
Invisible Barriers: Gender and Algorithmic Discrimination in Food Delivery Platforms

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Abstract

This project aims to investigate algorithmic discrimination in the food delivery sector, with a specific focus on gender-based disparities and their intersection with other forms of marginalization. Initiated by a multidisciplinary legal team, the research stems from growing concerns about the structural biases embedded within digital labor platforms, particularly in how algorithmic systems assign work, rate performance, and ultimately impact workers' access to employment opportunities.

Motivated by both observed inequalities and testimonies collected from affected workers, this project seeks to produce a thorough pre-litigation analysis combining legal, technological, and sociological methodologies. The law firm has chosen this moment to deepen its commitment to strategic litigation, bolstered by new collaborations with experts in algorithmic transparency and gender studies. This is their first formal research effort with the aim of support a pioneering legal case in Italy that challenges discriminatory algorithmic practices.

The case that inspired the research occurred in Turin. Two female workers claimed that Glovo's scoring system structurally disadvantages female couriers for their caregiving responsibilities and physical performances. The first hearing of this case will take place on the October 2025 below the court of Turin.

The research's goals are multifaceted: to uncover and document the mechanisms of digital discrimination, to provide empirical and legal evidence supporting claims of inequality, and to raise public and institutional awareness of the risks posed by unregulated algorithmic management in labour. Importantly, the project integrates direct participation from female couriers through interviews and focus groups, ensuring that their lived experiences guide the research trajectory.

Beyond the courtroom, the project aspires to influence policy discussions and contribute to a broader European conversation on the protection of workers' digital rights. This research is a necessary step toward transforming exploitative digital labour systems into fairer and more inclusive structures.

Keywords: discrimination, gender, female, algorithm, food delivery, riders

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