

Understanding technology-facilitated gender-based violence in digital labour platforms

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Abstract: Digital labour platforms continue to expand across the globe. In a similar trajectory, the overall number of people earning a livelihood from the platforms continues to rise. Nevertheless, the standard image of a gig worker in people's imaginations remains a young, single male who works part-time on delivery or ride-hailing platforms. Fairwork's research in almost 40 countries across the 5 continents shows that this is not the case. This paper's contribution aims to shed light on women and LGBTQI+ people's experiences when dealing with technology-facilitated gender-based violence enabled by location-based platforms. It will draw on qualitative data to explore how gender norms and gender-based violence seep into otherwise assumed neutral technologies. It will particularly focus on workers' lived experiences in Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, all member countries of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur by its Spanish acronym) and reflect on the need for a concerted regional regulatory effort to address the problem of technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the platform economy.

Keywords: Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, digital violence, platform work, Mercosur, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay.

ES Comprendiendo la violencia de género facilitada por la tecnología en las plataformas laborales digitales

Resumen: Las plataformas de trabajo digital continúan expandiéndose en todo el mundo. En paralelo, aumenta la cantidad de personas obteniendo ingresos prestando sus servicios en las mismas. No obstante, la imagen estándar que se tiene de un trabajador de plataformas en el imaginario colectivo sigue siendo la de un hombre joven, soltero, que trabaja a tiempo parcial en plataformas de reparto o transporte. La investigación de Fairwork en casi 40 países de los cinco continentes demuestra que esta imagen no refleja la realidad. La contribución de este artículo busca visibilizar las experiencias de mujeres y personas LGBTQI+ frente a la violencia de género digital, en línea o facilitada por la tecnología, habilitada por plataformas basadas en la localización. El enfoque estará puesto en cómo las normas de género y la violencia de género se infiltran en tecnologías que, en principio, se asumen como neutrales, como las aplicaciones y las interfaces web de las plataformas de trabajo digital. Además, se pondrá especial atención en las experiencias de Argentina, Brasil y Paraguay, países miembros del Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur), y se reflexionará sobre la necesidad de un esfuerzo regulatorio regional para abordar la problemática de la violencia de género facilitada por tecnologías en las plataformas de trabajo.

Palabras clave: Violencia de género facilitada por la tecnología, violencia digital, trabajo en plataformas, Mercosur, Argentina, Brasil, Paraguay.

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1. Introduction¹

Gig economy platforms continue their expansion across the globe, and the overall number of people earning a livelihood from the platforms continues to rise. However, the standard image of a gig worker –or location-based platform worker– in the media and in people's imaginations remains that of a young, single male who is only working part time on delivery or ride-hailing platforms to make some extra money on the side. Fairwork's research in 40 countries across 5 continents (Fairwork, 2025) shows that this is not the case, and there are important differences in the lived experience of workers in the platform economy.

This article aims to shed light on women and LGBTQI+ people's experiences when dealing with technology-facilitated gender-based violence enabled by the platforms, be it platform digital interfaces, algorithms, or platform management practices. It focuses on how gender norms and gender-based violence seep into otherwise assumed neutral technologies, such as apps and web-interfaces of digital labour platforms.

Digital or online gender violence has referred to gendered violence committed, instigated or aggravated, in part or totally, using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), social media platforms and email (TEDIC, 2025). However, there is not an agreed universal definition and other terminologies such as gender-based violence online (Suzor et al., 2019), digital violence or technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) offer additional understandings to conceptualise the phenomenon (Carrillo, Peralta, Sáenz & Moreno, 2024). Within this, less attention has been paid to the role of ICT technologies in facilitating discriminatory or violent practices within the context of the platform economy.

Digital infrastructures can enable, facilitate and directly discriminate against workers. Examples include, but are not limited to, binary categories of gender used by the platform interfaces which invisibilise diverse identities and enable identity theft reporting by customers, algorithmic management practices which favour some genders over others for certain kinds of jobs, or systems that restrict discrimination reporting for gender non-normative individuals.

This study seeks to identify dimensions of technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the field of work carried out through digital platforms. Although publications on digital platforms already provide enough elements to infer the worsening of precariousness (Montgomery & Baglioni, 2021; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2021; Muntaner, 2018), there are still gaps regarding the consequences of this productive format at a gender intersection. Such intersection is particularly important to analyse from different dimensions due to high levels of precarity and dependency of women of this economic

¹ All authors are affiliated to the Fairwork network and contributed equally to the development of this article. A preliminary version of this article was developed as part of a Fairwork researchers summit in Colombia in 2021. A particular thank you to Funda Ustek-Spilda and Treviliana Eka Putri who contributed to earlier versions and conceptualisations of this article. A special thanks also for Daniel Vizueté (FLACSO Ecuador), who provided valuable insights for the preliminary final version of this article.

sector. Concretely, studies focusing on the Global South point to women being pushed to the platform economy as a last resource for work (Mehdar, Geeling, Rizk, Spilda, Afifi, Budu, Tsibolane, Boateng, Mwakatumbula, Graham & Heeks, 2025).

Alienation, exploitation and domination are the basic premises of capitalist modes of production (Jarrett, 2015; 2022). In this sense, the precariousness of productive activity operated by digital platforms is not in itself new. What has changed in digital platform work is the execution of absolutely subtle and depersonalized formats of control on an exponential scale. Often marked by contexts of extreme precariousness and domination, the stratification of capitalist exploitation refers to the multiple forms of oppression and precariousness faced by different social groups under capitalism, especially women, blacks and LGBTQI+ communities (Jarrett, 2019). Thus, the workforce, especially women and LGBTQI+ populations, who have historically been excluded from the market, constitute structural marks of social hierarchization. As such, the delimitation of the digital gender category reflects the societal impacts generated by technological infrastructures, particularly digital work platforms (Faith, 2022). Moreover, the author adds that the phenomenon of online misogyny and gender-based violence is understood as a manifestation of the power relations underlying the intersection of precarious economies with historical privileges of masculinity and whiteness. Therefore, to ignore the role of capital in mediating with the world and only celebrate technological advances, would be to incur an epistemic innocence, at the risk of reproducing the abdication of critical thinking (Faith, 2022).

This paper will use examples from Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, to showcase how platforms have enabled and facilitated invisible and visible forms of discrimination. These countries are all members of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur by its Spanish acronym). The market is a regional integration process, initially established by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, and subsequently joined by Venezuela and Bolivia (Mercosur, 2025).

This contribution is a direct intervention to argue that platforms have a duty of care to their workers and a legal requirement not to provide conscious or unconscious discriminatory practices. Moreover, platforms must hold accountable actors interacting via their digital infrastructure and ensure worker's well-being.

Lastly, it is important to point out that the different case studies presented in this article were originally featured in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay Fairwork reports between 2020 and 2022. Fairwork is an action-research project that aims to shed light on how technological changes affect working conditions around the world by developing a series of principles for fair work (Fairwork, 2025). As a crucial part of the methodology, anonymous interviews with platform workers are conducted. The testimonies presented in this article were initially collected as part of the application of the Fairwork methodology in the aforementioned countries. Thus, the findings of this paper are grounded in qualitative research and are not intended to provide statistically generalizable conclusions, but to foreground and make visible worker's experiences that are often marginalized or obscured.

2. The importance of the MERCOSUR region in its intersection with gender and technology

The particular attention to the region that this article seeks is due, aside from the geographical affiliation of the authors of this paper, because the integration process has paid attention to the issue of gender-based violence for several years. Already in 2011, it developed a pilot project labelled Strengthening the institutional framework and the gender perspective in MERCOSUR, that ultimately

aimed to embed a gender perspective into the integration process (Campos, Marra & Pasinato, 2011). More recently, and during the 21st Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities on Women's Affairs of MERCOSUR (RMAAM by its Spanish acronym), a document with a list of ten recommendations for addressing gender-based political violence and misogyny was signed by representatives of Ministries of women from the MERCOSUR founding countries, making an explicit reference to online-gender-based violence (Secretaria de Comunicação Social, 2023). Moreover, thanks to Mercosur Resolution No. 20/98, the Specialized Women's Meeting (REM) was established, the first body of Mercosur to particularly address the theme of gender. It provided the opportunity for these agendas to follow a more defined course in the bloc in the following years (Azar, Celiberti & Espino, 2005; Palma, 2016). Thus, the role of the REM enables both the fulfilment of commitments in terms of gender relations and the construction of a broader project of social solidarity (Rodríguez & Tavares, 2006).

In a more recent context, the fundamental principles for Artificial Intelligence (AI) declared by the RAADH of MERCOSUR in late 2023 offer a strategic roadmap for regulating this transformative technology with a crucial gender lens (Mercosur, 2023). Recognizing the inherent risks of discriminatory biases within AI, the RAADH's emphasis on human rights aims to ensure equitable outcomes, aligning AI development with regional values to empower women and address existing inequalities.

The RAADH framework explicitly highlights equality and non-discrimination, directly confronting gender biases in AI by urging the elimination of exclusionary processes and promoting impartial algorithms. This proactive stance necessitates research and policies that consciously dismantle harmful gender stereotypes and consider the diverse experiences of women within the region. Furthermore, the RAADH's focus on privacy, data protection, transparency, explainability, and control are vital from a gender perspective, helping to mitigate risks like gender-based surveillance and ensure accountability. Thus, this article seeks to embed itself in ongoing processes of the block that seek to address the issue of gender-based violence from multiple perspectives.

Lastly, a further normative layer relevant to the MERCOSUR context is the adoption and progressive incorporation of the International Labour Organization Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (ILO, 2019). Convention 190 expands the understanding of violence and harassment beyond physical spaces, explicitly recognizing that such conduct may occur through work-related communications, including digital and online environments. This broader definition is particularly significant in the context of platform-mediated labour, where work is organized, monitored, and evaluated through technological interfaces. While the implementation and enforcement of Convention 190 vary across MERCOSUR countries, its normative framework provides an important analytical reference point for examining how technology-facilitated gender-based violence intersects with contemporary forms of work organization. The status of ratification across the analysed countries and the importance of its implementation will be addressed across the paper.

3. Gender violence in its intersection with digital technologies

The challenges to collectively address gender-based violence in its intersection with technology start with the problem of terminologies and definitions. There is a plethora of terminologies that currently propose conceptualisations of this type of violence and focus on different elements of it. The Women Rights Online coalition (WRO), a global network of leading gender justice and digital rights organizations, conducted a desktop research that mapped more than 90 documents (including

reports, blog posts and policy documents from regions including North/West/Southern and Central Africa, Europe, North America and Latin America) that contained definitions at the intersection of gender and technology. The research found an historical predominance of terms such as Online-Gender-Based-Violence (OGBV), Techno-discrimination, Online-Violence against Women Journalists, Online-Violence Against Women (OVAW), online abuse, digital abuse, Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), among others (Carrillo, Peralta, Sáenz & Moreno, 2024).

Such mapping of terminologies allowed for identifying several differences based on certain points of attention each term offers. That is, some terminologies focus on naming only women as the targets of violence. In contrast, others focus more broadly on women or girls or even "individuals and persons based on their gender, and people from LGBTQI+ communities". Other differences amongst these definitions stem from the source of violence and the types of perpetrators, and that some definitions pay particular attention to the effects of OGBV on the political, economic, and social environments of survivors of OGBV (Carrillo, Peralta, Sáenz & Moreno, 2024). The research findings were then shared and collectively discussed with participants from civil society, government, academia, and the private sector across the globe. In these discussions, participants pointed out that there is a significant lack of nuanced, agreed upon definitions for online gender-based violence (OGBV) and its various manifestations across different countries and regions, and that this presents numerous challenges when trying to address the problem in a comprehensive way (Carrillo, Peralta, Sáenz & Moreno, 2024). This has also been identified by academic work that affirms that technology-facilitated abuse (Another terminology addressing the issue of technology in its intersection with violence) is a global problem. However, regardless of efforts at the research, policy and practice arena to understand the issue, it continues to function within numerous silos, ultimately limiting opportunities for collaboration (Koukopoulos, Janickyj & Tanczer, 2025).

Moving forward, this article adopts the term "TFGBV" to refer to the phenomenon, in line with its increasing use in recent literature, while not excluding earlier definitions or the concerns they highlight (Carrillo, Peralta, Sáenz & Moreno, 2024).

4. TFGBV meets digital labour platforms

Although publications on work on digital platforms already bring enough elements to infer about the worsening of precariousness, there are still gaps with regard to the consequences of this productive format in its intersection with gender, and particularly how TFGBV manifests in this ecosystem. However, the existing literature has approached the topic in various ways. A special issue of Gender and Development has contributed significantly to the growing literature on new technologies, the future of work, and their implications for inequality (Rani et al., 2022). The study reinforces the importance of producing gender sensitive data capable of capturing how technological transformations in labour markets not only reshape employment conditions but also create new configurations of vulnerability, including gender-based exploitation, harassment, and technology-facilitated violence.

Conversely, the precarious working conditions on platforms, the lack of social protection, and the new forms of organization and resistance of female workers are also examined in different literature (Kwan, 2022; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022; Salvagni, Grohmann & Matos, 2022). Another study on the subject, published in the same year (Fuster-Morell, 2022), reinforces not only the observance of gender-based violence in the work of digital platforms, but also highlights the worsening inequalities that can exist in marginalized groups in the Global South.

Moreover, the concept of techno-discrimination emerges as a concept that aims to encompass the obstacles impacting women and LGBTQI+ platform economy workers since it focuses on the gendered inequalities that emerge on digital labour platforms (that is, Uber and PedidosYa) (Krishan, Dattani, Lubke, Varaschin & Graham, 2023).

Considering this structural discrimination, authors have pointed out that the different ways in which women enter the platform market are usually mostly through domestic work, click farms and other work-from-home platforms (Lukács, 2020).

Lastly, analysis from a feminist theory of technology perspective, which considers the participation of women in digital work (Fuster-Morell, 2022), argues that there has been a transformation in the means of production in this new stage of the current economic model that has reordered old forms of the sexual division of labor, recreating inequalities. That is, in the African context, this recreation or reinforcement of traditional gender roles include the strengthening of the notion of "man-work" and "women-work", with platform work sectors such as ride-hailing and delivery services being heavily male dominated, while domestic work is heavily female dominated, following their non platformised counterparts (Mehdar et al., 2025).

5. Methodological Strategy

This article adopts a qualitative analytical research design aimed at identifying and theorizing the socio-technical mechanisms through which technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) may emerge and be reproduced within location-based digital labour platforms. Rather than seeking to quantify the prevalence of violence, the study analytically examines how platform design, algorithmic management, and customer interaction systems may enable, amplify, or normalize gendered forms of discrimination and harassment. The methodological approach is informed by feminist political economy and critical platform studies, centering workers' lived experiences as a primary epistemic standpoint.

The empirical material derives from qualitative data collected within the framework of Fairwork research projects conducted in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Although Fairwork studies are not designed exclusively to investigate TFGBV, they generate rich qualitative material concerning working conditions, algorithmic management practices, customer interactions, and grievance mechanisms that allow for inferences and problematisations of different nature. These dimensions provide a relevant empirical basis for examining how gender-based vulnerabilities intersect with platform governance structures.

For the purposes of this article, a subset of interviews was selected for analytical examination. The selection criteria focused on testimonies that referred explicitly or implicitly to: (a) experiences of harassment or discrimination; (b) interactions mediated by rating or reputation systems; (c) algorithmic decision-making affecting access to work; and (d) exposure to safety risks linked to platform design or customer behaviour. The resulting corpus includes interviews conducted with women and LGBTQI+ workers across ride-hailing, delivery, and domestic work platforms.

The table below summarizes the analytical corpus used in this study:

Table 1. Interviews per country

Country	Interviews Conducted	Number of Platforms	Women	Prefer not to say ²	Platform Types
Argentina	85	7	25	1	Delivery, Ride-Hailing, Domestic Services
Brazil	88	10	21	0	Courier, care, ride-hailing and education
Paraguay	54	6	18	1	Delivery and Ride-Hailing Services

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The analytical strategy followed a thematic qualitative approach. Interviews were systematically reviewed and coded to identify recurring patterns related to gendered vulnerability, digital mediation, and platform governance. Through iterative coding and comparative analysis across countries, analytical dimensions of TFGBV were constructed. These dimensions do not represent exhaustive categories, but rather analytically derived patterns that illuminate how socio-technical infrastructures shape workers' exposure to gendered risks.

Given that this study relies on secondary qualitative data, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the interviews were originally conducted within broader research objectives and not necessarily focused on TFGBV, which may result in underreporting of certain experiences. Second, the qualitative nature of the data does not allow for statistical generalization. Third, the perspective of platform companies is not included in this analysis. This choice reflects a deliberate worker-centred methodological stance aimed at addressing epistemic asymmetries in platform research, where corporate narratives are often more visible than workers' lived experiences. Nonetheless, this absence may limit the ability to contrast corporate governance claims with worker accounts.

Fairwork uses its own criteria to evaluate work mediated by location-based platforms (Fairwork 2025). The qualitative mixed-methods methodology combines three main fronts: document analysis (contracts, policies, and news reports), dialogue with platform representatives, and interviews with workers, in order to understand how standards and contracts are implemented in practice. All interviews were conducted with informed consent under Fairwork research protocols, and data were anonymized prior to analysis.

By foregrounding workers' narratives and examining the interaction between gender norms and platform infrastructures, this qualitative analytical approach seeks to contribute a grounded yet theoretically informed understanding of TFGBV in digital labour platforms in the Global South.

6. Case studies in Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay

6.1. Argentina

Argentina has ratified ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work and has a robust legal framework in terms of gender equality and labour rights. However, this legislation does

² The authors consider it important to highlight responses from participants who preferred not to disclose their gender, as a proxy indicator suggesting the presence of gender-diverse groups within the workforce of digital labour platforms.

not yet extend comprehensively to platform workers. Most digital labour platforms classify workers as independent contractors, bypassing key protections such as social security, unemployment insurance, or access to complaint mailboxes. There are also no specific regulations requiring platforms to prevent or respond to gender-based violence.

In recent years, Argentina has seen multiple policy discussions and legislative initiatives aimed at regulating platform work. These efforts have included proposals to recognize platform workers as employees under labour law, initiatives to mandate social security contributions by platforms (Garavaglia, 2022), and discussions around algorithmic transparency (Sardegna & Peliza, 2024). However, none of these proposals have gained sufficient political traction to be enacted into law.

One significant obstacle is the classification of workers as autonomous contractors or "monotributistas", which allows platforms to bypass labour protections such as occupational health, collective bargaining, and due process rights in cases of suspension or termination. This legal grey area undermines enforcement mechanisms and creates conditions where workers—particularly women in vulnerable sectors like domestic work and delivery—are left without recourse in cases of abuse, discrimination, or violence.

Moreover, although Argentina has a relatively advanced data protection law (Law 25.326, 2000; Law 27.483, 2018), it lacks clear mandates for how labour platforms must handle personal or sensitive data, including that related to incidents of harassment or violence (Sardegna & Peliza, 2024). This legal vacuum contributes to a context where reporting systems are opaque, algorithmic decisions remain unaccountable, and workers—especially women—are disproportionately affected by the platform's lack of responsiveness.

Civil society organizations and some trade unions have called for platform-specific regulation that incorporates gender perspectives and ensures safety, dignity, and redress mechanisms for all workers. Nonetheless, these initiatives have yet to be translated into binding regulation, leaving workers—particularly women—exposed to unregulated digital labor environments that perpetuate precarity and risk.

Gender disparities remain deeply rooted in the platform economy in Argentina. Women are overrepresented in domestic work and underrepresented in delivery services, often facing both gendered expectations and higher exposure to risks. Interviews conducted with domestic workers and couriers show that algorithmic management amplifies their precarity and limits their ability to challenge abuses.

In the interviews for the Fairwork research in Argentina, women represented approximately 40% of all respondents, with a higher presence in domestic work platforms and a smaller proportion in delivery services. This gender split reflects broader labour trends but also points to distinct experiences of discrimination and violence across sectors. The platforms studied included delivery (Rappi and Pedidos Ya) and ride-hailing (Uber, Cabify, Didi and Beat)³ and domestic services (Zolvers and QxM)⁴.

One case worth highlighting involves a domestic worker who was hired through a cleaning platform. She was harassed by a client in the household during a service, facing verbal abuse and physical intimidation. When she attempted to report the incident via the platform's in-app messaging system, she received no response. Her account was suspended shortly after, without a clear explanation. Another case involved a female delivery worker who reported being exposed to insecure situations like standing alone during the night waiting for her customer to receive the delivery. The platform did not provide any emergency response mechanism, and her complaint was met with an

³ Beat stopped its operations in Argentina during 2022.

⁴ Domestic service platforms are expected to be incorporated in the next Fairwork report.

automated reply. Since the platform did not provide any solution, she then decided to work during daytime, which she claims involves lower fees and demand.

They categorize cleaning personnel as if they were ignorant, right? I mean, when you're outside, you don't see it, but when you're inside working and you see the quality of both the company and the people, you realize how a person doing cleaning is categorized. Also, most foreign people are discriminated against. (Garavaglia, 2023)

The truth is we're all exposed, both men and women. But, well, it's easier for a woman to be raped or beaten, right? I mean, just because we're women, we're more exposed. Sometimes I tell the chat, 'Look, I'm a girl. I'm standing here alone in the night.' But nothing changes. There's no consideration in that regard. (Garavaglia, 2023)

In both cases, and according to the testimonies of workers, the platforms failed to offer effective tools for reporting or addressing gender-based violence. There were no human agents assigned to these complaints, no follow-up on safety, and no transparency in how decisions were made regarding account status. Therefore, female workers are more exposed to earn less income or even to receive no income at all, with no support structures offered by the platforms whatsoever.

6.2. Brazil

The report released by Fairwork in 2022 in Brazil describes the historical context of job insecurity in the country, with a notorious aggravation when observing the intersections of gender and race. Before the pandemic, the year 2019 ended with 16.2 million unemployed, 6.7 million underemployed due to insufficient hours and 38.4 million workers in the informal sector. The unemployment rate was 11% in 2019, however, when disaggregated by colour and sex, it is possible to observe that black women are the most impacted; 15.6% of them faced unemployment that year, while the same occurred with 7.4% of white men. Also in 2019, among the employed population, 6.7% were domestic workers with and without a formal contract and 26% were self-employed. Again, when disaggregated by race and gender, we see that of all employed Black women, 17.9% are domestic workers (Fairwork, 2022).

The "platform in focus" section deals with the company Parafuzo, a Brazilian company created in 2014, and which operates in the domestic work sector with the provision of cleaning services. In 2016, Parafuzo earned 13 million reais and had approximately 1,000 professionals registered on its platform. In 2023, Parafuzo already operated in more than 160 cities, with more than 5,000 professionals registered on its platform. Data from the IBGE's Continuous Pnad (DIEESE, 2022) reveal that the cleaning service is made up of 92% women (5.2 million), 65% (3.4 million) of whom are black people (blacks plus browns). In addition, 4 million workers, representing 76% of the total population, did not have a formal contract, which indicates the profound informality of paid care work in the country. Regarding the Parafuzo platform, the Fairwork research highlighted that workers linked to the platform still suffer blockages due to low scores. Another issue is that, despite the company taking a stand against discrimination, not enough evidence has been gathered that allows it to confirm that there is a consolidated anti-discrimination policy with measures to promote diversity, equality, and equity on the platform. Ultimately, the field research brought elements that indicate the possibility of having the occurrence of gender violence in Parafuzo (Fairwork, 2023). This latest report highlighted a significant increase in reports of violence experienced by women. One of the workers interviewed stated:

There is a lot of harassment. I have witnessed it many times, I report it, and then the platform simply says that it will notify the user, and I never hear back about it (Fairwork, 2025b).

It should be noted that the notion of violence is understood here as something that goes beyond physical aggression, also encompassing discrimination and any practices that violate human dignity. Another relevant point is that, like the other countries that make up this study, Brazil has not ratified ILO Convention 190. In other words, the country is not a signatory to a set of measures considered basic to the fight against gender violence in workplaces (ILO, 2025).

The second report published in Brazil also presents the case of Maria, the fictitious name of a delivery woman (Fairwork, 2023). This is a 32-year-old pregnant woman who has been working for almost two years for Americana's Entrega Flash.⁵ In view of all the risks of the activity, she stopped working at five months of gestation and only returned when her son was four months old. When she returned, she said:

When I went back to work, in August, I thought I didn't have orders. I thought I had some problem with my registration, because I was online every day, wanting to do only Americana's Flash Delivery and no other applications. I sent them a message, and they replied that my registration was normal, that I could stay close to where there is demand (Fairwork, 2023).

Although she received sporadic messages from the company, this was interpreted by her as a measure to encourage her to stay connected to the platform without question. From then on, she started to receive few orders, until she received nothing else, which is known as white block.

In 2025, delivery workers in Brazil linked to digital platforms resumed protests between March 31 and April 1. The movement, called the "National Brake of APPs" by the category, gained strength in more than a hundred cities. The demonstrations included blockades of shopping malls, several motorbikes and even the closure of public roads. Due to the return of the workers' mobilization, an Extraordinary Public Hearing was organized by Guilherme Boulos (PSOL – SP), on April 23, 2025. The occasion was formerly attended by two women delivery workers, bringing the gender agenda to the debate on labour regulation for the first time. In the words of Jessica Magalhães:

This mobilization criticized not only our fellow motorcycle couriers for the absence of women in these spaces, but also Parliament, which never, in the history of building the rights of this category, thought about the inclusion of the female gender, or thought about the inclusion of women as subjects of rights.⁶

In this sense, Jessica emphasizes:

⁵ Americana's Entrega Flash is a delivery application and is part of the Americanas group. The Americanas group claimed bankruptcy and entered into judicial recovery at the beginning of 2023. The company's debts exceed USD\$8.59 billion and the company is accused of an accounting inconsistency of USD\$4 billion. The Americanas group owes USD\$13.50 million related to labor debt, and USD\$22.80 million to micro and small companies, among others.

⁶ Câmara dos Deputados. (2025, 23 de abril). Reunião de Comissão – CDU – [Notas Taquigráficas da audiência pública da Comissão de Desenvolvimento Urbano, 23/04/2025]. <https://escriba.camara.leg.br/escriba-servicosweb/pdf/76037?isTaquigrafia=false>

We have delivery women who are mothers, for example, who are unable to pick up their children from school because there is no cut made as a loophole in the fulfilment of the appointment.⁷

Such declarations reinforce the premises already addressed in this study, that there is an interference in the control of work caused by platforms through digital resources. Thus, there is a demand for acceptance, assiduity and availability at work, which when they do not happen are penalized in the logic of algorithmic control. In the case of Brazil, despite the efforts of progressive parliamentarians to listen, through public hearings, to the demands of workers, representatives of movements, researchers and legal experts, there is a long way to go before the activity is seriously and effectively regulated. During this period, it is common for demands to be co-opted by corporate representatives, reducing them to a mere 'regularisation' of the total absence of rights. For this reason, it is necessary to be attentive to the demands of the working masses, so that they can be reflected in real improvements for the category.

6.3. Paraguay

The platform economy is an undeniable reality in the country. Although there are no official statistics to determine the exact number of workers working in this area, the diversity and development of the ecosystem are signals of the size of the market. From international ride-hailing digital labour platforms such as PedidosYa⁸ to local apps that mediate domestic work⁹, it is evident that Paraguayan workers are dependent on the platform economy to sustain their livelihoods.

This said, reflecting on the experiences of different groups within this ecosystem is important. Due to the highly conservative nature of the Paraguayan context, it is crucial to reflect on the realities of women and vulnerable communities such as LGBTQI+ groups and how they interact within the platform economy. It is equally important to reflect on the role of these platforms in ensuring a safe and fair work environment for all types of workers.

The general context is already a complicated one. A considerable labour-gender gap persists in the country. That is, in 2020, 56,2% of women were in the labour force vis-a-vis 81,3% of men. According to data from the National Statistics Institute, women earn 22% less than men for the same type and job level. The main reasons for this gap are wage discrimination, lower hours worked and occupational segregation (Carrillo et al., 2022). Is it possible for digital labour platforms to play a role in mitigating these kinds of structural inequalities?

There is a common perception that by incorporating technology as the solution to wider societal problems, the problem itself will disappear. Such techno-utopian approaches are commonly identified in different public-policy solutions that produce more harm than the problems they were designed to treat. Examples of this include the digitization of different public policies without regards to human rights impact assessments as minimum tools to identify risks (TEDIC, 2023). However, the private sector is also not exempt from such a trend.

Digital labour platforms must consider the complexities their workers face globally when designing their systems. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights are clear in the role of businesses to ensure human rights compliance. Given the novel nature of digital labour platforms and the varying degrees to which these platforms have adopted inclusive design practices, more action is needed. Different examples in the Paraguayan case highlight the urgent need for platforms to develop digital systems that protect their users proactively. Moreover, it is worth highlighting

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://www.pedidosya.com.py/>

⁹ <https://helpers.com.py/#/>

historical debts from the State in relation to fostering a healthy work ecosystem free of violence. Paraguay has also not ratified ILO Convention 190 (ILO, 2025).

Workers' testimonies collected for the 2022 Fairwork Paraguay report evidence a complicated scenario for vulnerable groups when interacting with the digital systems of the digital labour platform Pedidos Ya. Such testimonies point to intolerant customers who report workers who don't comply with rigid cultural and gender stereotype norms in the country.

My friend, a lesbian [...] the people in the restaurants look at her with hate. Another friend of mine also experienced discrimination [...]. The customer told her she was a man [not a woman, as it says on the app], so she was blocked for two weeks. (Carrillo et al., 2022)

I have a colleague who has shaved her hair and looks like a man and once a client reported her because she was supposedly a man and not a woman as the app said. The client accused my colleague of renting an account and because of that she was suspended for a week and almost had her account cancelled. (Carrillo et al., 2022)

It is worth highlighting that numerous Pedidos Ya worker testimonies do not explicitly identify responsibility of the platform for such situations. This is indeed a layer of complexity to analyse: Although the actions did come directly by the customers and not from the platform, they were facilitated or found a way to insert themselves in the digital systems of Pedidos Ya, with the negative effect of a penalty to wrongfully treated workers.

In contrast, the 2022 Fairwork report on Paraguay highlighted a range of inclusive practices implemented by the digital labour platform MUV.¹⁰ Namely, the platform has a long stand against discrimination. This is translated into different inclusive design practices coded within MUV's digital infrastructure and is worth highlighting. I.e., a dedicated section on the platform's website takes a stand towards diversity and declares MUV's commitment to defending equal rights for all people. A zero-tolerance discrimination policy in MUV's Terms and Conditions complements this (Carrillo et al, 2022). The platform has furthermore committed publicly to bridging the gender gap among its drivers and achieving a 50-50 gender distribution of its driver's fleet. The platform aims to do this by offering female drivers and passengers a "women filter" function, allowing them to interact only with other women on the platform (Economía Virtual, 2022).

Lastly, MUV has a 24/7 driver support service, operating under the nickname "Charlie". Via this support service, drivers can appeal platform decisions or negative passenger ratings and ask for help if they have a particular problem. Different drivers' testimonies valued the effectiveness of the support service because it allows workers to get in touch directly with a human platform representative and effectively solve problems (Carrillo et al., 2022).

In the Paraguayan case, the current examples showcase numerous differences regarding platform practices and how they impact how specific communities experience TFGBV. In the case of the Pedidos Ya platform, both the lack of guidelines enforcement that can effectively shield workers from discriminatory situations emerging from interactions into the broader platform ecosystem, as well as the lack of more nuance in how the identity of workers is presented within the digital platform interface, are examples of the importance of the platform in foreseeing different situations and adjust both its management practices and interfaces, to protect communities from TFGBV. Moreover, in the case of MUV, the importance of established policies embedded in the

¹⁰ <https://muv-app.co/>

digital platform interface and the guarantee of human interaction to solve worker's problems are worth highlighting and they offer important lessons that other platforms could replicate.

7. Conclusions

This article's contribution aims to shed light on women and LGBTQI+ people's experiences when dealing with technology-facilitated gender-based violence enabled by the platforms, be it platform interfaces, algorithms in use, or platform management practices. It focuses on how gender norms and gender-based violence seep into otherwise assumed neutral technologies, such as apps and web-interfaces of digital labour platforms.

It is important that gender debates are positioned within a historical discussion of the class struggle. In the same vein, it is impossible to discuss the direction of the feminist movement without considering the multiple facets created by the platform economy, a new stage in a mode of production in crisis. The Marxist bases that reveal the exploitation of labour remain unchanged in an analysis of digital platforms, with the addition that the control mechanisms are now camouflaged in virtual territories, under a new arrangement. This situation therefore suggests an urgent demand for collective action to guarantee decent conditions for those who make a living from work, with urgency to consider the necessities of vulnerable communities such as women and LGBTQI+ communities. Considering that the current moment of platformization is not defined as an irremediable fact, it is important to focus on reflective practices for social transformation.

Mercosur's policy to confront the different forms of gender violence continues to consolidate, with regulations reinforcing cooperation between States and structuring bases for regional initiatives. It is understood here that the structuring of bases for regional initiatives can mean progress in terms of dynamism in the search to establish the bases for joint actions. In this sense, future research should accompany the implementation of these measures, in order to evaluate not only the continuity of collaboration between countries, but also the strengthening of the bloc's human rights mechanisms, especially in the consolidation of agendas for minorities for Latin America. Especially regarding gender-based agendas related to digital technologies, consensus appears to be emerging within the Mercosur sphere, so that policies can be better targeted and effective. Lastly, it is important that the bloc can facilitate processes towards supporting members internal processes to ratify ILO Convention 190 and evaluate the ways in which said Convention is applied particularly in the context of platform work.

Platforms need to take on more proactive responsibility in creating equal opportunities for employment for all while ensuring platform environments (design, interfaces, algorithms, policies or consumers) do not discriminate or affect workers disproportionately in any form. As evidenced in the Paraguay case study, the establishment of accessible complaint channels mediated by humans is a crucial safeguard for women and LGBTQI+ communities to report and seek redress for discriminatory impacts. Moreover, the necessity of considering different identities when designing the interfaces of the platform is equally important to ensure different types of workers feel welcome to register and work in these platforms in equal stand to its male and female counterparts.

Equally, as evidenced in the Brazil Americanas example, it is possible to infer that the platform's algorithmic management system does not recognize the break in work as a legitimate life event, but as an interruption of productivity that is liable to be penalized. In practice, the interface operates under the assumption of uninterrupted availability, rewarding constant connection and punishing absence, even in the case of women on maternity leave, for example. This dynamic demonstrates that algorithmic control is not only expressed in contractual terms, but also in the design architecture

itself. Rankings, acceptance rates, response times, and proximity metrics are converted into indicators of "trustworthiness," but remain blind to social realities and their gender specificities. Consequently, women tend to be structurally more likely to experience disruptions, which makes them disproportionately penalized by technical systems that present themselves as neutral. For these and other reasons, the recognition of the employment relationship, as a minimum standard of fair work, should be an indispensable condition for any worker. Although each activity has its differences in the execution of the task, it should be non-negotiable for jobs to recognize that human life is not organized as a linear curve of continuous productivity, but that it incorporates social and identity contingencies. Otherwise, the promise of flexibility becomes a mechanism for reinforcing structural inequalities, especially for women.

The two Argentine cases discussed above further illustrate that platform governance mechanisms cannot be treated as neutral technical procedures. In situations where women workers report safety risks and are subsequently blocked or suspended without meaningful avenues for appeal, such outcomes reflect not merely procedural rigidity, but design choices embedded within platform architectures. By processing risk reports through the same automated systems used for generic customer complaints, platforms may inadvertently equalize fundamentally different types of incidents. This equivalence can result in the further penalization of those who report harassment or unsafe conditions, disproportionately affecting women who already face heightened exposure to gender-based risks.

Moreover, platforms rarely examine whether gendered work patterns—such as women concentrating work during daytime hours due to safety concerns or care responsibilities—are structurally shaped by platform design. A genuinely gender-responsive governance approach would require platforms to analyse whether women and men exhibit differentiated work trajectories and to invest in mechanisms that actively mitigate those disparities rather than merely registering them as neutral behavioural data. These cases suggest that the reproduction of inequality is not only a consequence of broader labour market structures, but also of socio-technical design decisions that remain insufficiently scrutinized. The strong emphasis on multi-stakeholder involvement, including civil society, organised workers and women's and LGBTQI+ rights organizations, is key to integrating gender perspectives into regional initiatives that address the topic of TFGBV for effective and robust policymaking in the different member countries and in the still evolving area of platform economy. Only with this emphasis, MERCOSUR countries can guarantee an effective protection of women and LGBTQI+ communities –as well as the overall digital platform ecosystem and its different actors– and contribute to a more just and equitable future for work.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge a limitation of this study: it does not address issues of race and discrimination, even though these aspects of identity are often part of the same interconnected structures of domination. Future research on these issues within the platform economy could further advance inclusion and equity agendas.

8. References

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