
Segmented Workers, Unequal Opportunities for Contestation: Characterising Domestic Cleaners Across Digital and Formal Labour Markets in French-speaking Switzerland Using Mixed Methods

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Abstract

This study examines how two different infrastructures—the Swiss domestic service voucher system and cleaning platforms—are reshaping the structure of labour in the home-cleaning sector in French-speaking Switzerland. The voucher system “*chèque-emploi*”, a public administrative service, is designed to facilitate the formal declaration of domestic work and reduce undeclared labour (Ettarfi, 2024). In contrast, cleaning platforms, as private commercial initiatives, create new conditions that favour informal labour arrangements. More specifically, we focus on the most popular-based on popularity and number of profiles—marketplace platform connecting workers with clients. In the last decade, digital-labour platforms in the domestic sector have disrupted traditional employment relationships (Ticona et al., 2018; Schwaab, 2021), though their effects on working conditions are still debated. While platforms often reinforce existing precarity in female-dominated non-standard employment (Strüver & Bauriedl, 2022), some studies suggest a potential for “selective formalisation” on the labour relation (van Doorn, 2020). Yet, few studies (Windebank, 2007; Safuta & Camargo, 2019) have examined how distinct regulatory and organisational frameworks—platforms and public administrative tools—shape the actual workforce composition. Using a mixed-method approach combining digital methods (Rogers, 2019) to scrape (Zhao, 2017) over 2000 worker profiles from cleaning platforms, aggregated quantitative data from *chèque-emploi* services, and qualitative interviews with *chèque-emploi* representatives, this study compares workers’ characteristics across regulatory and organisational frameworks. Our analysis of workers is based on gender, age, education level, origin, legal status, activity rate, qualifications, and type of activity. In Switzerland, the cleaning sector predominantly employs women, with half of domestic workers being women of foreign origin and a high level of informal employment (Benelli, 2011). Our findings reveal a highly segmented cleaning labour market: marketplace platforms attract workers in more precarious situations, including temporary residence permits, recent migrants, requiring minimal (or none) qualifications. In contrast, the *chèque-emploi* system draws workers with more secure legal statuses, longer residence histories in Switzerland. These segmented worker profiles also shape the capacity for resistance: while *chèque-emploi* workers are better positioned to engage in collective action, platform workers often remain isolated and exposed to high risks if they contest their conditions. In an

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already-precarious sector marked by low unionisation (Peugny, 2021), understanding the heterogeneity and segmentation of the workforce enables developing collective strategies against the deterioration of working conditions under digital intermediation. Our analysis offers insights into the structural conditions that enable or constrain worker resistance, collective action, and demands for labour rights.

Keywords: platformisation, domestic cleaning, mixed methods, workforce segmentation, worker profiles