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POLICY DYNAMICS AND GENDER DIMENSION IN THE EU PLATFORM
ECONOMY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PLATFORM WORK DIRECTIVE

MA thesis

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of gender considerations into the EU Platform Work Directive, focusing on the polar approaches of the EU member states, Estonia and Spain. Using the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), it analyses how the beliefs of different advocacy coalitions influence policy outcomes related to platform work and gender specifically. The research involves thematic analysis of public documents, stakeholder interviews, and legislative materials. The study identifies key stakeholders including government bodies, platform companies, and labour organizations, and reveals significant dividing lines between their beliefs, particularly concerning the balance between market flexibility and platform workers' protections. Findings indicate that both Estonia's liberal, technology-focused policies and Spain's more structured and protective regulatory frameworks similarly overlook gender dimension. Despite their distinct economic and political contexts, the coalitions in neither country effectively integrate gender considerations into their platform work regulations advocacy. This study highlights the need for more comprehensive gender-sensitive measures in the rapidly evolving platform economy sector.

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Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital age, the platform economy has emerged as a revolutionary force, reshaping traditional job markets and labour relations across the globe. As technology advances, it introduces new challenges and opportunities, particularly affecting employment and labour rights.

Platform work refers to a mode of employment that allows organisations or individuals utilise an online platform to engage with clients, and get a payment in return for their work (“EU rules on platform work,” n.d.). The concept of platform work, characterised by taking on gigs or micro-tasks, challenges traditional employment norms by prioritising flexibility and minimal contractual engagement (Aloisi, 2019, p. 1; Litman et al., 2020, p. 2). However, this flexibility often comes at the cost of worker security and rights, prompting a need significant policy debate within the European Union. The most of the people who work at the platforms in the EU are currently self-employed (“EU rules on platform work,” n.d.). and hence lacking social protections and clarity that the traditional employment brings. As a result of the need, the EU Directive on “Improving working conditions of persons working through digital labour platforms”, or Platform Work Directive, aims clarify the employment status of platform workers and introduce standards for fair and transparent working conditions (“Rights for platform workers: Council agrees its position,” 2023). Yet, despite its intentions, the integration of gender considerations into these regulations remains an area ripe for exploration, not only concerning the Directive but platform work in general too.

The research puzzle revolves around the interaction between advocacy coalitions' beliefs and the integration of gender considerations into the Platform Work Directive. By focusing on Estonia and Spain, this study not only compares regulatory responses but also sheds light on how gender dynamics influence policy outcomes in different socio-economic environments. The objective is to provide a deailed understanding of the policymaking process, emphasising the influence of gender on legislative outcomes, or lack of such.

The relevance of this study stems from its potential to contribute to the ongoing discourse on labour rights and gender equality within the rapidly growing platform economy. By examining the intersection of policy, gender, and labour, this thesis fills a significant gap in current research, offering new insights into how legislative frameworks can better address the complexities of modern labour markets.

The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How do the beliefs of advocacy coalitions influence the integration of gender considerations in the EU Platform Work Directive? This question aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which gender-

related issues are addressed, or overlooked, in the formulation of labour policies. Additionally, the research explores another key question: What are the beliefs that serve as a primary dividing line between the different advocacy coalitions participating in the shaping of the EU Platform Work Directive?

The theoretical framework for this analysis is grounded in the Advocacy Coalitions Framework (ACF), which posits that policymaking is heavily influenced by groups of actors bonded by shared beliefs. According to the ACF, these coalitions play a crucial role in steering the direction and content of policies (Sabatier, 1988), particularly in areas as contentious and complex as platform work.

Methodologically, this thesis employs a qualitative approach, analysing data collected from public documents, stakeholder interviews, and academic literature. The comparative case study of Estonia and Spain allows to examine how different regulatory contexts address similar challenges posed by the platform economy. Thematic analysis of the collected data aids in identifying the core beliefs held by stakeholders and how these influence their positions on gender-related policy issues.

The structure of the thesis follows a logical progression, beginning with an overview of the platform economy and its implications for labour and gender. It then discusses the regulatory landscapes of the EU and its member states, with particular focus on the studied cases. The application of the ACF highlights how beliefs and coalition dynamics shape policy outcomes. The methodology section details the research design and data collection processes, setting the stage for a comprehensive empirical analysis.

To conclude, this work not only enhances understanding of the platform economy and its regulatory challenges but also highlights the critical need for gender-sensitive policy approaches. By examining Estonia and Spain, the thesis showcases the varying impacts of similar legislative goals in different contexts, contributing valuable insights into the broader EU efforts to regulate platform work.

1. Gender and Platform Economy

The platform economy, also known as the "sharing" or "gig" economy, is a rapidly evolving sector that radically transforms traditional employment frameworks by focusing on the micro-tasks that are typically completed on-demand with minimal contractual engagement (Litman et al., 2020, p. 2). This economic model leverages digital platforms to facilitate transactions between those who offer services and those who need them, effectively serving as an intermediary among the supply, end-users, and demand. These platforms categorise workers as self-employed contractors or partners, though the terminology and legal implications may vary across different regions (James, 2022, p. 3; Veen et al., 2020, p. 389). The rapid growth and widespread adoption of the platform economy highlight its appeal, offering flexibility and independence to workers, while also presenting unique economic opportunities and challenges for all parties involved in this triangular model. The platform economy can be analysed from various perspectives. While the term itself suggests economic implications, it also encompasses significant social effects, which we will explore in detail in the subsequent chapters.

I will introduce labour and gender theories in connection to worker's rights. Then, I will proceed with the definitions for platform economy. After, I will review the advantages that the system is capable of, as well as the challenges it is subjected to. I will also give a brief description for the gender equality challenges revealed in the platform economy settings, and how these are linked to what can be observed in traditional economic relations.

1.1 Gender theory, Labour, and the development of workers' rights

Labour theory of value, a cornerstone of classical economic thought established by Marx (1873), asserts that the worth of a commodity is tied to the labour expended in its creation. This principle has historically set the foundation for the debate on the exploitation of labour and the ensuing struggle for workers' rights, that is relevant to this day.

The Industrial Revolution catalysed significant changes in labour relations, embodied with the rise of the labour movement which strived for and secured collective bargaining rights as a remedy to exploitative labour conditions (Thompson, 1963). The labour movement's growth led to the emergence of various organisations and coordinated actions, including trade unions, which played a pivotal role in advocating for workers' rights. These organisations were important for the process of negotiating better wages, working conditions, and job security for workers ("Trade union," 2024). Alongside trade unions, grassroots campaigns and social movements have also significantly influenced labour rights advancements, using collective action to challenge and reform labour policies at both national and international levels.

Beyond traditional advocacy, more complex or even radical forms of expression, such as protests and strikes, have highlighted the labour movement's resilience and determination. A wide strand of literature explores these social movements. For example, Tarrow (2022) explores the mechanism through which social movements, including labour movements, engage in collective action to challenge existing power structures, influence policy, and raise public awareness about critical issues.

The establishment of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919 as a United Nations agency marked a significant advancement, creating global labour standards and advancing working conditions worldwide (“History of the ILO”, n.d.). Nowadays, the EU and ILO continue to collaborate on projects aiming towards advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, or supporting the principles of Decent Work (“The EU–ILO partnership”, 2022).

The discussion surrounding the “future of work” and how the further automation and artificial intelligence impacts the nature of work is gaining prominence. With machines progressively taking on roles previously filled by humans, there arises a crucial question: how should labour theory evolve in a landscape where human effort is no longer the only driver of production? This enquiry is addressed by Gilbert (2023), who delves into the challenges that accompany the integration of technology into the workforce, building on the foundation laid by Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014), who highlighted the shifting dynamics in labour due to advancements in technology.

Gender disparities is another facet of discussions that is relevant for this study. I will begin with looking at the gender theory and terms that lay in the foundation, then review the specific economic gender problems highlighted in the studies. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and West and Zimmerman's concept of “doing gender” collectively enrich understanding of gender as a complex, socially constructed phenomenon. Butler's (1990, p. 25) assertion that gender identity emerges through the stylised repetition of acts, challenging the inherent binary categorisation of gender, is complemented by West and Zimmerman's (1987, p. 129) exploration of gender as an active process, performed and reinforced in everyday social interactions. West and Zimmerman (Ibid, p. 126, 137) use the term ‘doing gender’ to explain the different behaviours, feminine or masculine, that are taken to express a gender that “reinforces “essentialness” once it has been constructed. Both perspectives highlight the performative nature of gender, suggesting that what is often perceived as a natural aspect of identity is, in fact, a dynamic construct shaped by societal norms and cultural performances. This synthesis underscores the fluidity of gender identities, illustrating that the traditional

dichotomy of male and female is a product of continuous social enactment rather than a predetermined biological fact (Butler, 1990, p. 136; West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 140).

Intersectionality is another term that is important for gender theory perspective, and it examines how various forms of identity, such as race, class, and gender, intersect to shape individual experiences of oppression or privilege (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). This framework highlights the complexity of discrimination, revealing that different aspects of identity cannot be separated but instead create unique and multifaceted social dynamics (Ibid, p. 140). Recognizing the intertwined nature of social categories, intersectionality is essential for understanding and addressing the nuanced ways in which systemic inequalities manifest and influence individuals (Ibid, p. 149).

Gender theory is instrumental in the realm of work and labour rights as it scrutinises the gendered nature of labour divisions, power relations within the workplace, and the pervasive inequalities faced by women, men, and individuals of diverse gender identities. In the context of labour rights, gender theory has exposed how labour markets are gendered, affecting the distribution of opportunities, resources, and benefits. Feminist economists have challenged traditional labour theories that failed to account for gender dimension in economics, such as labour divisions or the intersectionality of discrimination (Ferber & Nelson, 1993). They argue for a comprehensive understanding of labour that unpaid work such as domestic work or volunteer work, are value-adding activities within the economy, where the link is made also to the concept of economic rationality (Benería, 1999).

Economic gender disparities manifest in various forms and refer to unequal treatment of individuals in the workplace based on their gender. It may affect participation in the workforce or lead to a significant difference in the trajectory of one's career development. Women face a persistent wage gap, earning less than men for the same work, attributed to discrimination and the undervaluation of women-dominated sectors (Blau & Kahn, 2017, p. 790), and the glass ceiling effect explains how women are prevented from reaching top leadership positions despite equal qualifications at a certain point of their career (Cotter et al. 2001, p. 660). Moreover, Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos (1989, p. 190) highlighted that unequal access to education and training limits women's workforce, though this issue may be less pronounced in Europe compared to less developed countries. Another important aspect is occupational segregation that sees women concentrated in lower-paid sectors that are considered less prestigious (Charles & Grusky, 2004). Lastly, scholars highlight the existence of invisible work, not compensated labour that is more often faced by women, who are providing housework, emotional labour, or caregiving (Kaplan, 2022). Disparities in maternity

and paternity leave further penalise women, impacting career progression and wage growth (Pettit & Hook, 2005, p. 785).

By integrating gender perspectives into labour rights discourse, the challenges faced by women and other marginalised genders in the workforce have been brought to the fore, advocating for policy reforms and labour laws that aim for inclusivity and equity (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). It is underscored as one of the Sustainable Development Goals, a priority guiding global development, which highlights the importance of tackling existing labour and economic disparities (“Goal 5: Gender equality”, 2024).

This subchapter has set the historical and theoretical context for understanding the complexity of labour rights' evolution. By considering the characteristics of labour and the development of workers' rights, I establish a foundation for studying the platform economy, its connection to the workers and their rights. This also allows to better examine the unique perspectives brought about by the gender dimension.

1.2 Bright side of the Platform Economy

Platform economy is a relatively new phenomenon that gained more widespread attention as its prevalence continued to grow, reaching its culmination during the period of restrictions due to the spread of COVID-19 that aimed to avoid further spread of the virus. Many countries implemented restrictive measures in regards to people's movement. It led to the increase in use of platform services, such as taxi and food delivery, leading to amplified revenues generated from platform work (“The EU's platform economy”, 2024). Piasna et al. (2022, p. 9) mention that those sectors dependent on internet and digital technologies have generally experienced relative stability and success unlike other sectors during uncertain times.

Delving deeper into describing platform work, there are different bases that can be used to classify it, generally deriving from nature of the tasks performed and the specifics of the working arrangement (Veen et al., 2020, p. 389). *Taxi, food delivery, caregiving, clerical services such as translation, cleaning* are just a few examples from the diverse range of options available. Barzilay (2018, p. 552) mentions that there is a distinction between those who consider micro tasks as a main source of income or supplemental, which is highly relevant to the discussion of the insufficient social protection. Huws, Spencer, and Joyce (2016, p. 9) also highlight the contrast between online and offline workers, based on work being remote, or face-to-face and their communication with the client being mediated or direct. Overall, the realm of platform work encompasses a wide array of diverse aspects that merit consideration.

Where there is demand, supply naturally follows, and vice versa – a fundamental principle in economics, which is as relevant in the realm of digital platforms as in the

traditional economic relations, hinting at their promising potential for efficient resource allocation. For example, James (2022, p. 3) highlighted that digital labour platforms are praised for enabling workers to quickly earn money by accessing global client base, while easily managing their work schedules to accommodate any needs.

In addition to the aforementioned advantages, platform work is valued for the variety of available opportunities and entrepreneurial potential. Aloisi (2019, p. 1) describes platform work as "ultra-flexible work." A study by Varanasi et al. (2022, p. 2) brings up "lack of long-term commitment and manageable tasks" as one of the features that make platform work appealing in eyes of people searching for flexibility.

The platform economy has a potential to offer higher inclusivity and a more equitable environment since its anonymised setup can obscure the characteristics that otherwise could have resulted into a bias (Barzilay & Ben-David, 2016, p. 400). The structure significantly benefits individuals who have been marginalised, excluded, or distanced from traditional employment opportunities by providing them with the opportunity to reintegrate into the labour market, effectively offering a pathway to economic participation and empowerment (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021, p. 21). This could be particularly relevant, for example, after a period of unpaid reproductive labour, long-term illness, or extended caregiving responsibilities.

Many of the sources reviewed tend to focus on the negative effects, with positive effects often mentioned only to state the purported advantages of platform work, to serve as a comparison, or to debunk the "myth," as seen in studies by Wood et al. (2018) and Varanasi et al. (2022), among others. The next section discusses the critique in more detail.

1.3 Challenges of the Platform Economy

There are several benefits that platform economy system offers, including enhanced accessibility of the tasks, increased autonomy in determining work location, schedule, and volume, as well as no requirement to possess high educational qualifications or experience (van Slageren et al., 2023, p. 1796). Despite the described advantages, researchers contend that the platform economy is not without its share of challenges. The negative effects of the platform work can be characterised by: 1) the lack of social protection, 2) high precarity and 3) the untransparent algorithmic management used by the platforms. An aspect of platform work challenges that has received relatively little attention pertains to the gender dimension.

Elevated levels of uncertainty or precarity (Kahancova et al., 2020), stem from in the individuals' uncertainty about task availability that is essential for generating the income, sometimes their only source of income. Additionally, this situation is exacerbated by an overall lack of clarity about the future.

The status that platform workers have based on the short-term contractual agreements, as a result creating a shift of responsibilities towards the worker (Wiesböck et al., 2023, p, 7; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022, p, 5). Platform workers are generally not considered regular “employees” hence generally cannot claim social security system benefits from the government such as minimal pay, sick leave, parental leave, vacation pay and access to pension. Moreover, the nature of work sometimes leads to the feeling of social isolation, or even to overwork exhaustion (Wood et al., 2018) which is especially relevant in case the platform work is the only source of income for an individual.

Based on survey data from 13 European countries, Huws, Spencer, and Coates (2019, p. 14) argue that earnings from platform work are generally a supplementary source of income and not the main one, with the proportion of income from platform work typically being 12% or less depending on the market. As a result, distinguishing platform workers from other types of workers might be “misleading” since platform work does not define their “primary identity” (Ibid, pp. 14-16). Keeping that in mind, a significant percent of **digital platform workers** is not at all covered by a social insurance from risks of unemployment (62,4%), sickness (56,3%) and work-related accidents (54,2%), not by a platform or app, or another job, or any other source (“Employment statistics - digital platform workers,” p. 27). And this lack of coverage means that the precarity of work arrangements may have even deeper consequences, due to higher risks accompanying, for example, the insufficient amount of gigs available for completion, or losing the access to the platform. Exploring the topic of vulnerability further, Qui et al. (2023, p. 23) highlight the mismatch between the size of the platforms and the individual worker level that can be one of the factors contributing to vulnerability. A study on global production networks and contract labour conducted by Barrientos (2013) offers a valuable insight into global supply chains and their potential negative effects on the labour standards and employment rights.

Furthermore, another aspect that constitute a significant and vulnerable segment within the gig economy concerns migrant platform workers. The intersectionality of their identity as migrants can aggravate their vulnerability, as they may face additional barriers related to language, social integration, and legal status, complicating their access to rights and resources that are available to local workers. To illustrate the complexity of migrant labour within the EU platform economy, it's crucial to consider that more than 5% of the EU population are non-EU citizens, totaling over 23 million individuals (“Statistics on migration to Europe,” 2024). Based on COLEEM Survey from 2018, the proportion of foreign-born workers vary greatly by country and the category of platform worker: main, secondary, marginal, or offline (Brancati

et al., 2020, p. 27). It is important to note that available data is primarily sourced from online surveys that provides limited opportunities for reliable comparison in terms of longitudinal study and selection of countries. Throughout this work, for illustrating purposes I will be referring to the latest COLEEM Survey of 2018 based on observations from 16 member states, ETUI Internet and Platform Work Survey (IPWS) conducted in 14 EU member states in 2021, and the data on digital platform workers based on EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) conducted in 2022 in 16 EU member states and Norway.

Another crucial discussion point is the platform economy's reliability on algorithmic solutions which raises significant concerns regarding biases and discrimination, a critical issue highlighted by Kullmann (2018) and further elaborated by Aloisi and Potocka-Sionek (2022). These concerns stem from the opacity surrounding the data used in algorithms that match supply and demand, potentially reproducing existing biases and reinforcing social and economic disparities (Ibid, p. 32). This can manifest in algorithms favoring specific groups, amplifying inequalities in access and opportunities, or causing harm due to unforeseen consequences.

For example, the research by Dokuka et al. (2022) in the realm of online education reveals that women's working hours and earnings are less than their male counterparts, with evening work schedules being less common among female educators – potentially due to gender imbalances in caregiving and housework. Similarly, Cook et al. (2021, pp. 16-19) found in the context of ride-sharing services that safety concerns contribute to a gender pay gap, as women are less likely to drive at night and in areas with higher crime rates and potential intoxicated passengers. These findings across both online and offline platforms indicate that the broader societal issues of uneven household labour distribution and personal safety are systematically impacting women's work patterns. Consequently, algorithmic management systems that raise prices in underserved areas could inadvertently widen the gender pay gap by favoring men, who are more available during higher-paying times and locations, underscoring an urgent need for gender-aware algorithm design to ensure fairness in the platform economy.

According to Kullmann (2018, pp. 7-8), it might be harmful in the following ways: through the intentional act of discrimination, due to human error in the data, biased model or model regularly reproducing a disadvantage for a particular group. Moreover, the embedding of inequality is not limited to algorithmic solutions but may also permeate workplace culture, as Barzilay (2018, pp. 554-555) suggests.

Another side of this problem lays in the lack of openness and accountability that algorithmic solutions provide. Diakopoulos (2016) discussed the challenges of transparency in

his article. The author provided a list of separate decisions that algorithms make, including prioritisation, classification, association, and filtering (Ibid, p. 57). Based on the article, many algorithms that are used in the platform economy are of a closed nature and cannot be easily challenged and be held publicly accountable, especially in case of corporation (Ibid). Finally, Diakopoulos mentions that certain mechanism for disclosure should be introduced, including transparency regarding human involvement, details on data and model, potential failures, and the cases of use (Ibid).

No doubt, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, its widespread adoption, and its application in various areas of life only deepens the problem.. All in all, one should be always aware of the possible biases that the data might unveil and challenge the setup where it is appropriate.

1.4 Gendered Challenges Specific to the Platform Economy

There are additional issues to consider regarding platform work, and how does platform work intersect with gender dimension? Traditional economic relationships gave a basis for wide research on equity topics through the exploration of the gender pay gap, the glass ceiling effect, the burden of performing unpaid domestic work, and others.

According to Barzilay (2018, p. 557), “*what women have been accustomed to in the labour market may become what we expect in the gig economy*”. This can further be supported by Gilbert’s study of invisible labour (2023, p. 5) who claims that despite higher inclusivity of platform economy, “gender dynamics remain”. Furthermore, ETUI IPWS study highlights the gender disparities, with men prevailing in platform work in general as well as in “main platform workers” category (Piasna et al., 2022, p. 26). By main platform workers, the authors mean those people for whom “platform work represents a significant part of their working lives” (Ibid, p. 14) – and women constitute only about 35% in this group.

The data suggests that gender disparities manifest in line with traditional labour market division. For example, the EU gender employment gap data shows higher employment rate of men in 2023m working-age women rate was almost 10% smaller (“Gender statistics – Labour market,” 2024).

Women display a strong presence in on-location platform work, mainly young women providing care services, while activities like transport and remote professional tasks on platforms remain heavily male-dominated (Ibid, pp. 27-28). Another source of data, Employment statistics on digital platform workers, also supports the statement on gender disparity and highlights that platform workers on digital platforms were more often male than female (“Employment statistics - digital platform workers,” 2023).

While the platform economy appears promising and has the potential to further enhance equality, platform work tends to mirror the challenges of existing economic relations (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022, p. 5). Hence, it is important to keep in mind the challenges of traditional economy when identifying the gendered problems specific to the environment of platforms.

First of all, the gender pay gap constitutes a discrepancy in pay between men and women (Cook et al., 2021; Barzilay & Ben-David, 2016, p. 398). Another problem is occupational segregation: women are more likely to be engaged in “female-type jobs” lacking opportunities for any career growth – that in the end has the potential to deepen the pay gap even further (Dokuka et al., 2022, p. 2; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022, p. 5). Moreover, it is argued that women accumulate experience slower due to working fewer hours per week, and it is essential since the drivers need to learn strategic behaviour that would allow them to be more efficient and maximise earnings (Cook et al., 2021). While the platform payment system might appear neutral, the algorithms could still introduce unequal pay through such factors like peak hours or availability. This potential for algorithmic bias necessitates a deeper examination of pay discrimination in platform work.

Scholars argue that discrimination exists on the platforms (Cui et al., 2020, Tushev et al., 2020). It means that the bases for unequal treatment might intersect. For example, Webster and Zhang (2020) are looking at the intersectional context of gig work focusing on the backgrounds of female immigrant platform workers in Sweden. They reveal occupational segregation, reinforced gendered norms, limited career growth, and the need for further intersectional research to understand diverse worker experiences and broader social relations (Ibid, pp. 122-123). It is raised in the literature that “*women experience unequal treatment being on the platforms – in the form of lower ratings, unequal wages, fewer reviews, and unfavourable perceptions*” (Varanasi et al., 2022, p. 1), being just couple examples of many. The ranking system used in the gig economy often reflects the limited influence and control that workers have compared to clients, this imbalance in power can lead to negative impacts on the well-being of the workers, such as job insecurity, stress, and a lack of support or protection in their work environment according to Wood et al. (2018, p. 70).

Another major gendered challenge concerns *safety*, and possible effects on physical and mental health of platform workers. For example, women do face violence as well as sexualised violence while performing tasks (Kelkar, 2022, p. 12). Platform work might become an environment for potential unsafe situations, caused and enhanced by working on-site. Remote work also provides opportunities for unwanted advances through communication channels, on-

platform (James, 2022, p. 17), and the internet opens an opportunity for new forms of violence and harassment, that has a “dramatic discriminatory effect on women” (Barzilay & Ben-David, 2016, p. 404). It is important to note that men can also be victims of various forms of violence.

An asymmetry of information might endanger platform worker, the private information about the worker is often shared with the end-user but rarely vice versa (Qui et al., 2023). Having sufficient information about the users and locations might be essential for platform workers, especially in such instances where a ‘gig’ requires physical presence on site, or one on one interactions between platform worker and a client. A study by Ma et al. (2022) shows that the platforms were gender-agnostic and due to the lack of adequate protective measures and the fear of losing the future jobs, women have to tolerate the instances of harassment and bias.

The challenge involving social protection deepens around the topic of caregiving and pregnancy. James (2022, p. 15) mentions that women experienced biased treatment by customers after mentioning pregnancy or maternity, and it was affecting their income as well as mental state. Barzilay (2018, p. 559) further elaborates that caretaking responsibilities might be perceived on the labour market with bias too since it significantly deviates from the image of an “ideal worker” in the eyes of clients.

Additionally, platform work might coexist with invisible and unpaid domestic labour, contributing to existing fact of women often being “overburdened with household care”, or be keeping women away from joining platform work at all (Kelkar, 2022, p. 12). Invisible labour has been well studied in the literature on traditional economic relations and gender disparities (Kaplan, 2022). Platform work presents yet another environment where the effect can manifest itself. Platform work often involves unpaid tasks like managing profiles, searching for the gigs, communicating with clients, which contribute to the invisible labour burden without corresponding compensation. Familial responsibilities, such as childcare, can conflict with platform work schedules (James, 2022, p. 14) and make the highest paid hours unavailable. Barzilay and Ben-David (2016, p. 403) argue that platform work is not designed to accommodate these additional responsibilities that typically fall on women.

Moreover, Gerber (2021, p. 208) argues that precarity and uncertainty effects are “highly gendered”. The author also comments on self-employment as a “curse and a blessing for women” since it reinforces the existing market effects such as gender pay gap (Ibid, p. 209).

Finally, scholars mention the existence of structural barriers to joining the platform work (James, 2022, p. 4). The increased demand for women’s unpaid care work during the period of pandemic, combined with entrenched patriarchal norms and economic dependency on men, exemplifies a structural barrier that limits women's bargaining power and amplifies

gender inequality (Kelkar, 2022, p. 13). Another example is that depending on the nature of work you might need access to some means, such as a computer or phone – for online gigs or having a vehicle to perform courier work or taxi services. Authors highlight that women have less bargaining power (Kohlrausch & Weber, 2021, p. 16) to voice their concern and negotiate (Kelkar, 2022, pp. 11-12), although the nature of work and the challenges of online coordination also make it more complicated for all individuals to group, raise concerns and advocate their interests (Salehi et al., 2015). For example, due to the lack of bargaining power women might request less pay than men for the same type of job. Therefore, increased negotiating power could potentially lead to more specific policy solutions that better address the interests of women.

To conclude, I have established general types of gendered problems that platform workers face: 1) some forms of unequal treatment or the intersection of it; 2) risks to safety, 3) additional effects of lacking social security; 4) structural barriers and lack of opportunities to connect and raise concerns. There seem to be a lack of detailed research on the topic of the platform economy and gender (Morell, 2022), especially based on the data from the European countries. Gilbert (2023, pp. 2-5) states that the feminist perspective is crucial in examining precarious labour and digital economy, and the topic is often overlooked in the literature examining the emerging labour trends. Therefore, there is a pressing need for further in-depth research to address these gaps,

2. The EU and Platform Economy

As already mentioned, platform economy was growing massively, both globally and in the EU. To illustrate this, I turn to the ETUI Internet and Platform Work Survey (IPWS). The survey found that 17% of the working-age population had engaged in some form of internet work in the past year. Specifically, 4.3% of respondents had performed platform work, and 1.1% fall into the category of “main platform workers”, i.e., individuals who are “working 20 hours or more per week or earning more than 50% of their income through platforms (Piasna et al., 2022, p. 4). Based on these ratios, it was estimated that there were 12 million platform workers, with 3 million being “main platform workers” (Ibid, 52). Data from the EU Labour Force Survey conducted in 2022 across 17 EU countries shows that 3% of people aged 15 to 64 were engaged in digital platform employment, with the vast majority (80.1%) involved in only one type of platform activity (“Employment statistics - digital platform workers,” 2023).

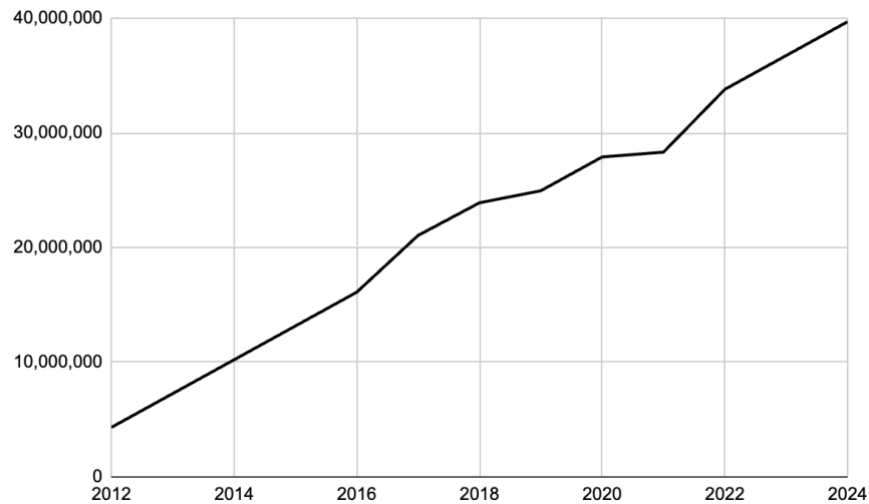


Figure 1. Projected number of platform workers. Based on Commission staff report data, compiled from different sources (“Document 52021SC0396(01),” 2021, p. 144). Graph compiled by the author.

Since the platform work has been in a constant growth, the revenues of platform companies have been multiplying in the past years and have reached an estimate of 14 billion euros in 2020, which is almost 5 times higher than the estimate of 3 billion in 2016 (“The EU’s platform economy,” 2024). As described earlier, the opportunities offered by platform work come with the challenges, and the regulation of the economic landscape lands on the EU level as well as the countries since the employment and social policy are of the shared competence of the EU and member states (“Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union,” 2016).

An unregulated environment in the case of such a large scale might have massive consequences for all the spheres concerning platform economy, such as as labour rights, competition, and consumer protection. The question of whether and to what extent the market needs regulation may arise. Such regulation could impact all parties involved by potentially stifling innovation and flexibility, particularly in the platform economy, which heavily relies on technological solutions. It could impose additional burdens on businesses, especially smaller ones, and affect workers' independence, ultimately jeopardising the viability of the platform model.

Since in the landscape of the EU more than 500 digital labour platforms were observed in 2020 (“The EU’s platform economy,” 2024), it is evident that different interests are involved and should be taken into consideration when any decision on regulation is being made.

The EU identified two key improvements that they are trying to achieve through the introduction of the regulation, correct employment status of platform workers and the rules on the use of artificial intelligence (“Rights for platform workers: Council agrees its position,” 2023). The member states introduce certain initiatives on their own, and there are clearly

different stances. In this case the regulation introduced on the EU level allows to harmonise the conditions across the member states, which is essential considering that the companies often operate in different markets of the EU.

In this chapter I will be looking further into the questions of the EU and platform economy regulation. I will examine the regulatory challenge arising alongside the platforms and workers. I will look at how the EU enforces directives, general decision-making process and how it may contribute creating a more heterogeneous regulatory landscape. Then, I will focus more on the Platform Work Directive and the stances that different EU member states have in its regard, introduce the main stakeholders involved, and review how it aligns with the EU efforts to establish a better state of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion.

2.1 Platform work Regulation

The discourse surrounding regulation features contrasting perspectives: pro-regulatory and anti-regulatory. If the current system fails to ensure fair labour practices and protect the rights of platform workers, regulatory intervention might be necessary. According to Aloisi and Potocka-Sionek (2022, p. 34), current setup “leaves people performing platform work under protected”. The platform economy while introducing flexibility also entails uncertainties and lacks social protection, potentially, highlighting the urgency for robust regulatory frameworks. The lack of consistent regulation is acknowledged by many studies, and is mentioned by Adebisi (2019), Donini et al. (2017, p. 209).

Moreover, in the competitive platform economy environment, some oversight might be needed to prevent the market failures, such as presence of monopolistic practices or some other unfair conditions. The measures that are already in place should be able to effectively tackle the specifics of platform economy, as well as focus on consumer protection – as the quality and safety of services offered on digital platforms should be ensured.

One of the main discussions in the regulation realm is on the status of the workers and reclassification, a large debate on which is mentioned by Kullmann (2018, p. 2). This issue is further illustrated by court cases submitted by platform workers, such as the case against Uber filed in the UK (“In a First, Uber Agrees to Classify British Drivers as ‘Workers’”, 2021). The workers in this setup are individual contractors, not employed by the platforms but connected through the platform with the clients. Traditional employment relationship could provide social protection but would significantly influence the flexible nature of the platform work which is deemed to be one of its main benefits.

It is important to note that in the EU, it is estimated that around 5,5 million workers seem to be misclassified as independent contractors (“Rights for platform workers: Council

agrees its position,” 2023). Furthermore, comparing gender-specific protections of platform workers with regular employment relationships, misclassification may lead to lack of paternal benefits or parental leave, limited access to protection against gender-based discrimination. Thus, many of the challenges of platform economy seem to be arising from the comparison with the traditional work arrangement. The current regulatory landscape, shaped by traditional employment norms, may not adequately address the unique circumstances of platform workers, thereby aggravating gender disparities within this evolving sector. The regulatory challenge posed by the platform economy extends beyond domestic boundaries, warranting a collaborative effort and a flexible solution. As discussed in the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy, “closing gender gaps in the labour market” is one of the key objectives as well as gender pay gap (“Gender equality strategy,” n.d.). If not directly then indirectly, the Platform Work Directive has a potential to contribute to the key objectives mentioned in the strategy.

The regulatory landscape within the European Union (EU) and its member states demonstrates variety of approaches and potential inadequacies in effectively addressing the dynamic nature of the platform economy. Hence, the EU has been working towards creating a more standardised approach to platform economy regulation, acknowledging the need for adaptation to the evolving digital landscape, in a form of a new Platform Work Directive. It is also worth mentioning, that Directive on Transparent and predictable working conditions already touches platform work dimension specifically (“Document 32019L1152,” 2019).

Individual member states within the EU maintain diverse regulatory frameworks, leading to discrepancies in how the platform economy is governed at the national level. For instance, Spain has implemented specific regulations, referred to as the "Rider's Law," (Waeyaert et al., 2022) to address labour issues within the gig economy, reflecting a tailored approach to platform work regulation. Conversely, countries like Estonia, known for their business-friendly environment, may have a more laissez-faire approach. These variations pose challenges for harmonising regulations across the EU and effectively addressing the dynamic development of the platform economy. The same pattern of polarisation considering the regulation can be illustrated by the data on platform economy initiatives and court cases, published by the Eurofound agency. It shows that the highest numbers of initiatives and court cases in relation to platform economy can be found in Germany, Italy, and France – with 33, 36 and 58 instances, respectively. Spain, Belgium, Netherlands, and Finland exceed 10, while the rest of observed countries in the EU only has occasional occurrences (“Platform Economy Database,” 2024). While the initial legislative environment is important, it also provides insight

into the behavioural patterns of regulatory authorities and how they respond to emerging challenges.

The impact of regulatory measures on innovation and growth within the platform economy underscores the necessity for maintaining a delicate balance. While regulations are crucial for protecting workers, ensuring fair competition, and addressing societal concerns, an overly restrictive regulatory environment may impede innovation and affect the overall growth of the sector.

2.2. The Decision-Making Process in the EU

Decisions related to platform economy regulation within the European Union (EU) involve a complex interplay of key actors and defined procedures. The EU employs a multi-level governance structure where decisions are shaped through collaboration between the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of the European Union.

Generally, the ordinary legislative procedure (co-decision) is used for the creation of law on the EU level, where The European Commission initiates proposals outlining regulatory frameworks or directives (“Ordinary legislative procedure,” n.d.). The proposals undergo scrutiny and amendments in the European Parliament and the Council, with up to three readings available. The legislative process involves negotiations, debates, and compromises among member states, reflecting the diverse interests and priorities within the EU. The proposal may be agreed upon earlier as well as rejected at any stage (Ibid). Additionally, member states retain a role in implementing and enforcing regulations, contributing to a shared responsibility (“Policy, law – decision-making process,” n.d.).

Directive is a form of legal act that “is binding as to the results to be achieved” (“Directive,” n.d.). The directive results into a more unified and harmonised approach within the EU but while maintaining a common objective and framework outlined in the directive, member states have a freedom to decide on how to achieve the named goal (Ibid).

2.3 Platform work Directive

In this subchapter, I will have a look at the initial directive’s proposal and final version that was agreed upon. The process surrounding the development of the Platform Work Directive started with its legislative proposal being made public on December 9, 2021. Subsequent steps included its referral to a Parliament committee on January 17, 2022, for the initial reading. On 12th December 2022, a significant step occurred with both a vote in the committee during the first reading and the committee's decision to initiate interinstitutional negotiations, as documented in the adopted report. The movement towards a plenary discussion was marked by the tabling of the committee report for a first reading on December 23, 2022.

The formal announcement to enter into interinstitutional negotiations under Rule 71 occurred in the plenary session on January 16, 2023, with the Parliament's confirmation following on February 2, 2023. The process reached a significant milestone on March 19, 2024, with the committee's approval of the text negotiated during the first reading of the interinstitutional discussions (“2021/0414(COD),” n.d.). Efforts are underway to conclude this process prior to the upcoming European Parliament elections (“Is the platform work directive dead?”, 2024).

The regulatory decisions within the EU aim to address the challenges of the platform economy while balancing the interests of various stakeholders, including platform workers, businesses, and consumers. This work attempts to explain the gender dimension of platform economy regulation, through looking at the process of how a new EU-wide regulation, platform work directive, comes to its final form and to what extent the gender dimension is considered in its formulation, or even if so. The further section aims to give an overview on the directive and the existing discussions that will allow us to examine the directive.

In July 2023 the EU Commission finally agreed on the position regarding the proposed Directive (“EU rules on platform work,” n.d.). It sought to clarify the status of workers based on fulfilling certain conditions and provide guidelines regarding the use of artificial intelligence through bringing “transparency to platforms” (Ibid).

The directive proposal mentions *“the potential for gender bias and discrimination in algorithmic management could also amplify gender inequalities”* (“Document 52021PC0762,” 2021). Although gendered problems are not highlighted specifically as the points that directive is to resolve, the EU has demonstrated a numerous achievement in gender equality (“Gender equality strategy,” n.d.) so we can expect to see the reflections of it through the considerations facing the gendered challenges specifically throughout the decision-making process and the interests that different actors are advocating for or against. It has the potential to improve the working conditions as it aims to reclassify certain groups of people and provide them with “improved working conditions”, including social protection based on the local regulations (“Document 52021PC0762,” 2021).

Gender mainstreaming, a crucial concept in policy formulation of the EU. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy towards gender equality, that ensures that gender perspective is integrated in contents of the policies and gender representation problem is being addressed too, during all steps of policy-making process (“What is gender mainstreaming,” 2023). The EU proclaimed its commitment to gender mainstreaming and promotion of equal rights on numerous occasions, starting with “European Commission’s Communication on Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into all Community Policies and Activities” in 1996,

followed by appearances in the Treaties, roadmap and strategy documents (Ibid). However, gender-related terms commonly focus on women, it is essential to acknowledge that gender mainstreaming, as discussed by Weiner (2023, pp. 605-606), can sometimes exhibit imbalances. Weiner notes that the EU's policies may fall short in acknowledging the experiences of men (Ibid).

Lastly, the ILO working paper by Aloisi, Rainone, and Countouris (2023) examines the EU Directive on Platform Work and claims that the proposed directive on platform work aims to significantly enhance worker protections, particularly against digital surveillance and algorithmic monitoring, potentially benefiting all employees. However, it struggles to address the evolving challenges of platform work fully. The necessity of adapting existing laws and providing clear guidelines for implementation is emphasized to ensure the directive remains effective and relevant in the rapidly changing employment landscape (Ibid, p. 35).

Importantly, the presidency of the Council of the EU has changed from Spanish to Belgian in 2024, which may shed light on why the certain compromises were made. The Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU was able to advocate for firmer approach to regulative measures, following the footsteps of pioneer Spanish law (Bérastégui, 2024). The final draft of the directive was significantly milder than the original proposal and the stakeholders raised a need of a more, likely moderated to secure consensus among all parties ahead of the elections. Although even in the beginning of the negotiations, the concern was raised to focus more on workers' rights and strive for a "more ambitious" directive ("Díaz and seven other EU labour ministers call...", 2022).

3. Advocacy Coalitions and Platform Economy in the EU

The complexities of platform work, including its challenges and the need to balance these with business interests, create a complicated policymaking process for the platform work directive at both EU and local levels. As I aim to examine the divergent advocacy within member states during the process of shaping the new EU directive, I should seek insights from the theories that clarify the policymaking and agenda-setting processes.

3.1 Introduction of the Advocacy Coalition Framework: advocacy coalitions and belief systems

For the purposes of this work, I chose the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), that was developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith in 1980s and that offers a theoretical framework for analysing policymaking environments characterised by conflicting goals, multiple actors, and high levels of uncertainty (Sabatier, 1988, Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018). Pierce et al. (2022, p. 140) characterises the ACF as "a synthesis of the top-down and the bottom-up perspectives

of the policy process”. Blatter et al. (2015, p. 10) argue that the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) stands apart from other theories that are describing the decision-making process in distinct stages by emphasising the continuous competition between opposing coalitions.

Three basic prerequisites for the use of this theory were defined originally, which are a considerable timespan, focus on a policy subsystem and the conceptualisation of public policies through a belief system (Sabatier, 1988, p. 131). Originally, the theory was aimed to explain the context of the United States, but to make the application of the theory easier on other cases, it is advised to look at two additional variables which are degrees of “consensus needed for major policy change” and “openness of political system” (Weible et al., 2009, p. 123). More recent study by Weible et al. (2019, p. 17) highlights minimal conditions needed for adequate use of ACF, that are policy actors and shared belief systems. Furthermore, Stachowiak (2013, p. 3) suggests that the Theory of Coalitions can be utilised under conditions where there is a favourable administration in power, alongside a “strong group of allies with a common goal”. Weible, Sabatier and McQueen (2009, pp. 8-13) offer different approaches for classifying the actors, but also to resources and coalitions. Various coalition strategies were identified, including electoral collaboration, recruitment, federalism, knowledge generation, and altering public opinion via mass media (Hoefler, 2023, p. 2; Stachowiak, 2013, p. 10).

Belief systems are described as “*sets of value priorities and causal assumptions about how to realize them*” (Sabatier, 1988). They encompass the principles and values that individuals or groups consider important and the underlying assumptions about the methods or strategies required to realise these values. The theory distinguishes *deep core beliefs*, *policy core beliefs*, and *policy positions* as hierarchical elements shaping the belief systems of advocacy coalitions, with *secondary beliefs* playing a crucial role in policy implementation (Ibid, p. 144).

By examining the interaction between coalition resources, opportunity structures, and belief systems, the ACF provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics underlying policy change processes within the context of the EU platform economy. The policy change in question of this research is the emergence of a policy compared to the lack of regulation since the introduction and the wider spread of platform work that we have recently observed. More importantly, by incorporating a further gender specific focus, I can see how the advocacy coalition within or among member states integrate considerations of gender problems existing in platform economy into their policy positions and strategic interactions during the decision-making process. This allows to understand if the gender issues are framed within the platform work directive discussion, and if so, to what extent and how.

3.2 Platform work through the lens of Advocacy Coalitions Framework

The Advocacy Coalition Framework provides a strong foundation for my research for a several reasons. First, ACF is particularly effective in capturing the complexity of coalition behavior because it considers not just the actions but the comprehensive belief systems behind these actions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). It is therefore well-suited to explore deeply held beliefs about gender, or gender-related issues that inform coalition strategies. Moreover, ACF emphasises the concept of policy-oriented learning within coalitions over time (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018). This aspect allows for the examination of how coalitions evolve in their approach to gender issues as they acquire new information and experiences which is especially relevant since the information travels fast nowadays. ACF provides tools to analyse the interactions between coalitions, which is crucial when different coalitions may support or oppose gender initiatives for different strategic reasons (Sabatier and Weible, 2019).

Furthermore, by focusing on the policy subsystem – in this case, the EU platform economy – ACF allows for a detailed exploration of specialised issues like gender that may not be the central focus of broader policy debates (Sabatier, 1988). The ACF typically requires a time span of at least 10 years (Weible et al., 2009, p. 122), which is approximately as long as the platform economy sector has been evolving. Although, there is no policy outcome on-hand, it is possible to explore the actors, their beliefs, and interactions within. The ACF's inclusivity of various types of actors, from government officials to interest groups and researchers, offers an good model for examining the diverse array of stakeholders concerned with gender issues in platform work policies.

Finally, the framework has a strong empirical application in policy studies, with a track record of successful use in diverse policy areas, which lends credibility to its selection for analysing gender dimension within policy coalitions. ACF was introduced almost 30 years ago, and since then was reviewed multiple times based on the theory applications coming from different policy domains and different local contexts (Weible et al., 2009; Weible et al., 2019). It brought up some additions and confirmed the explanatory potential of the model. In the next section, I will discuss the methodology used in this study.

4. Methodology and Research Design

The objective of this study is to analyse the policy dynamics and gender dimensions of the EU platform work directive, focusing particularly on how advocacy coalitions' beliefs shape the policy-making process within the contexts of Estonia and Spain.

4.1 Choice of methods

This research employs a comparative analysis through the thematic analysis of qualitative data, the choice of which is justified by its utility in uncovering the decisions, actions, and interactions that lead to the formulation of the EU Platform Work Directive, with a particular emphasis on understanding how gender considerations are integrated within advocacy coalitions' belief systems.

Pierce et al. (2022, pp. 147-148) study on the use of the ACF highlights that process tracing principles are often applied in the field of policy change since it does not require a high number of policy changes required for the use of quantitative methods. The study highlights that one of the concepts that falls under the examination is beliefs and strategies, and for their exploration surveys, documents and interviews are used as the main data sources (Ibid, p. 148). The gathered data provides a narrative that reflects the advocacy coalitions' strategies and their engagement with gender considerations.

Initial exploratory data collection lays the groundwork for understanding the policy environment and identifying relevant coalitions (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 240). As discussed by Weible et al. (2019, p. 17), policy actors may be “identified through “case knowledge” or via application of numerous methods, it is advised to triangulate methods in order to cross-validate the findings. Stakeholder analysis is one of the methods named but it is highlighted that there is no unified approach towards the analysis (Ibid).

The research design process can be outlined as follows and is to be done at least twice – for Estonia and Spain cases to compare the two as the end goal.

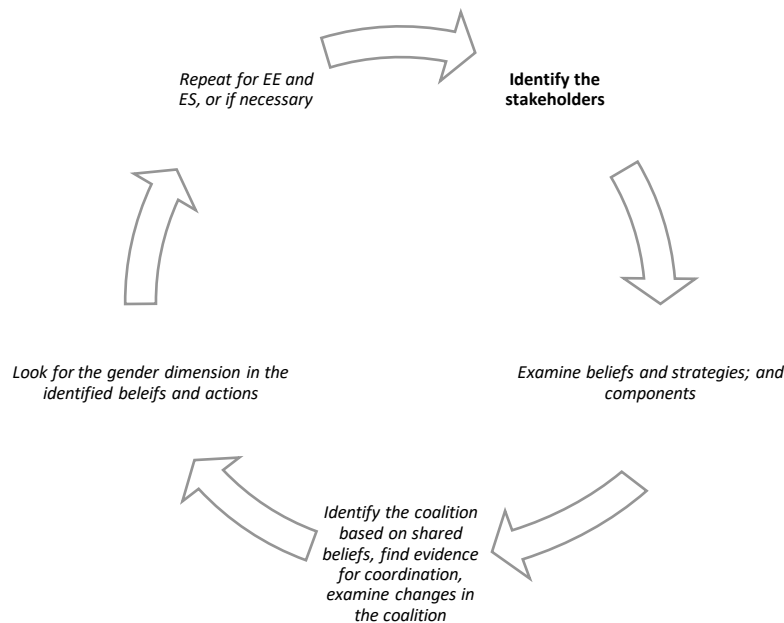


Figure 2. Streamlined research design. Scheme compiled by the author.

It is claimed that the process of identifying beliefs should be accompanied by usage of “some sort of coding scheme” (Weible et al., 2019, p. 18). In this study I will focus on identifying the beliefs rather than assigning a specific belief category to them. Moreover, Weible et al. (2019, p. 4) highlighted the lack of a unified approach to categorisation of beliefs into a hierarchical structure and acknowledged that the same beliefs might be classified differently depending on the researcher. Therefore, adding an extra layer of categorization for the purpose of my research would be unnecessary, identifying any beliefs is sufficient and can be further looked into in a case-by-case manner.

Following this, a more focused collection is directed at uncovering how gender issues are addressed by different coalitions, analysing the change over time in response to new information, experiences, or shifts within the political sphere (Tansey, 2007).

Thorough record-keeping is crucial and can include such elements as recording the analysis of policy documents, highlighting the nuances in stakeholder interviews, and cataloguing the revisions to policy drafts (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 15). This ensures the transparency of the research process, guarantying the credibility of the study's findings. Furthermore, certain steps, such as the analysis of documents, may be revisited multiple times to ensure a comprehensive understanding (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 28). Since the policy is not yet complete, new and potentially significant pieces of evidence might still be appearing.

Through thematic analysis of the data collected from the documents, official records, interviews, or other, secondary sources, I will substantiate or challenge hypotheses regarding the integration of the gender dimension in the EU Platform Work Directive policy-making process. The study is guided by the following research questions:

Q1: What are the beliefs that serve as a primary dividing line between the different advocacy coalitions participating in the shaping of the EU platform work directive?

Q2: If, and how the gendered dimension is incorporated within the belief system of different advocacy coalitions?

4.2 Data Collection

The primary data for this research will be collected from publicly available sources, such as policy proposals, position papers, reports, and official statements from stakeholders involved in or affected by the platform economy. The selection of the sources will be based on their relevance to the Platform Work Directive, platform work in general, and the gender dimension in policy-making.

In December of 2021 (“2021/0414(COD),” n.d.), a proposal for a Platform Work Directive was published, but the industry had been developing for years, and data on the

number of platform workers projected from 2012 (“The consequences of power,” n.d.) – see Figure 1. It gave the opportunity for the parties of interest in this evolving sector to organise and potentially imprint their beliefs and period from 2012 till early 2024 is feasible to look at. I anticipate that the raise of shared viewpoints will mirror the expansion of the platform economy after the times of covid spread, as with time and larger scale the individuals and institutions may potentially gain a clearer understanding and gather evidence to support their opinions.

Overall, 51 pieces were used for the further analysis, with 29 pieces from the context of Estonia and 22 sources of data illustrating opinions on the national level in Spain. More details on the character of these pieces will be provided in the empirical part of the analysis. Given the lack of comparative data and reliance of studies on "projected statistics," the use of qualitative data is well justified. I aimed to include at least one piece of qualitative data per identified stakeholder and considered secondary sources, such as news articles, discussing the specific stakeholders.

Originally, the idea was to gather some additional data through the semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders who possess insights into the policy process or who have knowledge, or opinion on the key events in the negotiation process, coalitions or actors involved. Potential interviewees list included social partners, representatives from non-governmental organisations advocating for platform workers or gender equality, an ombudsman for gender equality or equal treatment commissioner. Tansey (2007, p. 770) highlights the role of the elite interviewing for gathering the data for the process tracing, since it allows such applications in research as corroborating existing data, gauging the perspectives of specific groups, deducing broader population traits or decisions, and piecing together historical events. While it would be beneficial to receive the belief statements first-hand, this might not be a feasible solution since the key actors may be out of reach.

Therefore, the likelihood of securing interviews is a key consideration in the sampling strategy, with a focus on those most accessible and willing to provide informed perspectives on the subject matter. However, it is expected that the information obtained from the interviews will provide greater insight into the gender aspect, as existing sources are expected to offer limited data on this aspect.

Contact with the interviewees was made through public email addresses using a standardised message that informed of the purpose of this study, highlighted the opportunity to contribute their insights on the platform work directive, and particularly to the exploration of its gender dimension – the primary focus of the research. In a few instances, the contact was

made through the contact form available on the web-site since there was no contact address provided. For a list of prospective interviewees, the structure of the interview and the Informed Consent form, see Appendix 1, 2 and 3, respectively. Overall, 22 entities were contacted in the period from 11th to 22nd of April 2024: 12 from the side of Estonia and 10 representing Spain. Reaching out to potential Spanish entities proved more challenging due to limited contact options beyond phone numbers, restrictions for the contact (as having to provide Province), and potential language barriers.

As a result, two interviews were conducted via Zoom, with Kaia Vask and Kaja Toomsalu who represented Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL) on the 10th of May and with Maria-Helena Rahumets, adviser at the department of labour relations and work environment in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, on the 13th of May. Another interview with the participant from Spain was in the discussion but the correspondence later stopped. Eventually, it did not seem possible to secure any interviews with the representatives of Spanish entities.

To work with the data gathered from the textual sources and interviews, I am using thematic analysis. It is a widely used, flexible method in qualitative research providing a systematic framework for “*identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-79). According to Braun and Clarke, the theme is related to the research question and “represents patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Ibid, p. 82). The process, as outlined by the authors, involves an iterative engagement with the data, allowing for a deep understanding of the content while handling various data types (Ibid). By thoroughly coding and categorising data collected from interviews and documents, thematic analysis allows to distill and interpret the underlying themes that shape stakeholders' perspectives and policy discourse, highlighting specific beliefs. This rationale led to the choice of thematic analysis over content or discourse analysis, which are also popular methods of analysis.

According to Terry et al. (2017, 19) the coding frame, essential for a thematic analysis, should consist of a label, definition, and clear instructions on how to identify it. Initial coding frame **included** the following themes:

- Challenges of platform work (the lack of social protection, high precarity and the untransparent algorithmic management)

- Gendered challenges (such as gender pay gap, job type and career opportunities, discrimination, invisible labour, safety and health risks, lack of social protection, structural barriers)
- Gendered dimension (how the directive tackles gendered challenges of platform work)
- Any potential mentions on additional stakeholders, coalitions, coordination, and strategies.

While many themes can be identified in the qualitative data, I will focus only on those that can characterise beliefs. These may include broad statements captured as deep core beliefs or policy core beliefs specific to the platform economy policy subsystem, or even more particular secondary aspects. Themes that do not align with these positions will be excluded from this research. After an initial review of the sources, the framework was crystallised to highlight whether a certain topic was raised in connection with a particular stakeholder at all, and how. In the Table 1 is the final version of Coding frame used to analyse the qualitative data.

Category	Code Label	Description	Example
Worker's rights and protections	Lack of social protection	Theme captures issues related to the absence of traditional employment benefits for platform workers, such as health insurance, pension schemes, unemployment insurance, etc.	<i>"...ensures that all workers, regardless of their employment status, are granted essential rights and protections." ("Platform work directive: A milestone...", 2024)</i>
	Safety and Health Risks	Focuses on the physical and psychological risks associated with platform work, including exposure to unsafe conditions, mental health stressors, and the general well-being of workers in digital and gig economies.	<i>"...that the platforms cannot use them for discriminatory purposes, restrict the fundamental rights of workers, or generate a negative impact on their working conditions, health and safety at work." ("Celebramos El Desbloqueo...", 2024)</i>
	Precarity and Uncertainty	Theme focuses on the instability and insecurity of platform work, characterised by fluctuating work hours, uncertain income, lack of job security, and the absence of long-term contracts.	<i>"Since platform workers in Estonia are not protected by employment contracts, working time and rest rules do not apply to them." (Kersa, 2022)</i>
Social and Demographic Challenges	Legal Clarity and Correct Classification	Evaluating efforts to define legal employment status and classifications in the platform economy.	<i>"...the presentation of a general presumption of employment relationship." ("Resolución de la CES sobre la evolución de la propuesta...", 2022)</i>
	Migrants as a Vulnerable Group	Addresses the specific challenges faced by migrant workers in the platform economy, such as exploitation, discrimination, language barriers, lack of access to legal	<i>"The misconception that foreign couriers mainly come to Estonia for work has been disproved." (Kersa, 2022)</i>

		and social protections, and heightened vulnerability due to their status.	
	Gendered Challenges	This label covers issues that disproportionately affect workers based on their gender, including the gender pay gap, job segregation (types of work predominantly done by one gender), lack of career advancement opportunities, invisible labour (unrecognized contributions), and structural barriers to equal participation.	<i>"Taxi work is still somewhat dangerous for a woman, courier work is not."</i> ("Vaba Valik...", 2022)
	Benefits of Platform Work	Theme highlights the positive aspects of platform work as perceived by workers, such as flexibility in scheduling, autonomy in job selection, the possibility of balancing work with personal life, and the potential for entrepreneurial growth.	<i>"...of the opinion that people choose the way of working through the work platform precisely because of its flexibility"</i> ("Eesti Tööandjate Keskliidu Seisukoht...", 2022)
	Untransparent Algorithmic Management	Focuses on the lack of transparency in how decisions are made by algorithms within digital platforms, including how work is allocated, performance is evaluated, and penalties are assigned, without clear explanations or accountability.	<i>"The directive also strengthens transparency and human control of automated monitoring and decision-making systems through algorithms used by digital platforms."</i> ("The ministry of work reaches an agreement...", 2023)
Operational side	Stakeholders Involved*	Identifies all the relevant parties involved in or affected by platform work, including platform companies, workers, labour unions, regulatory bodies, and advocacy groups, highlighting their roles and interests in the platform economy.	<i>"For CCOO this standard was the first step, but we have always worked to guarantee a regulatory framework for the entire digital and platform economy."</i> ("CCOO Valora El Acuerdo...", 2024)
	Coordinated Action or Strategy*	Documenting the instances of collaborative efforts and strategic planning among stakeholders to promote or implement the directive, or certain topics.	<i>"The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) today asked to temporarily halt the legislative process to approve the community directive on improvements in working conditions on digital platforms...."</i> ("Sindicatos Piden Detener Ley UE Sobre Plataformas...", 2022)

Table 1. Coding Frame. Compiled by the author.

* Not themes but supporting details gathered while referring to the sources

4.3 Case Selection: Estonia and Spain

In examining the regulation of platform work within the European Union, Estonia and Spain present distinct case studies due to their differing approaches to platform economy regulations. The challenges of platform work are universal. Both countries face similar fundamental challenges common to the platform economy, such as precarious employment conditions, lack of social protections, significant gender disparities. These shared issues serve as a foundation for employing the Most Different Systems Design (MDS) to explore how the advocacy coalitions on the national level address these universal challenges, and if they

incorporate gender into their advocacy efforts. It is important to highlight the active participation of both countries in the gig economies, with a significant presence of platform work across various sectors such as transportation and delivery services. The platform companies of Spain and Estonia are in Top 5 based on their earnings, across the EU (“The EU’s platform economy,” 2024).

Looking further into the contrasting regulatory approaches of Estonia and Spain, following details can be highlighted. Estonia, with its rapid digital transformation and a liberal approach to market regulations, presents a unique case of a highly digitised economy that has embraced the platform economy as an integral component of its market innovation (O’Dwyer, 2022). This approach reflects a broader trend of digitalisation, that is a trend well studied in Estonia, where platform work is seen as an opportunity for economic growth and labour market flexibility.

In contrast, Spain, with its historical emphasis on worker protections and a more cautious approach to the gig economy, provides a rich context for analysing how traditional labour protections intersect with the emerging realities of platform work. The Spanish regulatory response, particularly the “Rider’s Law,” enacted to address the challenges faced by delivery platform workers. The law mandates clearer definitions between self-employed contractors and employees, aiming to extend labour protections to many who were previously unprotected (“Collective bargaining in the platform economy...”, n.d.). Spanish policy illustrates a commitment to integrating more traditional labour protections into the new economic models introduced by the platform economy.

In both contexts, women engaged in platform work often face additional challenges that are not adequately addressed by existing regulations. These include disproportionate exposure to sexual harassment, the double burden of unpaid care work, and systemic barriers that limit their opportunities for career advancement within the gig economy.

The application of MDS in this research helps to highlight how each country’s unique regulatory framework impacts the advocacy regarding the same set of challenges. This study seeks to determine whether the differences in the approaches of these two countries lead to different advocacy coalition composition. Analysing these cases enables a deeper understanding of how advocacy coalitions form and operate within these national contexts, and how their underlying belief systems, shaped by distinct political, economic, and cultural histories, inform their stance on gender issues in platform work policies.

A strand of literature looks at the state and development of platform work in Spain. A range of studies look at the classification of Spain’s platform workers (Guerrero & Royo, 2021),

and the implemented regulation. Donini (et al., 2017) underscores the imperative for adopting unified legislative frameworks within the EU to better protect gig economy workers, revealing significant variances in national approaches that underscore the complexity of regulating platform work across diverse legal systems based on the cases of Italy, Spain and France. Collective action strategies are looked at, revealing importance of employment for representation, with evidence from the case of Uber (Riesgo Gómez, 2023), and the significant role of spatiality for collective action (Moralez-Muñoz & Roca, 2022). Multiple of these studies apply the comparative research design, comparing Spain to other EU countries but also outside (Donini et al., 2017, Moralez-Muñoz & Roca, 2022).

Estonian case is not that thoroughly explored. A study by Tavits (2020) looks at the new forms of employment in Estonia, highlighting the lack of regulation currently and analysing possibilities for development, such as creation of an entrepreneur account. Lanamäki and Tuvikene (2021) focus explores how Estonia has strategically formalised and legitimised ride-hailing platforms, focusing on the innovative integration of digital technology into the transportation sector. It highlights Estonia's approach to balancing regulatory frameworks with the promotion of digital innovation, serving as a case study for the effective governance of emerging technologies (Ibid). Aside from that, there is a noticeable gap in the literature specifically addressing Estonian case in the context of digital platforms, and a lack of literature considering the gender dimension.

4.4 Research Limitations

Every research project encounters certain limitations, and this study is no exception. Acknowledging these limitations is necessary for understanding the scope of the findings and their applicability. This subchapter outlines the key constraints faced during the research process and the strategies employed to address them. One anticipated limitation is the ongoing nature of the implementation of the EU Platform Work Directive, which has not been finalised yet as of May, 2024. This may restrict the analysis of the directive's impact but does not diminish the study's potential to explore the black box of the policy process and advocacy.

Moreover, inherent researcher bias presents a potential limitation, particularly in the interpretation of qualitative data and the selection of sources that align with pre-existing hypotheses (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 19). To mitigate researcher bias, a systematic approach to data collection and analysis will be employed, alongside the verification of findings through triangulation with multiple data sources.

Furthermore, for the analysis I need to look at the evidentiary sources in the local languages, other than English, although some of the sources have English version to the

documents available. Throughout this work, this challenge is primarily addressed by using digital translation tools, such as Google Translate. Language barrier would also present a significant challenge when interviewing stakeholders who do not speak English, since it would necessitate additional considerations and resources to facilitate effective communication.

In conclusion, the research methodology employed in this study aims to offer an in-depth analysis of policy dynamics and the gender aspect within the EU's platform economy. And, utilising the ACF and through a comparative analysis, this study seeks to provide valuable perspectives on the cases of Estonia and Spain. Since the study only looks at two of the member states, there is a potential for research of all coalitions involved in the EU policy-making process and looking at the general dividing lines between the coalitions based on a larger selection of case.

5. Empirical Analysis

The goal for the empirical analysis is to shed light on the advocacy coalitions behind the platform work directive, and most importantly, the consideration of the gender dimension. In this chapter, I will start by looking at the local stakeholders who may have an interest for advocacy in the platform economy sphere. Then, I use the thematic analysis to uncover the beliefs that the stakeholder have, confirm if there is any evidence of their activity in the sphere, and determine the coalitions based on the beliefs. By doing so, I respond to the research question regarding the dividing lines as well as the consideration of the gender dimension at the later stages. I look at the local level, Estonia and Spain separately, and then finalise the chapter by the comparison, and the discussion of limitations and considerations for the future research in the field.

5.1 Key actors shaping the platform work directive

Examining key stakeholders is a crucial initial step in this analysis, as they offer a range of perspectives on platform work based on the different beliefs, which are further manifested in the actions of advocacy coalitions. Complete overview of all the key actors and their beliefs is needed for accurate identification of the advocacy coalitions that operate in the subsystem, and eventually for precise conclusions on the policy-making process around the change of legislation, the emergence of the EU's directive on "Improving working conditions of persons working through digital labour platforms".

Consulting the formal list of stakeholders involved in directive-making, such as those documented by the European Parliament's Legislative Observatory (OEIL) provides a clearer picture of the institutional actors involved in shaping the directive on platform work. Key bodies include *the European Parliament*, with its relevant committees tasked with reporting and forming opinions on legislative proposals, and *the Council of the European Union*, which represents member states' interests. *The European Commission* plays a pivotal role in drafting and proposing legislation, while advisory groups like the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions offer their specialised insights. These entities form the backbone of the formal legislative process, driving the development and refinement of policies aimed at improving working conditions on digital platforms ("2021/0414(COD)," n.d.).

While these institutions form the structural framework of the EU's legislative process for platform work, it is crucial to also consider the impact and roles of national stakeholders who directly influence and implement these directives at the local level. My research, therefore, focuses on these national actors, exploring how local coalitions and individual stakeholders

within Estonia and Spain engage in the negotiation process of such EU directives according to their specific national contexts and interests. *National parliaments* are pivotal in shaping the EU Platform Work Directive through their watchdog role over subsidiarity and through their influence on national governments in the Council. They evaluate whether proposed directives might be more effectively handled within their own legislative frameworks. During the ordinary legislative procedure process, they can provide reasoned opinions, and if a significant number raise subsidiarity concerns, they can potentially halt or amend legislation via the "yellow card" procedure. Following the directive's adoption, national parliaments are responsible for transposing it into domestic law, ensuring that it aligns with national legal and socio-economic contexts, a process which allows for further tailoring to address the unique aspects of platform work within their jurisdictions. This transposition process is critical, as it can include public consultations and debates, offering an additional layer of democratic scrutiny and adjustment before becoming national law ("National Parliaments in the EU," n.d.).

Additionally, in platform work, the triangular relationship crucially informs the key stakeholders: platforms, workers, and end-users. These actors are not only integral to the platform's operations but also to the evolving nature of representation and advocacy. Discussions on stakeholders must consider not only this foundational triad but also the emerging collective actions. Workers and grassroots organizations are increasingly seeking to carve out their own representation, often more nuanced and specific to their services and needs, as opposed to traditional unionisation efforts (Borghi et al., 2021, p. 3). These would fall under the interest representatives' category, alongside platforms – and the meetings with such are documented for the transparency purposes ("2021/0414(COD)," n.d.).

If a particular representation or an idea gains enough traction among the masses, it can significantly impact the actions of national parliaments. This connects to the subchapter where I examined key stakeholders specific to each member state, who are likely to influence policymaking through participation in broader interest groups or by presenting their cases directly to the parliament.

5.1.1 Stakeholders in Estonia

In Estonia, the discourse surrounding the EU Platform Work Directive is shaped by a constellation of interests, each with unique stakes in the policy outcomes. One side of the stakeholders is platform companies themselves, who have an economic interest in the regulation's design and enforcement. Based on the report published by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications in 2022, the list of companies operating in Estonia included Bolt, Yandex, Uber, and Taxigo focusing on providing ride-hailing services, and Bolt

and Wolt focusing on delivery of food (“Platvormitöö tegijate organiseerumine Eestis,” 2022). But the situation changes quickly, Uber and Yandex are not present in the market anymore, while some new companies, such as Fudy, has appeared (Whyte & Peegel, 2023). From the documentation about meetings with interest groups and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication, the meetings were scheduled with the platform companies active in Estonia, during the negotiations period (“Kohtumised Huvirühmade Ja Lobistidega,” 2024).

These entities are frequently represented in interest groups actively participating in EU-level discussions that will have effects on their operations, individually or through collective structures such as the Move EU, whose aim is to voice a joint opinion of multiple companies on the prospects of the industry (“The European Association of On-Demand Mobility,” 2021).

Business associations stand alongside these platform companies, advocating for conditions conducive to digital market growth and innovation. In Estonia, which boasts a highly digital economy, business associations include such groups as the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Startup Estonia, The Estonian Association of Information Technology and Telecommunications (ITL), Estonian Employers' Confederation, or Estonian E-Commerce Association. These associations could be representing the collective interests of businesses within the country, including platform companies.

Within Estonia's Parliament (In Estonian, Riigikogu), the social committee was appointed to share an opinion on the directive, as mentioned in the final position of the Parliament on the draft of the directive (“Riigikogu seisukoht...,” 2022). It has undergone scrutiny without entering a debate, proposing amends, or sharing the objection (“The platform for EU Interparliamentary Exchange,” n.d.). The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications are pivotal governmental bodies that bring regulatory and industry perspectives to the table. Their involvement is evident through the multiple statements on platform work that the above-mentioned ministries have published. Significant role of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications was confirmed by the information from the interview, that highlighted the attempts of the ministry to bring together different interests in a form of a compromise (M.-H. Rahumets, personal communication, May 13, 2024).

Workers themselves constitute a key interest group in shaping outcomes related to the platform economy, who can gain representation and advocate for workers' rights through such structures such as trade unions and labour organisations. According to Kallaste (2023, p. 359), the fragmented nature of Estonian trade unions, coupled with low membership, results in limited resources that impact their capacity to represent employees effectively, although

industry-level unions show greater success in securing collective agreements. Nevertheless, such organisation as Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL) can be mentioned in this regard.

Furthermore, other entities that are focused on protection of rights, but focusing more on gender equality, might be observed. For example, the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre (ENUT), or the Estonian Women's Association Roundtable (EWAR).

Finally, I look at the academic institutions that might be affecting the overall sentiment through sharing knowledge and expertise – that in Estonia are gathered around two main scientific institutions, Tallinn Technical University and Tartu University. The activity can be seen by the numerous conferences held and projects conducted in the past years, highlighting the involvement of academic community in the topic. Moreover, the opinions shared by Tallinn Technical University were referred to in the final Parliament's position discussion ("Riigikogu seisukoht...", 2022).

A variety of stakeholders holds a potential interest in the state of platform work, active lobbying has been relatively limited, a fact underscored by several interview rejections indicating non-involvement of the entities that I identified and contacted in the legislative process. Overall, the following excerpt confirms to us the stakeholders who were most actively involved in the negotiation process of the platform work directive. Compared to the list of potential stakeholders, it constitutes the lack of involvement from non-governmental organisations, any gender equality related entities.

"... compared to some other directives that have been negotiated, we got <...> quite a lot of feedback from, for example, platforms that are popular in Estonia, such as Bolt and Wolt. We also got some feedback from our Trade Union Confederation and Employers Confederation, so the main institutions or main social partners for us in Estonia. And some feedback, for example, from different <...> scientists who <...> were very helpful for us as well." (M.-H. Rahumets, personal communication, May 13, 2024)

5.1.2 Stakeholders in Spain

In Spain, the discourse and policymaking concerning the EU Platform Work Directive are influenced by a diverse array of stakeholders. The presence and relationship of actors differs from what we can observe in Estonia and might be connected to the fact that the dialogue has been already established between the stakeholders, antecedent implementation of Rider's law.

While the Supreme Court itself is not a political entity, its judgments have been instrumental in shaping the regulatory landscape, exemplified by rulings that paved the way for further legislative actions (Rodríguez, 2022).

The national legislature (las Cortes Generales) engaged into a political dialogue scrutinising the Directive, affirming its alignment with subsidiarity principles, demonstrating a proactive engagement with the legislative process at the national level (“Spanish Cortes Generales,” n.d.). Key governmental players in these conversations include the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy and the Vice-President of the Government (“Díaz and seven other EU labour ministers call...,” 2022).

Major platform companies such as Glovo, Uber Eats, and Just Eat (“Spain: First Collective Agreement for Platform Workers,” 2022) , whose operations are intimately affected by labour regulations, represent the business side of the stakeholder spectrum. They are countered by a robust labour movement, including bigger scale unions as General Union of Workers (UGT), the Workers’ Commissions (CCOO) and other movements such as Riders X Derechos, the Asociación Autónoma de Riders (“Spain approved a law protecting delivery workers,” 2021), which have been very active in advocating for platform workers’ rights, as well as rider collectives like “Yes, I am self-employed” (“Sí, Soy Autonomo”) and “Couriers United” (“Repartidores Unidos”) which vocalise the concerns and demands of platform workers (Wray, 2023).

The discourse is further enriched by the European Trade Union Confederation, employer associations like the Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations (CEOE) and Confederation of Business Organisations for small and medium enterprises (CEPYME), which argue for business-friendly policies that also correspond to the nuances of digital and platform economies (Aranguiz, 2021).

Civil society's voice is carried by NGOs and organisations focused on social justice, equitable work conditions, and gender equality, ensuring the directive's sensitivity to broader social concerns. For example, Institute for Women (Instituto de las Mujeres) which is related to the Spanish governmental body, the Ministry of Equality (“Conócenos,” 2024).

Complementing these voices are legal experts and academics from Spain's think tanks and universities, whose analytical work on the platform economy contributes to an informed and evidence-based regulatory approach. This can be seen at first by the amount of literature on the context of Spanish reform, and the platform work in general (Guerrero & Royo, 2021; Morales-Muñoz & Roca, 2022; Riesgo Gómez, 2023). Guerrero and Royo (2021, p. 178)

mention a large body of the literature on the “social protection of platform workers” in Spain, emphasising the importance of the theme in the Spanish context.

5.2 Beliefs and Coalitions. Thematic Analysis

In this subchapter I focus on the beliefs and coalitions in the policy subsystem of platform economy in Estonia and Spain, by utilising thematic analysis to systematically identify and analyse patterns within qualitative data. By categorising and interpreting these themes, the analysis validates whether the observed policy actions are genuinely aligned with the articulated beliefs of the stakeholders involved. Defining beliefs for key stakeholders within the context of the EU Platform Work Directive involves understanding their stated positions, values, and underlying assumptions about platform work and its regulation.

Beliefs are manifested in public statements, documented legislative histories, and personal interviews. Insights into these beliefs can also be gleaned from secondary sources, including expert analyses and media articles, which help deepen our understanding of the motivations and viewpoints influencing stakeholder actions. In case of Estonia, I was also able to conduct the interview with the key stakeholders, that will be looked at throughout the subchapters.

5.2.1 Advocacy coalitions and their beliefs in Estonia

For the analysis, I reviewed the data gathered from the public sources. The sources were looked up by the prompts in both English and languages used locally (Estonian, and Russian). The search prompts usually included a name of the country to restrict the geography and the platform work, or platform work directive. Some examples are: “*eesti platvormitöö*” (Estonia platform work), “*eesti platvormitöö seisukoht*” (Estonia platform work position). Additionally, the search has been done through the Estonian Parliament’s website. Additionally, to look for more specified sources that might have offered a gender dimension insight, the prompts included “*platvormitöö naised*” or “*platvormitöö sugu*” (platform work women/gender). Some of the sources were found with the snowball effect, by the references in the found sources that lead someplace else.

Regarding the data gathered from the public sources, most of the analysed pieces of data are from the Parliament, and the ministries. There are some expert opinions, providing perspective on law, tax. A couple of sources illustrates the perspective of the platform companies, and only individual pieces shed light on the opinion of the platform workers. Some of these pieces can be characterised as opinions, some statements, and some are official documents. The detailed composition of the sources used for the analysis can be found on the Table 2, and it is important to note that a considerable number of sources was reviewed

additionally although not included in the final composition if none of the relevant themes appeared on the first reading.

Entity Type	Number of reviewed pieces
Estonian Parliament	10
Ministry	9*
Expert	4
Platform	2
Union	2*
Insurance Fund	1
Workers	1

Table 2 Pieces of data by the entity, Estonia. Compiled by the author.

() indicates additional pieces of data obtained through interview.*

Using the data gathered, I conducted thematic analysis by using the insights from the literature review for the initial coding frame (outlined in subchapter 4.2) and looking for the outlined themes as well as the emerging patterns in the qualitative data. Finally, I refined and defined the themes. And, by looking at the themes the stakeholders are focusing on, I make assumptions about their beliefs, as well as find any additional evidence for the coordinated action and the confirmation of stakeholders involved.

How can the stakeholders be grouped based on their sets of values? The controversy lays mostly between the interest of employer and the workers, the statement was also confirmed by the data from the interviews.

Initially, Estonia was among the Member States that did not support the draft of the directive, aligning with several other countries in opposition due to substantial disagreements over key aspects of the legislation. The primary concerns included the criteria for triggering the presumption of employment status, who could initiate it, and the conditions for rebutting it (Bérastégui, 2024). However, as negotiations progressed and the directive's provisions became less stringent, Estonia shifted its stance. This change facilitated a consensus that ultimately allowed for the approval of the directive, demonstrating Estonia's flexibility in response to modified legislative conditions. This shift was influenced by proactive efforts from unions within Estonia and other countries. These collective actions helped facilitate a consensus that ultimately led to the approval of the less strict version of the directive, reflecting Estonia's responsiveness to the modified legislative conditions.

“And also, now, that there was a concern about <...> acceptance of directive as it is, then we sent together with some other unions from other countries, we sent a direct

letter to those prime ministers.” (K. Vask and K. Toomsalu, personal communication, May 10, 2024)

In Estonia, the lack of formal organisation among platform workers significantly hinders their ability to engage in collective bargaining. These workers often resort to forming informal networks on platforms like Facebook or Telegram, where they create closed communities. This setup restricts participation and visibility, limiting the dialogue to only current group members and obscuring their discussions from external observers and potential allies.

“...[they] organise themselves through Facebook groups or something like that, but those groups are closed groups, so other people can't join those groups or see the discussion that platform workers themselves have.” (Ibid)

An interesting observation about one of the platforms is their emphasis on considering couriers' interests while promoting the advantages of the platform economy, such as flexibility and independence. The company foster inclusion by inviting couriers from various countries to discuss their experiences with policymakers, ensuring that couriers' voices are heard in the formulation of platform work regulations (“Couriers making their voices heard...,” 2022). It might be that the inclusion of workers' voices through platform facilitation is possible due to the lack of strong worker organization, at least, in Estonia.

Furthermore, the typical profile of a platform worker often highlights a fundamentally vulnerable position, affecting groups like students, refugees, or migrants (K. Vask and K. Toomsalu, personal communication, May 10, 2024) who may already face significant barriers in the labour market. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the precarious nature of gig work, where job security is minimal, and workers have little leverage to negotiate terms. The transient and uncertain conditions inherent in platform work disproportionately impact these groups, making it even more challenging for them to advocate for better working conditions or assert their rights effectively.

“Platform is a mean to get the job, you must accept those conditions, or otherwise you just don't get this job. That way the ordinary workers, they can't influence [their working conditions]. They must accept the conditions; they don't have right to negotiate at the moment.” (Ibid)

One of the themes that was not originally included in the list of the themes was concerning *benefits of platform work*. The theme was highlighted by the platform companies, as well as legal experts, and the union organisations (Pisuke, 2022; “Eesti Tööandjate Keskliidu Seisukoht...,” 2022; “Couriers making their voices heard...,” 2022). The topic was raised in the narrative of the workers as well, who mentioned “*free choice when to go to work*” (“Vaba Valik ...,” 2022). But generally, it can be concluded that many stakeholders find flexibility an important characteristic of platform work and put an emphasis on the need for a balanced approach towards the regulation, which could be characterised by “encouraging entrepreneurship with caution” (Timian, 2023).

Need for *advancement of social protection* seems to be another theme that shows a clear pattern through the marked labels in the qualitative data. This belief characterises a wide range of actors, it’s found in the parliamentary statements, as well as research, economic expert, Ministry of Social Affairs. It was talked about in both interviews as well, clarifying the positions of Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication and Estonian Trade Union Confederation.

However, companies and business organisations did not explicitly mention these issues. Instead, they emphasised the complexities associated with implementing social protections, pointing out the increased administrative burdens and the potential risks these regulations pose to the sustainability of the platform economy model. These stakeholders argue that while the intent behind such protections is valid, the practical implications could affect the growth and operational efficiency of platform-based businesses:

“In order to obtain social guarantees, the platform employee has the option of concluding an employment contract or acting as an entrepreneur himself, paying income tax and social tax.” (“Eesti Tööandjate Keskliidu Seisukoht...,” 2022)

Continuing the exploration of beliefs related to the interests of platforms and the necessity of fostering a business-friendly environment, one opinion on the Ministry of Economic Affairs' interests emphasizes their dual responsibility to support businesses while also protecting the Estonian legal system within the EU framework.¹ This viewpoint surfaced during a discussion about unregistered correspondence between a platform company and the ministry, highlighting the Ministry’s role in safeguarding Estonian businesses and

¹ but dual responsibility also in the sense that supporting businesses, but also standing for the worker's rights (as also this area is their responsibility. The employment policy used to be under the ministry of social affairs until the last government was established)

acknowledging a need to rectify a mistake in administrative procedures (Tooming & Wright, 2024).

The need for legal clarity and the correct classification was mentioned throughout many sources. The topic of regulation of the assumptions of the employment was called “the heart of the negotiations” (M.-H. Rahumets, personal communication, May 13, 2024). This distinction is crucial for understanding the beliefs of the stakeholders.

“As an article and the topic that comes with the most impact, from there as well on the workers side, they see that it’s important that people performing platform work would be assumed to be employees in the most easy way. But from the employers’ side or platform side they saw a lot more risk when the presumption would be too easy to fulfill, because they were worried that there will be too many false positives. And it will therefore make more problems that it would make <...> good.” (M.-H. Rahumets, personal communication, May 13, 2024)

Finally, while accessing the themes in the given set of data, some topics were almost not raised at all such as gendered challenges, specifics of the migrants as a more vulnerable group, precarity and uncertainty. Responding to the first research question, *what are the beliefs that serve as a primary dividing line between the different advocacy coalitions participating in the shaping of the EU platform work directive*. For Estonia, the primary dividing line between the different advocacy coalitions involved in shaping the EU Platform Work Directive centers on the classification of platform workers and the assumptions about their employment status. This divide is crucial, reflecting contrasting views on the balance between regulatory protection and business flexibility that are foundational to the platform economy in Estonia.

On one side of this divide, some coalitions, largely composed of unions and worker advocacy groups, argue for more stringent regulations. They advocate for a presumption that individuals engaged in platform work should be classified as employees unless proven otherwise. This approach aims to extend traditional employment protections and benefits to platform workers, addressing concerns over job security, fair wages, and social protections. These groups contend that such measures are essential to prevent exploitation and ensure fair treatment in the rapidly evolving gig economy.

On the contrary, platform companies and certain business-oriented coalitions push for a looser classification that favours independent contractor status. They argue that the flexibility and entrepreneurial opportunities provided by platform work could be stifled by heavy-handed

regulations. From their perspective, the independence of platform workers allows for innovation and growth within the sector, offering individuals the freedom to work when and how they choose, which is seen as a fundamental benefit of the gig economy.

This dichotomy represents a fundamental conflict over how platform work should be conceptualized and regulated within the EU. Each side’s stance is shaped by underlying beliefs about economic freedom, worker rights, and the role of government in regulating new forms of employment. The debate over these issues is heated, with each coalition bringing forward data and testimonials to support their views, reflecting broader ideological battles over the future of work in an increasingly digital economy. This main dividing line not only influences legislative outcomes but also shapes the narratives and strategies of stakeholders within the platform work debate.

5.2.2 Beliefs of Advocacy Coalitions in Spain

For the purpose of searching the pieces to add to the set of qualitative data, the same logic was used, and the search was done using the keywords in English and Spanish. The examples of the prompts would be “*españa plataforma trabajo directiva*”. Some of the sources were also found by adding the names of the specific entities, such as the ones that I identified as potential stakeholders. In order to find anything related to gender dimension, I also used prompts including (but not limited by) words such as “*mujeres*” (*women*) or “*género*” (*gender*). Although, in the context of Spain, it is relevant to look at the discussions around Rider’s Law, as well as around the Platform work directive, as both are linked by their regulatory agendas – which were included in case they were found through the search prompts or referenced in the other sources reviewed.

Overall data reviewed included official documents, reports, regulations, statements etc, the composition of data can be found on Table 3. The gathered pieces of evidence are covering Government, as well as an example of Local government, Trade unions such as UGT or CCOO, expert opinions etc.

Entity Type	Number of reviewed pieces
Union	6
Academia	5
Government, Ministry	4
Parliament	2
Workers, Movements...	1
Political Party	1
Local government	1

Digital Future Society compiled a report with the details on researching platform economy (“Digital platform work in Spain...,” 2020, p. 13). Some of the documents mentioned in the report were also included for my analysis. The researchers have identified 15 themes based on their selection of reviewed documents that covers the period from 2014 to 2020 including job insecurity, regulation, employment status of workers, and more (Ibid, pp. 45-46).

In this report, key themes such as "Digitalisation and impact" and "New forms of work in the digital economy" emphasise the transformative effect of technology on labor practices, highlighting advancements like automation and artificial intelligence that redefine work structures (Ibid). The themes "Employment status of workers" and "Job insecurity" illustrate the precarious nature of platform work, probing into the complex relationships between platforms and service providers, and underscoring the instability and competitive pressures faced by workers (Ibid). On the other hand, themes like "Labour opportunity" and "Pro-innovation" argue the benefits of platform work, such as flexibility and entrepreneurial opportunities, suggesting that regulation should balance worker protection with fostering innovation (Ibid).

Significantly, "Regulation" and "Analysis of court judgements" indicate a pressing need for clear legal frameworks to address ambiguities in employment classification and to enforce labor rights effectively (Ibid). "Workers' voices" further enriches this analysis by providing firsthand insights into the real-world impacts of legislative and market changes on platform workers (Ibid). This comprehensive thematic exploration of the Spanish documents and publications highlights the critical balance between safeguarding worker rights and supporting economic innovation in the digital age and offers a valuable insight into a comprehensive Spanish context. Nevertheless, I will return to the thematic analysis conducted with the newly identified data.

First of all, *lack of social protection* is one of the themes that was labeled often. The belief that platform workers are not socially protected enough exists and should be tackled. It was raised by the trade unions, and European Trade Union Confederation. The actors refer to the impact that the directive will have, highlighting that the directive “will grant labour rights and social guarantees to millions” (“Los Ministros de Trabajo...,” 2024). In the same source we can find mentions of Safety and health risks, another theme that was highlighted Party Representative and in the opinion of one of the researchers (“Celebremos El Desbloqueo...,” 2024; Rojo, 2024).

Legal clarity and correct classification seems to be a topic for almost every source reviewed. Discussions often mention Rider’s Law, and how the new European directive would relate to that. Spain, under the leadership of Second Vice-President Yolanda Díaz, has expressed reservations about the current EU directive proposal for digital platforms, advocating for a more robust version that stringently protects workers' rights. Díaz has successfully rallied support from eight other EU countries, aiming to establish a directive that effectively addresses the classification of workers, transparency in algorithm management, and the prevention of “false self-employed” statuses within digital platforms. This initiative reflects Spain's proactive stance in regard to workers’ protection (“Díaz and seven other EU labour ministers call...,” 2022).

Overall, in Spain, the discussion surrounding the EU Platform Work Directive appears less heated at the local level, with one potential explanation being that Spain has already navigated these debates before. With its own regulations already in place, such as the Rider’s Law that formally recognises gig workers as employees, the directive is expected to have a less disruptive impact compared to countries without comprehensive regulations (such as Estonia). This pre-existing framework means the directive will reinforce rather than revolutionise the current standards, smoothing its implementation and acceptance within the Spanish context.

Continuing the topic of the Spanish regulation, another important aspect is that Rider’s law resulted into agreements between the trade unions and the platform companies, the first of those was with the Just Eat Spain regarding some specific working conditions, such as “working time, hourly wages, trade union rights, and addresses the algorithmic management of work” (“Collective bargaining in the platform economy...”, n.d., p. 2). From the case study, it also seems like the agreement was perceived positively from both sides, as it clarified working conditions and provided some social protections while maintaining the flexibility (Ibid, p. 9).

Trade unions in Spain have demonstrated a strong and demanding presence, particularly in the context of digital platform work. The UGT, one of Spain's major unions, has been instrumental in pushing for a comprehensive definition of digital labor platforms and advocating for a general presumption of an employment relationship within the legislative framework (“Resolución de la CES sobre la evolución de la propuesta...,” 2022). This aligns with broader demands of the ETUC, reflecting a firm and determined effort to advocate for the rights of platform workers across Europe. Based on the open letter of trade union to one of the platform companies, despite winning a significant majority of reclassification cases in European tribunals, unions face challenges as platforms resist changing their business models

(Voet, 2024). This persistence highlights the unions' resilience in fighting for worker rights despite systemic resistance from platform companies. Furthermore, the theme of *shifting the responsibility towards platforms* was raised, requiring them to definitively establish whether a worker is classified as an employee or self-employed, thereby centralising accountability with the platform itself (“The ministry of work reaches an agreement...,” 2023).

In the analysis of Spain's approach to the EU Platform Work Directive, a notable division emerges between two primary coalitions, each defined by their distinct beliefs regarding platform work regulation. One coalition emphasizes the necessity for stringent regulatory frameworks to protect platform workers, advocating for robust labor rights and social protections. This group largely consists of labor unions, workers’ organisations and movements, which argue that the current approach inadequately safeguards workers' rights and welfare in the EU – while highlighting the advantages of the regulation introduced in Spain. On the other side, a coalition comprising platforms, with a more liberal regulatory stance. They prioritise market flexibility and innovation, contending that excessive regulation could stifle the growth and dynamism of the platform economy, although not seen directly from their statements but in this case, by a reversal of logic. These differing beliefs create a fundamental rift between the coalitions, shaping their approaches to advocacy and influencing their strategies in the legislative process.

5.3 Gender Dimension

Overall, the analysis revealed a scant amount of direct references to gender issues, indicating a notable gap in the explicit consideration of gender within the available data, with no data to be analysed for Spain, since no gender specific themes were labeled on the selection of the analysed data items. The single mention of gender based on the analysed Spanish sources was found in the statement of Yolanda Díaz, Second Vice-President of the Government of Spain and Minister for Work and Social Economy, who stated that the proposal for the Platform Work Directive is “*a breakthrough for men and women working on digital platform*” (“The ministry of work reaches an agreement...,” 2023). While this reference to gender by Yolanda Díaz appears minor, it is crucial in the context of labor discussions. The gender of workers is overlooked when stakeholder refer to neutral term of "platform workers".

For Estonia, not many sources even referenced any gender related topics regarding the Platform Work Directive or platform work as well but sufficient information is available for the analysis. I delved into the specific instances where the reviewed data pieces were labeled as “Gendered challenges”. Moreover, through the interviews with the Estonian stakeholders, EAKL and MKM, I had an opportunity to directly ask for an input about the gender dimension.

One article was found to describe the experiences of female food delivery couriers in Estonia, shared by Delfi. In the article, safety risks are mentioned for the taxi drivers but otherwise no significant challenges were noticed by the females who shared their experiences with the News portal Delfi (“Vaba Valik...,” 2022). Another source that may shed the light on demographics of platform work in Estonia, is the Platform Work 2021 survey that was mentioned in both of the interviews as well. It provides us with the passage indicating that generally platform work is adopted only slightly differently among genders but with some differences based on the type of work (Vallistu & Pirits, 2021). It was further elaborated that *“to some point the income may depend”* on what kind of work is being performed by platform workers (M.-H. Rahumets, personal communication, May 13, 2024), although the gender pay gap data is currently not available for platform work.

Regarding the final proposal of the directive, it lacked having many specific provisions addressing gender equality or challenges related to gender. Although earlier versions indicated a proposal to include measures against gender-based violence, these were ultimately excluded from the final document but the gender equality is mentioned throughout the document (“2021/0414(COD) Events”, n.d.). Looking back at the gendered challenges of platform work identified in the theoretical part, the statement that “workers have the right to fair and equal treatment” highlights that the text of the Directive that was adopted by Parliament partially tackles unequal treatment challenges, as well as intersectional discrimination (Ibid). However, this omission of more specific provisions highlights a gap in addressing gender-specific issues within the legislative framework, underscoring the need for a more inclusive approach to policy-making. The interviews confirmed the premise that the gendered dimension was not considered much during the policy-making process on the level of national discussions in Estonia, as well as on the EU level, nor has been advocated for by any specific coalitions, or stakeholders.

“...and I can’t recall that the gender question, gender equality question, was raised a lot during the negotiations. I think the main perspectives were very platform-specific and labour law specific, so that kind, of regarding that directive, was a bit at the background.” (M.-H. Rahumets, personal communication, May 13, 2024)

Another idea that was repeated in both interviews was regarding the directive being only the “first stage” in the process of making the platform economy regulated more clearly, and that potentially more focus on gender will be included on later stages, after the directive comes through the scrutiny on the EU level, and then will be included in the national legislature of the member states, which will take up to two years.

“...when the regulation is in place, after that, maybe there will be something concerning gender issues.” (K. Vask and K. Toomsalu, personal communication, May 10, 2024)

In response to the second research question regarding the incorporation of the gender dimension within the belief systems of different advocacy coalitions, it appears that the gender aspect was not specifically emphasized during national-level negotiations in either Spain or Estonia. A potential explanation for this oversight could be that the presumed shift from misclassified self-employment to recognised employment status under the directive might inadvertently provide platform workers with the rights and protections afforded by regular employment contracts, including adherence to local gender equality regulations. However, this does not directly address the unique gendered challenges faced by those for whom platform work serves as a supplementary income and who are genuinely independent contractors. Thus, while the issue of gender is recognised in the EU and the member states, it has not been prioritised within the directive’s framework, reflecting a gap in advocacy efforts to fully integrate gender considerations into the legislative agenda.

5.4 Comparative Analysis

The empirical findings revealed that while Estonia and Spain both are involved within the discussions around Platform work directive, their approaches show significant contrasts shaped by their distinct advocacy coalitions and belief systems. Despite these differences, the incorporation of gender considerations into platform work policies remains minimal in both countries.

Estonia's advocacy landscape is influenced by a digital-first economic policy, where platform companies align with government bodies to promote a regulatory environment that supports economic flexibility and innovation. These stakeholders advocate for a regulatory framework that underscores the economic benefits of the platform economy, highlighting job creation and technological advancement and the high flexibility for the workers. The prevalent belief among these Estonian coalitions is that market-driven solutions will foster the growth of the digital economy without the need for more regulations.

Conversely, Spain presents a different approach, deeply rooted in traditional labour rights frameworks. In Spain, coalitions formed by labour unions and worker advocacy groups have a substantial influence on policymaking. These groups advocate for a stricter regulatory approach, pushing for platform workers to be classified as employees to ensure they receive comprehensive employment benefits and protections. The belief system in Spain places a high

priority on social equity and the protection of workers' rights, reflecting a broader commitment to safeguarding vulnerable workers within the platform economy.

However, the gender dimension is notably underemphasised in both countries. Despite the varying cultural, economic, and regulatory environments, neither Estonia's nor Spain's coalitions effectively integrate gender considerations into their platform work advocacy. This oversight is significant given the potential of platform work to either perpetuate or mitigate existing gender disparities in the labor market. The findings suggest that while platform work is recognised as an emerging and influential sector, the specific gendered challenges it presents are not being adequately addressed within the current advocacy efforts. This lack of emphasis on gender issues may stem from the prevailing economic ideologies in each country, where market efficiency and technological advancement are seen as paramount. The underlying belief systems within the advocacy coalitions in both countries tend to marginalise gender issues, relegating them to secondary importance in the broader dialogue about platform work regulation. This gap highlights a critical area for future policy development and research, suggesting that more targeted efforts are needed to ensure that gender considerations are integrated into the legislative frameworks governing platform work. By incorporating gender dimension, the EU could potentially improve regulatory environment that not only positively affects technological and economic progress but also promotes values of social justice and gender equality.

5.5 Limitations

This study faces several limitations that could impact the depth and interpretation of the findings. A notable challenge is the uneven availability of about the local negotiations in Spain and Estonia. It seems that some data is not exactly publicly available, although enough to understand the positions of the different actors. This was partially tackled by the contribution of the interviews conducted with the Estonian stakeholders.

The methodological approach of this thesis, which primarily utilises qualitative analysis, also introduces certain limitations. While this approach allows for an exploration of advocacy coalitions, it may overlook broader, quantifiable trends that could be captured through quantitative methods. A solely qualitative focus might limit our ability to generalise our findings or to measure the impact of advocacy more broadly, but currently reliable and comparable quantitative data on platform work in the European Union is missing.

Additionally, personal biases are an inherent part of any research process. My interpretations are influenced by my academic background, personal values, and theoretical

inclinations. To counteract potential biases, I employed triangulation where it was possible, in order to bring different perspectives to the analysis and ensure a more balanced approach.

Considering these limitations, future research could benefit greatly from a mixed-methods approach. Integrating quantitative data could enhance the qualitative insights, offering a more balanced perspective on how advocacy coalitions influence policy outcomes across different settings. For example, employing statistical analysis to measure the direct impacts of policy changes on platform workers, or conducting surveys to see stakeholder satisfaction, could provide a broader understanding of the effectiveness of platform work directives. That will be especially relevant when the Directive reaches the national legislatures, and the exact decision on how to comply is taken.

Acknowledging these limitations highlights the complexities of studying legislative processes across different countries and underscores the need for diverse methodologies. This not only reinforces the validity of the current research but also paves the way for more comprehensive future investigations into labour regulations in the digital economy.

Conclusion

In the current thesis, the exploration of the EU Platform Work Directive, specifically its gender dimensions within the advocacy coalitions, was driven by an objective to identify the various beliefs and divisions that shape the policy-making process regarding platform work in the distinct regulatory environments of Estonia and Spain. The goal was to understand how deeply gender considerations are embedded within the belief systems of different coalitions. In case they are considered at all.

To achieve this objective, the research employed a combination of thematic analysis, using the qualitative data from a variety of sources as well as semi-structured interviews with the key stakeholders. By reiterative analysis of the collected data, this study was able to confirm the main stakeholders, as well as identify the advocacy coalitions within the policy subsystem of platform economy and beliefs behind them.

The findings of this research reveal that, despite the significant impact of the platform economy on the European labor market, gender considerations are often overshadowed by broader discussions. In both countries, we can see two coalitions, one being represented with platforms, and another being represented by trade unions, with some minor variations. The main controversy laying between the coalitions were concerning the various social protections, the correct status of the workers, and the flexibility of platform work that would be affected by the change. In both cases minimal attention was paid to the impacts of platform work on different genders. This oversight persists despite the varied social, economic, and political landscapes of Estonia and Spain.

One of the critical insights from this study is the similarity in how gender issues are marginalised in the policy-making processes of both countries, or, not acknowledged by the policy-makers. Despite Estonia's liberal market policies and Spain's more protective labor legislation, both nations demonstrate a lack of substantial integration of gender perspectives within their respective platform work policies. This observation might represent an initial stage in policy evolution, with the potential for more comprehensive inclusion of gender perspectives in future iterations of platform work regulations. The practical implications of these findings suggest a need for EU-wide directives that not only address the economic dimensions of platform work but also explicitly integrate gender considerations. Such policies would ensure that the benefits of the platform economy are more equitably distributed, supporting a more inclusive approach to economic development. Moreover, these findings contribute to academic literature by highlighting the gaps in current research on the intersection of gender and platform work, suggesting that more focused studies could be needed.

The limitations of this study, primarily its focus on only two EU countries, suggest that the findings, while indicative, may not be universally generalisable across all of the EU member states. Future research could expand on this work by including a broader array of countries with different economic and social policies, and using other sources of data for the analysis. This would not only enhance the validity of the conclusions drawn but also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender is considered, or overlooked, in the formulation of platform work regulations across the EU.

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Appendix 1. Interview structure

Introduction

Hello, and nice to e-meet you. My name is Mariia, I am a master's student in the University of Tartu and currently working on my master's thesis. The topic is concerning policy dynamics and gender dimension of platform economy in the EU and the Platform Work Directive that recently got agreed upon.

For a detailed examination, I've chosen cases of Estonia and Spain as these two vary greatly in their regulative approach. I would like to identify different coalitions shaping the directive, focusing on beliefs behind those actions. Your expertise can provide me with the insight into the advocacy process and understand how the gender dimension is incorporated herein.

Background

- Could you tell me about your job and how is your work related to the working conditions of persons working through digital labour platforms?
- Were you in any way involved in shaping the directive, and how?

Challenges

- What do you think about the working conditions of platform workers?
- How do you feel about the final directive's proposal and the way it tackles the challenges that platform workers are facing?

Gendered challenges

- Have you observed any specifics for platform work in regard to gender? Could you bring an example?
- Do you believe that gender issues are tackled enough by the proposed directive?

Stakeholders and coalitions

- Is there a clear set of actors who have interests in shaping Platform Work Directive in Estonia/Spain?
 - o If yes, who are the key actors? If no, why not?
- Have you observed any coordinated action between those actors? Do you yourself coordinate with any?
- What are the main dividing lines that keep those groups/actors (and you) apart?
 - o Are there any highly controversial matters?
 - o Do you think core values of the groups/actors are different?
 - How exactly? Could you elaborate on that?

Appendix 1 – Continuation

- Do you agree with the current shape of the directive? Do you have any concerns?
 - *What do you think are your main values?*

Gendered dimension

- *Some studies pointed out that the platform work can enhance gender challenges that the traditional economy has, such as gender pay gap or having to combine it with care-taking responsibilities. Do you believe new directive considers the gender dimension enough to help overcome such situations?*
- Have you noticed any actors that would be pushing for considering gender dimension specifically?
 - If yes, who are they?
 - Could you please elaborate on why do you think they are interested in that? What do you think are their main values?

Appendix 2. List of contacted entities

Name	Country	Entity	Contacted	Outcome
The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner	Estonia	Social partner	11/04/2024	Declined
Estonian Labour Law Inspectorate	Estonia	Governmental agency	18/04/2024	No Response
Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre (ENUT)	Estonia	NPO	18/04/2024	No Response
The Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable (EWAR)	Estonia	Network	18/04/2024	No Response
Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL)	Estonia	Trade Union	18/04/2024	No Response
Platform work researcher	Estonia	Academia	21/04/2024	No Response
Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Estonia	Business Association	18/04/2024	No Response
The Estonian Association of Information Technology and Telecommunications (ITL)	Estonia	Business Association	18/04/2024	Declined
Estonian Employers' Confederation	Estonia	Business Association	18/04/2024	No Response
Estonian E-Commerce Association	Estonia	Business Association	18/04/2024	No Response
Ministry of Social Affairs	Estonia	Ministry	18/04/2024	Redirected
Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications	Estonia	Ministry	18/04/2024	Agreed
Riders for Rights	Spain	Workers' movement	21/04/2024	Dropped
Digital Future Society	Spain	Think Tank	18/04/2024	No Response
Institute for Labour Studies	Spain	Academia	21/04/2024	No Response
Spanish Association of the Digital Economy (Adigital)	Spain	Association	21/04/2024	No Response
European Trade Union Confederation	Spain	Trade Union	21/04/2024	Agreed
Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations (CEOE)	Spain	Business Association	21/04/2024	No Response
Confederation of Business Organisations for small and medium enterprises (CEPYME)	Spain	Business Association	21/04/2024	No Response
The Workers' Commissions (CCOO)	Spain	Trade Union	21/04/2024	No Response
The General Union of Workers (UGT)	Country	Trade Union	21/04/2024	No Response
Ministry of Equality	Spain	Ministry	21/04/2024	No Response

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

You have been invited to take part in a semi-structured interview for Master's thesis project on the topic of *"Policy Dynamics and Gender Dimension in the EU Platform Economy: an Analysis of the Platform Work Directive"*, conducted by a Master's student of the "EU-Russia Studies" programme at the University of Tartu in Estonia, Mariia Nedosekova.

The objective of this study is to analyse the policy dynamics and gender dimensions of the EU platform work directive, focusing particularly on how advocacy coalitions' beliefs shape the policy-making process within the contexts of Estonia and Spain.

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Please, sign the informed consent form if you decide to participate. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time without the need to justify your decision and without any consequences.

The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Interview audio recordings and transcripts will be stored on a password-protected laptop. The recording will be erased after the defense, in July, 2024. The data will be used solely for scientific purposes of the given research.

If you have any questions, please contact Mariia Nedosekova (mariia.nedosekova@ut.ee) or the academic supervisors, Stefano Braghiroli (stefano.braghiroli@ut.ee) and Pirjo Turk (pirjo.turk@ut.ee).

Giving Consent

I, _____, have read and understood the information provided above and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation in the research project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. I give the right to store, process and analyse my answers. I agree to be quoted in the text of the thesis directly, using my name.

Signature, date

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