's experiences, as the results showed, and therefore conditioning and shaping their daily dynamics at work, as Cant (2020) also stated.

However, within a decentralized and unbounded workforce where women were in the tiny minority, there was another option on the table: just avoid other workers. That option proved to be the most attractive for many women workers, thereby maintaining a gender dynamic which carried through to our later organization. [...] If female workers began to avoid them, then we were unlikely to recruit them to a WhatsApp chat, and if they weren't on our WhatsApp chats, then we couldn't communicate with them. These chats themselves were also very male-dominated, and sometimes played host to sexist ideas. (Cant, 2020, p. 69)

Another reflection regarding women's experience can be made. This activity reinforces the already previously existent gendered work (Kasliwal, 2020). Considering the present reproduction of social gender roles, such as unpaid domestic work mainly exercised by women, this activity could, somehow, represent a positive alternative for women trying to conciliate unpaid domestic work with their traditional professional life—conciliation that women are socially expected to achieve inherently, unlike men. Despite such conciliation being, in fact, possible by platform work, this also means that, when compared, women's experiences result in extra work burden with such a combination, while at the same time spending as much time on their platform work, or more—compared to traditional jobs— (Kasliwal, 2020), with the necessity of achieving good earnings and maintaining the household. Despite the experiences and testimonies representing a less positive framework, this activity allows for some control

over their life, considering that if one was to quit this, it is acknowledged that they would face difficulties in finding a similar job that allowed for them to combine their different types of work (paid work and unpaid domestic work) and, consequentially, suffer even more negative consequences (Cant, 2020).

The data in this research supports the argument that this activity still represents a means through which these prejudices and inequalities are still reinforced and perpetuated. Both these two general dimensions together shape a precarious experience for these workers, reproducing a lack of strong and effective labour conditions. These cyclical experiences, especially in these specific social groups, compresses and reduces these workers' life to this reality niche, thus hardening an already difficult social and cultural event that is social mobility. The *uberisation* of work may not, by itself, be the cause of social stagnation but it can certainly weigh in on it.

Comparing here to observations and investigations conducted in different countries, some strong similar experiences can be found. In André, Silva and Nascimento (2018), research conducted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with workers of this activity, as well as in Vosgerau and Comar (2019), also a Brazilian study, the main points drawn out from the interviews are that lack of security and insurance related to the inexistent work bond, along with the excessive workload are the main reasons why this activity is considered, by the workers themselves, very vulnerable, and precarious. Looking to a completely different context, the book of Cant (2020), "Riding for Deliveroo", conducted in the UK context, shows those same tendencies:

When you understand a workplace from the workers' point of view, all kinds of previously invisible phenomena come into view. Deliveroo—which looks on the surface like the shiny model of a new economy—is revealed to be based on a class composition that's prone to explosions of struggle. (Cant, 2020, p. 120),

where the workers acknowledge their precarious conditions as drivers for this company that, even in a struggling pit, they find the will to self-organize and act on their own hands to fight for more and better conditions (Cant, 2020) in the sector, which is a will and fight found also in the other studies. Travelling across the globe to a considerably different economic context, we find Japan's on-demand delivery workers' experience very similar to the previously mentioned. The same lack of rights and insurance constitute the work and, consequentially, life uncertainty and instability that most of the research show to be experienced by the workers (Umer, 2021). This study in Japan, as the author reports, shows how these main challenges and problems experienced by on-demand platform work are common in several different developed economies (Umer, 2021). The similarities across the globe tell us that the structures and consequential experiences and challenges are inherent and directly associated with the platforms in the gig economy and not so dependent on the local economy and conducts.

This reality can represent a contemporary and *platformised* return to the piece-wage jobs and the depreciation of the workers and their performance, while at the same time commodifying them as what they provide. This route leads inevitably to the dehumanization of the worker that is gradually more treated as a number in an algorithm that may or may not be available for such service.

It is acknowledged by the workers that these type of services offers unemployed people a solution for some problems the conventional labour market do not, primarily, despite the poor conditions, the ability to have work in the first place and not be unemployed (Carmo and Matias, 2019), considering the difficulty that some people go through to get a job already mentioned here—whether it is due to lack of opportunities, lack of studies or some sort of structural discrimination. Despite the earnings they get, which some consider good if they perform an overly excessive amount of hours of work per day, the workers still consider their lives to not be as good and comfortable as they wish they were, noticing the feeling of insecurity not only about losing the job but as well as surviving with such a job, being unable to improve their life and even that their position and the work they develop has no dignity, is degrading and it completely relays on the company (André, Silva and Nascimento, 2018). From the workers' side, besides trying to escape unemployment and straightening their living situation, these companies rely on three other major strategies to gather more workers for their services, which can be explaining factors for such growth of couriers despite the bad conditions, and those are the flexibility speech (G. Friedman, 2014; Vallas and Schor, 2020; Vieira, 2021), the promise of high and easy earnings (André et al., 2018), and the possibility of entrepreneurship (Barrat, Goods and Veen, 2020; Leonardi and Pirina, 2020; Vallas and Schor, 2020). The advertisement of the possibility of being an independent worker or self-employed with full control of the schedules and one's earnings is a tool to make people desire an entrepreneur route of their work-life, where they believe it will improve their lives, as opposed to simply being wage-earners and working for somebody other than themselves (Vieira, 2021). The entrepreneurial route aggregated with the flexibilization of work shapes the workers' way of enduring the conditions they consider to be negative.

Platform work can degrade ones working conditions, however, they still represent, when comparing pros and cons, a job and earning alternative and opportunities for groups of people that have, due to different social and cultural institutionalized reasons, a harder time in entering and/or succeeding in other conventional activities (Cant, 2020; Doorn, Ferrari ad Graham, 2020; Manyika et al., 2016)

Although data support that the workers find joy in this activity they perform and even consider, currently, the flaws and disadvantages compensate when comparing to not having a job or having another one where they wouldn't, allegedly, earn as much, they still, at the

same time, don't consider enduring in this job permanently nor for much longer in their lives, as they account for its instability character and that it is not aligned and is not compatible to their prospects and life goals.

These results, as any results in social science research, strongly matter for the evolution of the fields and their comprehension. In the case of this specific research, the analysis and results can be relevant in a set of ways. As has been explained in the casing (see Empirical chapter) and throughout, Portugal offers a new and different ground and perspective for the overall platform economy, especially for the present specific case study. Few solo analyses and research are, as expected, not enough for the span and depth that this phenomenon takes in the contemporary social and economic framework. Therefore, representing still a new emergence, as an important one, research on it is still of great priority to build a set of different aimed studies for them to complete each other and better found the knowledge on this context worldwide.

With the responsibility upper mentioned, there are some contributions from this study to the field that is possible to highlight.

Analysing the results and interpreting the workers' experiences and their perceptions of it enables the understanding of what must probably be the most urgent matter to attend to regarding this labour activity: the political action in creating a new intermediary category of workers for these *platformised* couriers. As observed also in some workers in Spain (Vieira, 2021), these couriers cherish the degree of autonomy, freedom, and flexibility that this activity allows them, and report their wants in preserving such characteristics, being nonetheless the core reasons that they perform in this activity and is compatible to their current living situation.

However, as corroborated by the data and mentioned in the previous chapter, the workers at the same time aim for, eventually, a higher level of labour protections and rights, while being independent workers. As of right now, the status of workers that represents them politically and legislatively does not make possible such coexistence. Conventional hiring through a labour contract will make the worker an employee of a company, safeguarded by the labour code in charge, typically without the flexibility and autonomy mentioned; while an independent worker is not tied to the company with a labour contract, thus not being covered by the rights and protections the employee status enables but has the possibility for flexibility and autonomy. Considering the growth of this group of workers in this activity, and the lawful crossing between the more flexible and autonomous dimension with a protected one, it seems urgent the discussion and reflection on this possibility crossing by the policymakers.

Within still the worker's scope, nonetheless, the focus of this research, the demographic information of them also constitutes a fertile base for the scientific analysis of this phenomenon. Inevitably, it might be a source for deepening the comprehension of this activity for several reasons, but the focus regarding the results obtained in the present research lay in the different



job conciliations this group of workers' exercise. The typologies operationalized in table 5.1 in the Results chapters, are of great relevance specifically in the interpretation of the different experiences of different workers, accordingly to the type of conciliations they exercise and how it shapes and conditions not only their experience as workers but also the direct impacts on their life. As the current reports sustain, the experience of a courier that conciliates a full-time stable conventional job with one good delivery platform (Type 1)—normally for some extra income—will most likely differ considerably from one courier that practices only this job and conciliates, for example, two platforms within the *platformised* goods delivery market (Type 4). Type 1 will more easily have a less stressful experience and a more positive perception towards the work, due to the safety the full-time conventional job provides and the importance of the courier work as just an extra; while for Type 4 the exact opposite might happen, where the courier work constitutes the main source of income and subsistence for the worker and, therefore, higher levels of responsibility and uncertainty are felt, otherwise as the results support. This typology is further applied to future research and can help ground crucial analysis and pattern search of the translation of this emergent phenomenon into the couriers' experiences and life.

Lastly, the scientific content that the reports obtained in this research provide the field regarding the importance and role of entrepreneurship and its speeches and discourses in this experience induces an interesting perspective on it and what it means to this niche of study. For the past decade, with political and economic neoliberal practices in place alongside strong worldwide events such as the 2008 subprime crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, self-employment became not only one of the few available routes to some groups—in the aftermath of the subprime crisis—but as well one of the main goals for the same or other groups of workers. This idea was rapidly branded as entrepreneurship and spread as a more autonomous, fair, and independent alternative to the conventional labour market as the workforce. Reaching different targets, the *platformised* labour was no exception. Firms quickly used this wave to their advantage by advertising their platforms as a self-employment opportunity. This altogether became more and more present and a type of culture in the labour market, in some more obvious and conscious ways than others. When returning to the reports, it is possible to analyse that in all the experiences this culture reproduction is very present in the speeches and actions of the workers and that it represents a considerable heavy role in their perception as couriers. While it mainly represents, the data shows, a role of motivation within the workers, while aiming for something better for their lives, some data also gives hints of a more hidden complex role. Some reports have suggested that the interiorization of the entrepreneurial discourse can represent a mechanism of coping and legitimization of this phase of life the workers endure in the *platformised* activity, namely regarding the less positive aspects of it. It is possible to find data that suggest that although the workers acknowledge

their vulnerable and disadvantageous position, that experience is legitimate and natural for the entrepreneurial self-employment end goal of being one's "own boss" and depending only on oneself while improving the earnings. With a neoliberal integrated economy overall, this emphasis tends to continue and grow, with the *platformised* companies taking it into an advantage in popularizing and legitimizing their businesses and the labour reconfigurations they practice, inevitably impacting and shaping the market and dynamics in the transversal dimensions. This analysis has not taken much space in the field yet, and this research, besides shedding interesting light on it, also may have identified, and indicated an important sphere within this phenomenon that should be further developed.

It is important to return to the research questions: how are the different experiences that these workers have and how they translated into their life; and to what extent are existing social inequalities perpetuated and/or enhanced through *uberised* work? Through the 4 different goals stipulated, based on the analysis of the overall labour process and dynamics, relationships and interactions and the workers' perceptions and reproductions regarding the activity, it is possible to reflect on the initial questions.

Considering the work developed so far, answering the first question, or shedding strong and interesting light on it, is the most complete and founded process. The interviews conducted provided a big amount of information in not only the dimensions intended for the analysis and pre-established but also about several other dimensions and aspects of this activity that are also important. However, considering the conduction of the research, the main conclusions to draw from the interpretation of the results directly connect to the first question. These experiences despite being unique in their way for each courier, share a lot in common. Within the enjoyment the couriers can have working in this activity, the daily labour dynamics and its structures inevitably allow and perpetuates the incessant work feeling not only timewise but also earning-wise, alongside the non-existence of safety nets guaranteed by the firms—carrying all the labour responsibility to the worker—while dealing at the same time with mentally draining hostiles and prejudice interactions. The joints on which this activity is conducted create a dangerous physical experience, as well as a financial, social, and psychological unstable experience. Combining these two aspects of the activity, supported by the reports, these workers' experiences are considered precarious, not representing the most prosperous alternative for workers that want to engage in self-employment and grow financially, as well as for the workers that have a harder time in inserting in other parts of the labour market. The precarious conditions and experiences to which these workers are bounded to directly affect their other dimensions outside of the labour one, transferring those same feelings of instability and uncertainty onto them, and contaminating social, political and economic life as we know, perpetuating some characteristics and expectations of some social groups and social classes,

hardening the peoples own social mobility, and the evolution of social and political representations and actions on these matters.

Regarding the second question, and as was understood with this chapter so far, it constitutes probably the closest aspect to a limitation of this research. An answer cannot be fully given regarding that question, as it would require more deepening solely of those aspects, but it is possible to have a general outlook of the possible outcomes of such research if they were to be made. It is not possible to reflect with big certainty that the *uberised* work reconfiguration actively reproduces existing inequalities, but as these reports concern and suggest, it might represent a means through which those same inequalities cannot find an end as it might be believed, and a means that can even perpetuate some inequalities and social unbalances and discriminations.

Qualitative research results can be a target of several different interpretations from several different perspectives, deepening the reflection and comprehension of the phenomenon analysed. In the present research, these were the reflections and interpretations considered to be the most interesting and important to the current state of the field and the context in which it is inserted in.



## 7. Concluding Remarks

The prime intention of this research revolved around the investigation and exploration of the specific courier workers' labour experience in the *platformised* goods delivery activity, within the Portuguese context, more specifically the Lisbon metropolitan area. Therefore, the focus has been concentrated on the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of the workers, directly reported by them, including all different dimensions that concern their job activity.

Returning to the research questions established to guide this research, the findings and their interpretation can support answers to those questions, related directly to the context analysed. Answering the first research question on how the different experiences in this *platformised* labour activity are translated into their life, it is possible to access that the labour and relational dynamics this job creates translate into an incessant rhythm of overall workers' life while establishing and reproducing poor structures and conditions, that burst the labour sphere, throughout the other life dimensions that cannot be dissociated from this, constituting a precarious, unstable and uncertain life cycle, a cycle that is fuelled by the need to earn more money.

Answering the second question posed—to what extent are existing social inequalities perpetuated and/or enhanced through *uberised* work—, it is accurate to access that the way this *platformised* activity is built and structured, altogether with the social, cultural, and political aspects and characteristics of the context, can contribute to the reproduction of a set of inequalities and discrimination pre-existent, more specifically in the case of immigrants' couriers. The dynamic and conditions analysed and described both in the Results and Discussion sustain that this activity tendentially involves workers that are already fragilized social groups, such as immigrants and women, and that the experiences contribute to the enhancement of the factors that make them fragilized social groups, in the way the labour conditions confines them to the same poor situations and difficulty in social mobility throughout time, as well as the relational aspects subject them to daily hostile and discriminative interactions, all aspects to create a stressful precarious living.

The reconfiguration of a flexible and unregulated labour market represents an escape valve and one of the few opportunities of work for many individuals in the workforce, tendentially marginalized in some way, but their experience and existence in it is proven to not be the most pleasant and beneficial in both short and long-term. Testimonies of workers in this—so advertised—flexible and independent activity of no labour rights and social protection, low earnings, and income, with the addition of greater responsibility—masked under the autonomous idea—, discriminations and hostilities all build up a precarious experience of marginalization, uncertainty, and unsafety in all dimensions of the life of these workers and the ones depending on them.

Besides the overall content this research provides, it also accounts for other more specific contributions to the field and the study of this phenomenon, presented next.

The considerable innovative deepening conducted regarding the entrepreneurial dimension of this activity, contrary to other research focuses, and how it is reflected in the workers' actions and speeches and their perceptions of it indicates a relevant dimension for further research. In the present research, this analysis provided content to assess the direct or indirect reproduction of speeches or actions and what role that dimension takes in their life. Within the current sample, results and interpretations show that this entrepreneurial reality has been gaining presence and relevance among the couriers. Even if unconsciously, this is observed in the natural reproduction of flexibility and self-employment ideas, also by the companies introduced, advertised, and popularized, and in those cases, this entrepreneurial route represents a form of escape and legitimate justification to endure even the negative aspects that the workers pointed, of this job. Further investigation into this sphere within the platform economy, and this activity specifically, contribute to a better reading of the role and impacts of a neoliberal capitalist agenda in these reconfigurations of labour.

The other contribution of this dissertation to the field relates to the operationalization of typologies of workers according to their job conciliation. Not only through this research, but that was also in dialogue with what was stated through other investigations in other contexts, it is notable that conciliating working as a courier for this activity with another conventional job, or even conciliating different platforms of this activity, is a common reality among workers. Therefore, it should be an aspect taking place in the analysis and interpretations of this phenomenon. Different conditions, this is, different conciliations, result in different experiences in different aspects, even if with similarities, as it demonstrates the different motivations the workers must indulge in this labour niche, as well as demonstrates the different relevance given by the workers according to their life context. The deeper application of these typologies, along with the analysis through this scope, can contribute not only to the understanding of the overall dynamics and impacts of the *platformised* courier activity according to different typologies—as each different typology needs to be assessed and interpreted within its context—, but as well as to the reading and complement the debate around the status of these workers depending on their typologies and how to balance it with the other commutative life spheres.

Lastly, as mentioned at the beginning of this research, the conducted approach of this investigation differs from most of the existing studies, especially in the Portuguese context, due to its more transversal character and focus on studying not only the labour dimension of the phenomenon and the political and economic aspects of it but also studying the social component and impacts on the life of the workers, specifically looking at the intersectional discriminations and hostilities existent in this activity.

Despite reaching the established goals in the present investigation, this field and this phenomenon still ask for more research and study. The conduction and analysis of the results obtained pointed out some aspects considered priorities to further deepening and, for that reason constitute here the set of recommendations for future approaches and investigations. Firstly, it is urgent and complementary to the research on other urbanized, and on less urbanized, areas of Portugal to widen the territory analysed and, consequentially, contribute and complete the knowledge on this specific context of a world phenomenon. This widening will also serve for the comparisons among regions, assessing the territorial effects and differences if existent, as well as for the improvement of the interpretation of the findings in each research, as the sample investigated covers more possibilities and realities.

Other necessity, and here recommended, lay on the public legislative and political debate and reflection around the possible creation of a new worker status for these specific workers, falling somewhere between the status of the employee and the status of the independent worker, already existent and covered by the Portuguese legislation. The reports analysed, not only in this research but also interpreting other previously made, sustain the need referred by the workers to be recognized with their status that allows them to preserve aspects of independent-working and *platformised* activity, such as flexibility and autonomy, while at the same time hold some labour and human rights when conducting their job activity. This conjugation is not a reality currently, but it is recommended here to further approach this perception among the workers to possibly justify this debate.

On a more personal note, this research represented a turning point in my academic and professional journey. This experience throughout this year, together with both my bachelor's and master's journey inevitably, solidified my interest and thrive for the study of and working on/about the social and economic impacts of different aspects and phenomena of the labour market on the workers and overall society as a whole; and the political debates and answers to be thought out from these realities and problematics. Additionally, this experience throughout the last year thought me a lot about conducting research in social sciences, improving, and solidifying my skills both in the field and in the writing and reporting of the research.

*Platformised* economy is a well-established reality worldwide, as is its *platformised* goods distribution and delivery courier activity. This reality represents the constant changes in the economic and labour market panorama that follows both the wants and needs of the society, dynamics, and realities. Therefore, all the social sciences should always be updating their research and knowledge of the world as it is not stagnant, but rather mutable over time and events. This research sheds light on an ongoing and growing phenomenon not only in Portugal but worldwide, that deserves the attention of the social sciences organs and its academics, due to its growing relevance and ground taken in the global political and economic framework,

currently shaping its limits and processes, and gradually representing a bigger percentage of it. This investigation and the knowledge of this phenomenon does not end here, existing a set of deep and complex dimensions that deserve attention.

You shouldn't wish to be a courier! If you can avoid it, avoid.  
(Woman, 32 years old)



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## Attachments

### **Attachment 1. Interview Script**

#### Sociodemographic dimension (general)

- Name
- Age
- Nationality/ethnicity
- Education
- Family (nucleus) constitution

#### Introductory dimension (contextualization)

##### A. General

- Life path so far
- Professional path so far
- Initiation process: how, when, how long, why, how it happened
- Only activity or conciliated with some other

##### B. In the case of immigration

- Reason to have emigrated
- Comparison between the origin country and Portugal (professional and personal)
- Expectations: corresponded or not?

#### Professional dimension (specific)

##### A. General/Conditions

- Schedules and shifts practised
- Labor schedule changes or maintains and why
- Remuneration for a day of work: how is it, how is the day/work organized considering that
- Incorporation process: how it happens, how did you start in this sector, Self-taught or any type of training, any information given
- Territory definition to reach and include in a day: how, why, how to define Kms reached
- Means of transportation
- Labor conditions adjacent: are there any? What type and how?
- Work accidents: occurrence, how it is dealt with, is anything done about it
- Social contribution: makes or not, used to make but not anymore, vice-versa

##### B. Platform

- Employer: existence, how do you run to in case of need, and what's the process like
- Scoring and rating process and how and in what it influences
- Orders management
- Clock in: how does a day of work start platform-wise

#### Relations dimension

##### A. Pairs/Collective action

- Contact and relation with other couriers, possible group formations
- Existence of collective organization and action: professional or leisure
- Existence of sense of belonging/group union
- Existence of support and help
- Existence of experience sharing and

##### B. Clients

- Relation with clients: more common experiences, ups and downs

#### Future dimension

- Perspectives about life in general
- Perspectives about professional life
- Perspectives about (non) continuity in this activity
- Perspectives on career evolution
- Compatibility of life goals with this activity

#### Personal perception dimension

- Activity in your life: how do you feel, what do you think about it, the role of this activity in your life on an immediate level and medium-long term
- Structure and conditions: what do you think of this regime, if and how this regime influences a day in the work, if and how this regime influences other dimensions of life
- Career appreciation: contributions and deductions
- In the work: what's your experience, does it differ for any reason, does it differ according to each worker?
- In the work as an individual: possible hostilities, discriminations, abuses, mistreatments
- Types of experiences according to different workers
- Possible changes and adjustments in this regime to improve it
- How this activity and its workers are perceived in society

#### Speeches dimension

- No boss. Flexible Schedule. Quick remuneration. Now you can increase your income while you explore the city.
- Earn money when you want: You have the flexibility to decide when you work.
- Don't live to work. Work to live.