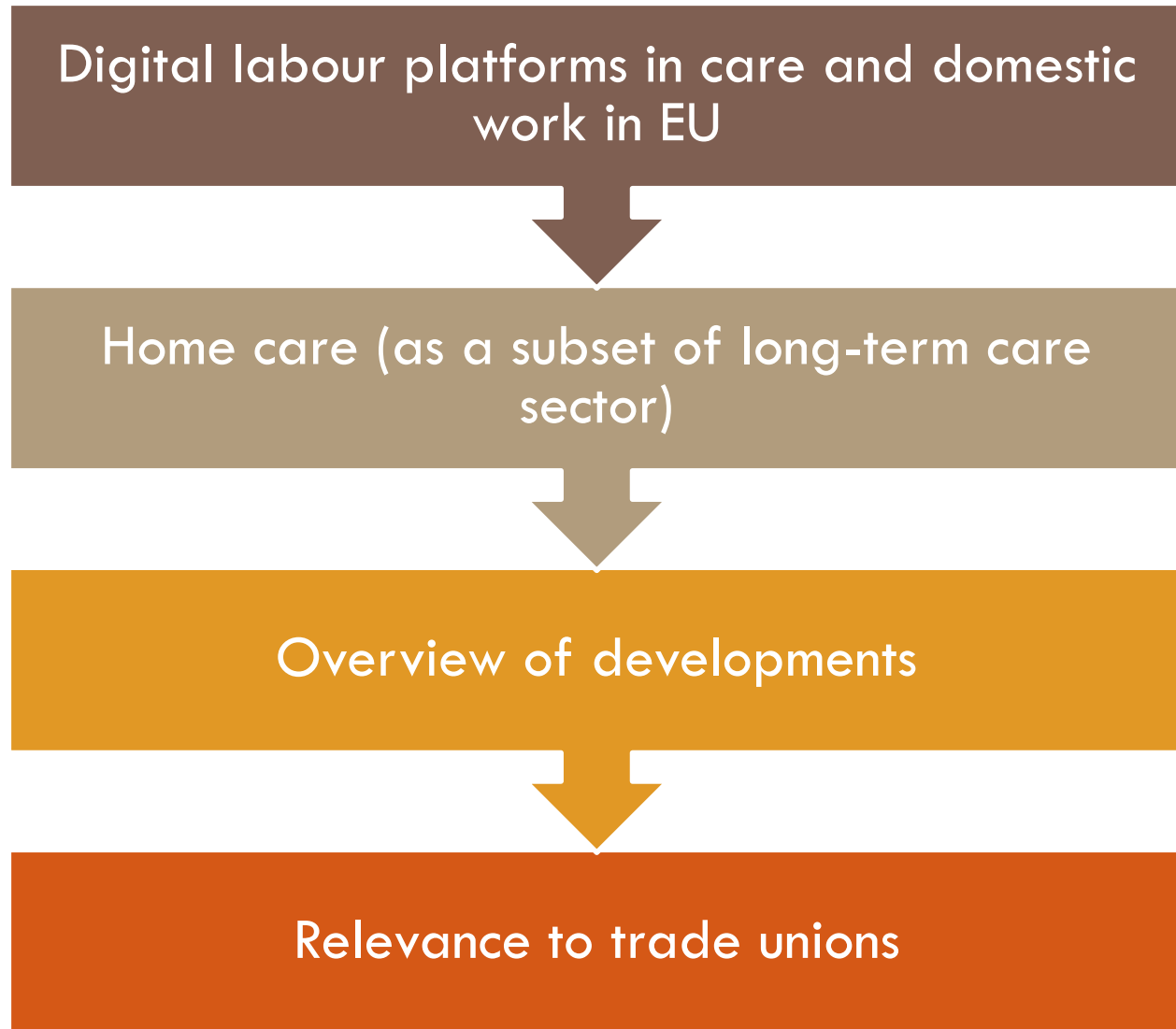


# Digital Platforms in Care: Impacts and Challenges for Trade Unions

## Context and approach





## Digital Platforms

- Accelerated growth of the platform economy in Europe (online crowd workers and *offline* on-demand digital platform workers)
- *Time and place dependent* on-demand work mediated through digital platforms *connecting* workers with customers/clients for the services requested via app/website
- The business model of digital platforms shares similarity across countries. Access to marketplace and flexibility
- Generally, platforms are viewed as making jobs more casual, pay less predictable and limit social protection (Pulignano et al, 2023), create new risks (Macdonald 2021) and new forms of control – e.g through reputational mechanisms (Sedacca, 2022).

# Sectoral Differences in Platforms

## Ridesharing/Delivery Platforms

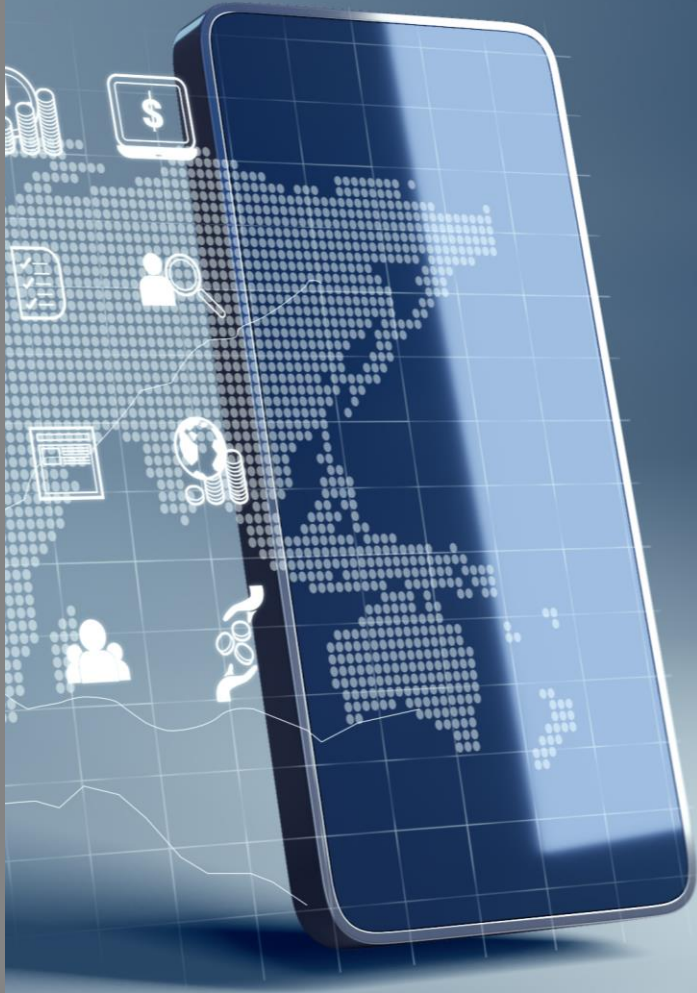
- Circumvent existing regulation
- Traditionally well organised, unionised workforce
- Male Dominated workforce
- Ad-hoc customer/worker interaction
- Publicly visible work

## Care/Domestic Platforms

- Regulatory gaps
- Low unionisation, poorly organised workforce
- Female dominated workforce
- Ongoing relationship between client and worker highly valuable
- Largely invisible work

# Operational models

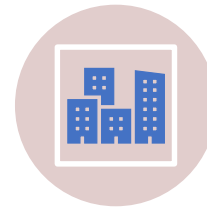
- Reasonable to assume that such intermediaries will follow the trend of platforms in areas such as transport and become more pervasive in the market (Trojanksy, 2020)
- Care platforms typically downplay their platform status (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018)
- Operate in a number of formats, either singularly or in tandem
- A subscription model where workers and/or clients pay a fee to use the platform
- Commission/Transaction fee per task/placement undertaken
- Fees for ancillary service provision e.g. certification, insurance



# Features



International/  
Indigenous  
organisations



Transition from  
traditional  
agency model



Commercial/  
cooperative forms



Range of Services  
provided



Detailed Profiles



Administrative  
support



## Hidden in plain sight? Liminality in the visibility and invisibility of the care workforce

*“We as a union generally act if there is demand. In the case of riders, even if the demand didn't arrive, you could see them on the street and so we went. Here, on the other hand, no one contacted us, there was no question. Then you don't meet them.”*

*“We don't know how to intercept them, but then we don't even know what to propose because we can't offer a platform worker what we do in traditional situations.”*

Organising such *“a widespread and far-flung workforce... [would be] ... literally impossible.”*





## Union concerns

- A new form of privatisation threat in the sector
- Vulnerability of parties in the care relationship
- Lack of collectively bargained terms and conditions of employment
- Broader impact



# Relevant EU policy and actions

## European Care Strategy

- Principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights emphasises the importance of improving *the affordability and accessibility* of care services
- Recommended guarantees for *decent conditions and wages, and social rights for care workers, including representation and collective bargaining.*

## Directive on Platform Work

- Aimed at improving working conditions while preserving the opportunities and benefits brought by the platform economy while addressing bogus self-employment
- Algorithm management - increasing transparency, ensuring human monitoring, and providing for right to contest automated decisions

## Directive on adequate minimum wages & collective bargaining coverage

- Provide conditions enabling greater access to collective bargaining where current coverage is below a threshold of 80 percent

# Union Approaches

1. Rejection of platform work, address the emergence of platform work in care through lobbying for broader regulation generally

2. Campaigning for greater regulation of the care sector itself

3. Accept that platform work is a growing feature of the care sector and adopt active strategies in response



# Pathways forward

- Developing communication strategies and mapping the platform care workforce in the digital space
- Increasing opportunities for interaction with care platform workers
- Building alliances with other stakeholders: family carers, older persons advocacy groups, migrant rights groups
- Engagement with employer body interest groups and enforcement bodies
- Drawing on lessons from campaigns in other areas of care work
- Strengthening of existing employment regulatory tools and practices





# Conclusions

- **Employment Conditions:** Uberisation of care? vs potentiality of formalisation ((Trojanksy 2020; Rodríguez-Modroño et al 2022 Mateescu and Ticona 2020 and 2022; Pulignano 2023).
- **Blurring of lines between care and domestic work:** efforts to create clear lines of differentiation in the work performed
- **Scalability and Isomorphism:** platform cooperatives provide an interesting alternative model but the potential to scale at pace is limited compared with the potential for rapid scalability of commercial platforms; some indication that workers experience of employment does not always vary between models
- **Migration and care drain:** decent work and social justice issue

# Focus: LTC platforms in Italy

- 13 specialised platforms for carers
- 10 multi-services platforms (carers, cleaners, baby sitters...)

ON DEMAND PLATFORMS



DIGITAL PLACEMENT AGENCIES



EMPLOYERS



Care Platforms:  
Impacts and challenges  
from a trade union  
perspective.



Report commissioned by the  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
Foundation & the European  
Public Services Union, 2024

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