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## **Platform Economy and Labour**

The Impact of the Platform Economy on Labour Market Institutions

**Supervisor:**

Prof. Marco Arlotti.

**Final Report by:**

Khushi tewatia

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how labour market institutions shape the regulation and consequences of platform work in Italy and Spain, with particular attention to employment classification, algorithmic management, and labour-market dualization. It argues that the platform economy should be understood not simply as a form of digital innovation, but as a mode of labour coordination in which market intermediation and managerial control increasingly converge. Using a comparative institutional approach, the study analyses legal frameworks, policy developments, and labour-market indicators to assess how the two countries respond to platform-mediated work. (OECD, ILO and European Union, 2023; Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022)

The findings show that Spain has developed a more explicit and coherent regulatory response, especially through the Riders' Law and stronger transparency provisions, while Italy has relied more on fragmented judicial and enforcement-based intervention. The thesis concludes that the effects of platformisation are not technologically predetermined but depend on the capacity of labour institutions to identify hidden control, reduce misclassification, and extend effective protection to workers. More broadly, the study highlights that the future governance of platform work will depend on how law, collective bargaining, and public institutions adapt to increasingly algorithmic forms of managerial authority. (Todolí-Signes, 2021; European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurofound, 2025a)

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Digital platforms have become an increasingly important way of organizing work across Europe, especially in sectors such as food delivery, ride-hailing, and online task-based labour. (OECD, ILO and European Commission, 2023; Baiocco et al., 2022). Their importance lies not only in the spread of app-based services, but in the fact that platforms can coordinate labour, structure access to tasks, monitor performance, and shape remuneration through software-mediated systems. For this reason, the platform economy is not simply a new branch of the digital economy, but a distinct form of economic coordination in which market intermediation and managerial authority increasingly overlap.

Recent international and European research has shown that platform work raises questions that go beyond innovation and convenience. (OECD, ILO and European Union, 2023) frame digital platform employment as an issue of job quality, employment status, and worker protection, while the Joint Research Centre shows that algorithmic systems can perform managerial functions such as task allocation, instruction, evaluation, and sanctions. (OECD, ILO and European Commission, 2023; Baiocco et al., 2022; ILO, 2024). This means that platformisation must be analyzed not only as a technological development, but as a transformation in the labour process and in the institutional governance of work.

The topic is especially important in Europe because platform labour interacts with labour-market institutions that were largely designed around the standard employment relationship. When workers are formally classified as self-employed but are substantively dependent on platform systems for task access, income generation, and performance evaluation, institutional tensions emerge around misclassification, social protection, collective bargaining, and transparency. These tensions have made platform work one of the clearest testing grounds for the capacity of labour law and industrial relations systems to respond to software-mediated control.

## 1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The core problem addressed by this thesis is the widening gap between formal autonomy and substantive dependence in platform-mediated work. (European Labour Authority, 2025; Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022). Platform firms may present themselves as neutral intermediaries and as independent contractors, yet the underlying labour process may still be shaped by ratings, behavioral penalties, task-allocation systems, pricing structures, and opaque algorithmic procedures. As a result, traditional indicators of subordination become harder to identify, and labour protections that depend on clear employment classification become more difficult to apply.

This problem does not produce the same outcomes in every country. Spain has moved towards a more explicit regulatory response through the Riders' Law, which combines a presumption of employment in digital delivery work with algorithmic information rights, while Italy has relied more heavily on courts, enforcement bodies, and fragmented corrective intervention to address false autonomy and hidden control. The contrast between the two countries suggests that the consequences of platformisation are institutionally mediated rather than technologically predetermined. (Todolí-Signes, 2021; European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurofound, 2025a).

## 1.3 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The main aim of this thesis is to analyze how labour-market institutions shape the regulation and consequences of platform work in Italy and Spain, with particular attention to employment classification, algorithmic management, and labour-market dualization. (OECD, ILO and European Union, 2023; European Labour Authority, 2025). More specifically, the thesis asks how the platform economy should be conceptualized in labour-market terms, how institutional frameworks mediate the effects of platformisation, and why Italy and Spain have developed different regulatory trajectories in response to similar pressures.

The thesis is guided by three research questions:

- How should the platform economy be defined and analyzed within a labour-market and political-economy framework?

- How do labour-market institutions mediate the effects of platform work and algorithmic management?
- Why do Italy and Spain display different institutional responses to platform-mediated labor?

These questions are linked by a common hypothesis: platform capitalism does not weaken labour protections automatically but does so where institutional frameworks are unable to identify, classify, and regulate digitally mediated forms of control. (European Labour Authority, 2025; Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022)

## 1.4 CASE SELECTION AND SCOPE

Italy and Spain are selected because they provide a meaningful comparison between two Southern European labour markets that face similar pressures of precarious work, non-standard employment, and platform expansion, (Todolí-Signes, 2021; European Labour Authority, 2025) but have responded through different institutional pathways. Spain is particularly important because its Riders' Law explicitly links employment classification to algorithmic transparency, while Italy is analytically valuable because it reveals the limits of a more fragmented and litigation-driven response.

The thesis also includes for Italy a specific focus on the case of the Emilia-Romagna region in order to show that platformisation is shaped not only by national law but also by broader labour-market environments. (Regione Emilia-Romagna, Agenzia Regionale per il Lavoro, 2025). Regional labour-market data indicate that Emilia-Romagna performs more strongly than the Italian national average on employment and unemployment indicators, (European Commission, Eurostat, 2021) making it a useful reference point for considering how subnational institutional capacity may condition the effects of precarious digital work. The scope of the thesis is deliberately focused. It does not attempt to cover all forms of platform labour across Europe, nor does it rely on original survey or interview evidence. Instead, it concentrates on the institutional governance of platform work through legal, policy, and comparative labour-market analysis.

## 1.5 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is relevant for three reasons. First, it contributes to ongoing debates on the platform economy by treating it as a problem of labour governance rather than only a question of innovation or business-model change. Instead of focusing primarily on technological disruption or entrepreneurial success stories, the thesis foregrounds how platforms reorganize authority, responsibility, and risk in the labour relationship, and how this reorganization is mediated by existing legal and institutional arrangements. Second, it connects the literature on algorithmic management to comparative political economy by showing that control embedded in software has different consequences depending on how labour-market institutions classify and regulate it. By systematically relating algorithmic forms of monitoring, evaluation, and allocation to cross-national differences in employment law, collective bargaining, and social protection, the study situates digital management techniques within broader varieties of capitalism. Third, it contributes to the comparative discussion on Italy and Spain by showing that the same platform logic can generate different regulatory and distributive outcomes when embedded in different institutional settings. In doing so, the thesis offers an integrated account of how platform expansion interacts with pre-existing dualization, enforcement capacity, and institutional path dependencies in two cases often treated as similar but which diverge in important respects.

The study also has policy relevance. If platform work continues to expand while employment status remains ambiguous and algorithmic systems remain opaque, workers may face intensified income instability, weaker bargaining power, and fragmented access to social protection. The risks are not limited to a narrow segment of gig workers; they can spill over into adjacent sectors as platform-like management practices diffuse more widely and as firms experiment with hybrid forms of contracting. Against this backdrop, the thesis argues that understanding how institutions can render hidden control visible is essential not only for academic analysis, but also for designing effective regulatory tools, enforcement strategies, and collective bargaining responses. By clarifying where institutional protections are robust and where they are eroded or bypassed, the study provides a framework that can inform debates on presumptions of employment, algorithmic transparency, and the extension of collectively negotiated rights to platform-mediated work. In this sense,

the relevance of the study lies in its ability to connect micro-level labour processes to macro-level institutional change and to identify concrete levers through which the future of decent work in the digital economy can be shaped.

## **1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter II reviews the literature on platform economy, labour-market institutions, algorithmic management, digital Taylorism, and institutional erosion. Chapter III develops the methodology and explains the comparative institutional framework, dataset structure, feature engineering, and performance metrics used in the study. Chapter IV presents the analysis and results, focusing on employment-status misclassification, institutional disruption, labour-market dualization, protection gaps, and regional variation. Chapter V discusses the findings, outlines theoretical implications and policy recommendations, identifies the limits of the research, and presents the final conclusions of the thesis.

This introduction establishes the central argument that runs through the study as a whole: the platform economy matters not simply because it digitizes exchange, but because it reorganizes labour through the intersection of algorithmic control, legal ambiguity, and institutional asymmetry. The chapters that follow examine how that transformation unfolds, and why its consequences differ between Italy and Spain.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 PLATFORM ECONOMY DEFINITIONS AND BUSINESS MODELS

Literature increasingly defines the platform economy not as a broad synonym for digitalization, but as a specific mode of economic coordination in which digital infrastructures mediate transactions while also organizing labour relations. The OECD/ILO/European Union handbook is particularly useful because it conceptualizes digital platform employment and work through three dimensions—type of production, type of platform, and employment status—thereby making the category analytically operational rather than merely descriptive (OECD/ILO/European Union, 2023). In political-economy terms, this definition is important because it shifts attention from consumer-facing innovation to the institutional organization of labour and power. Platforms do not simply match supply and demand; as JRC research on algorithmic management shows, they may also assign tasks, communicate instructions, evaluate performance, and allocate rewards or sanctions, which means that platform business models combine market intermediation with programmable forms of managerial control (Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022). For the purposes of this thesis, the platform economy is therefore understood in a labour-market sense as work mediated by digital platforms in which labour input is coordinated, monitored, or evaluated through digital procedures. This narrower definition is preferable because it keeps the analysis focused on employment status, labour law, institutional protection, and the governance of managerial authority, all of which are central to the later comparison between Italy and Spain.)

**Table II.1. Core analytical dimensions of the platform economy**

| <b>Dimension</b>         | <b>Analytical content</b>                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Object of analysis       | Digital platform employment and work should be distinguished by type of production, type of digital platform, and employment status. |
| Organizing principle     | Platforms can act not only as intermediaries but as coordinators of labour through automated allocation, evaluation, and sanctions.  |
| Source of economic power | Power increasingly derives from control over data, rules, and software-mediated procedures.                                          |
| Labor-market relevance   | Platform work is a problem of job quality, worker protection, and employment classification, not only of innovation.                 |

Source: Own elaboration based on OECD, ILO and European Commission (2023) and Baiocco et al. (2022).

Table II.1 clarifies why the platform economy cannot be reduced to a neutral digital marketplace. The literature instead suggests that the platform model is a hybrid institutional form in which contractual externalization and managerial internalization coexist, allowing firms to disclaim the employment relationship while preserving substantial influence over the labour process. (OECD, ILO and European Commission, 2023; Baiocco et al., 2022).

### 2.1.1 Types of labour platforms

The literature distinguishes among labour platforms primarily by the way work is spatially organized and by the degree of operational control embedded in the platform architecture. (OECD, ILO and European

Commission, 2023; Brancati, Pesola and Fernández-Macías, 2020). One major distinction separates location-based labour platforms, in which services must be performed in a specific physical place, from online labour platforms, in which tasks are completed remotely through the internet. This distinction is analytically relevant because it affects the forms of surveillance, work intensity, and legal contestation associated with each type of platform work.

Location-based platforms include ride-hailing, food delivery, domestic services, and local care work. In these cases, the digital interface coordinates labour that remains materially tied to urban space, time-sensitive logistics, and physical mobility. Online labour platforms, by contrast, mediate freelance tasks, coding, design, writing, and microtasks that can be delivered from any location, often across national borders. The labour process in online platforms may be less visibly tied to local regulation, but it remains shaped by ranking systems, customer reviews, and algorithmic task allocation.

The distinction between location-based and online labour platforms is especially useful in the European context because the former have generated the clearest legal disputes over employment status and subordination. (Brancati, Pesola and Fernández-Macías, 2020; European Labour Authority, 2025). Delivery platforms in particular have become the central empirical case in both Spain and Italy because the combination of digital coordination, time pressure, and physical presence makes managerial control more visible than in many forms of remote freelance work. (Brancati, Pesola and Fernández-Macías, 2020; European Labour Authority, 2025). This explains why platform regulation in both countries has concentrated heavily on riders rather than on all categories of platform labour equally.

The literature also suggests that typologies based purely on sectors can be misleading. (Baiocco et al., 2022; OECD, ILO, and European Commission, 2023). A more useful distinction is whether the platform merely facilitates contact or whether it actively structures work through shift allocation, pricing rules, reputational metrics, and algorithmic assessment. From this perspective, delivery platforms have become analytically central not because they represent the whole platform economy, but because they reveal in concentrated form how digital intermediation can shade into labour governance. (Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022; European Labour Authority, 2025)

**Table II.2. Types of labour platforms and institutional relevance**

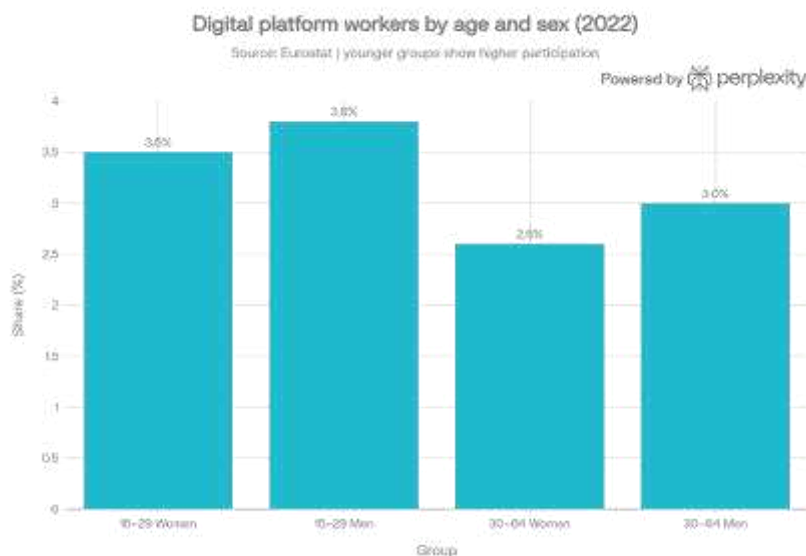
| Type                                   | Defining feature                                                                                      | Main institutional issue                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location-based platforms               | Work must be performed in a specific physical place; examples include ride-hailing and food delivery. | Greater exposure to local labour law, urban enforcement, and visible subordination conflicts. |
| Online platforms                       | Work is delivered remotely through the internet; examples include freelance and microtask platforms.  | Greater jurisdictional fragmentation and weaker visibility of control.                        |
| High-control platforms                 | The platform allocates tasks, evaluates performance, or influences pay and future access to work.     | Employment classification becomes contested because control is embedded in software.          |
| Lower-control intermediation platforms | The platform provides matching functions with weaker ongoing labour coordination.                     | Labour-law issues may be less immediate, though asymmetries can still persist.                |

Source: Own elaboration based on OECD, ILO, and European Commission (2023) and Brancati, Pesola and Fernández-Macías (2020).

Table II.2 summarizes the main types of labour platforms and their institutional relevance.

A demographic profile of platform work also helps situate the typology. Eurostat's statistics indicate that in 2022 in Europe participation in digital platform work was higher among younger people than among those aged 30–64, with the reported shares reaching 3.8% for men aged 15–29 and 3.5% for women aged 15–29, compared with 3.0% and 2.6% respectively among older groups.

**Figure II.1. Digital platform workers by age and sex in Europe, 2022.**



Source: European Commission, Eurostat (2023).

This figure is relevant to the platform typology because it suggests that platform labour is disproportionately associated with labour-market entry, early-career insecurity, or supplementary work among younger cohorts. Literature therefore encourages interpreting platform work not as a marginal technological curiosity, but as part of broader transformations in labour-market segmentation and the normalization of precarious income strategies. (European Commission, Eurostat, 2023; Brancati, Pesola and Fernández-Macías, 2020).

## 2.2 LABOUR MARKET INSTITUTIONS FRAMEWORK

An institutional approach is necessary because the consequences of platformisation depend on the legal and collective structures through which work is classified, represented, and protected. The labour market should therefore be analyzed not as a passive background to platform innovation, but as the institutional field through which digital business models are either constrained or normalized.

Within this framework, labour market institutions include employment-status rules, social protection, collective bargaining, worker representation, and rights to information about algorithmic decision-making.

This broader conception is necessary because formal contract labels often conceal actual dependence.

Platform firms may classify workers as autonomous while still shaping scheduling, performance discipline, and access to future work through digital systems.

Spain and Italy illustrate two distinct but related institutional trajectories. Spain's Riders' Law is especially significant because it combines a presumption of dependent employment for delivery-platform riders with a right for workers' representatives to be informed about the parameters, rules, and instructions underlying algorithms that affect working conditions. (Todolí-Signes, 2021; European Labour Authority, 2025). In theoretical terms, this means that Spanish regulation treats opacity itself as a labour-market issue rather than as a merely technical matter.

Italy has followed a more fragmented path, with courts and enforcement bodies playing a significant role in identifying the limits of nominal self-employment. (European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurofound, 2025).

The Italian debate has focused on whether platform control over availability, work organization, and remuneration is compatible with autonomous work, highlighting a more reactive and litigation-driven mode of labour-market governance.

The broader institutional context also matters because platform work interacts with pre-existing labour market dualization. In Spain, temporary employment declined from an average of 26.6% in 2017–2019 to 15.4% in the first three quarters of 2025, showing that institutional reform can reshape one traditional channel of segmentation. (European Commission, Eurostat, 2021). Yet lower formal temporariness does not automatically eliminate insecurity if precariousness is reorganized through false autonomy, unstable task allocation, or opaque performance management.

**Table II.3. Institutional dimensions for analyzing platform labour.**

| <b>Institutional dimension</b> | <b>Why it matters in platform work</b>                                                               | <b>Comparative relevance</b>                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Employment classification      | Platforms may classify workers as self-employed despite substantial control over the labour process. | Spain moved toward a statutory presumption in delivery work; Italy relied more on adjudication and enforcement. |
| Worker representation          | Collective voice is crucial where rules are unilateral and opaque.                                   | Spain linked algorithmic information rights to workers' representatives.                                        |
| Transparency rights            | Algorithmic governance creates information asymmetries that weaken bargaining power.                 | Spanish reform explicitly recognized the need to disclose algorithmic parameters affecting work.                |
| Enforcement pathway            | Rights depend on the capacity to identify and sanction disguised control.                            | Italy shows the importance of courts and prosecutors where ex ante regulation remains fragmented.               |

Source: Own elaboration based on Todolí-Signes (2021), European Labour Authority (2025), and Eurofound (2025).

Table II.3 provides a summary of the institutional dimensions used to analyze platform labour comparatively.

This institutional framework guides the comparative analysis developed later in the thesis. The decisive issue is not whether digital platforms exist, but whether labour institutions can make hidden control visible, classify work accurately, and protect workers against the externalization of risk through technical and contractual design.

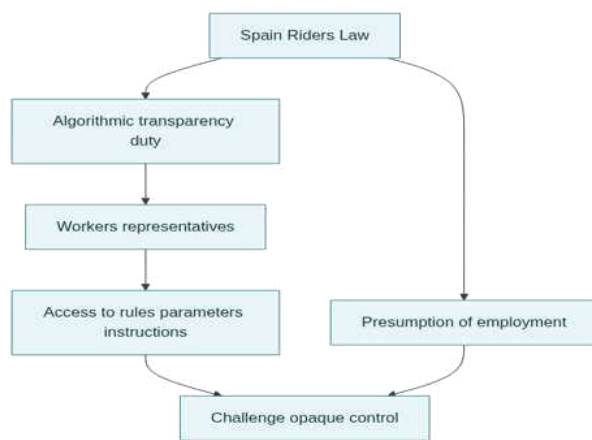
## 2.3 ALGORITHMIC MANAGEMENT AND WORKER CONTROL

The concept of algorithmic management has become central to literature because it captures a transformation in managerial authority rather than a simple technological improvement in efficiency. According to the JRC, algorithmic management refers to the use of computer-programmed procedures to coordinate labour input, including the allocation of shifts and tasks, the communication of instructions, the monitoring of performance, and the distribution of rewards or sanctions. This definition is especially important because it reveals that algorithmic systems can exercise recognizably managerial functions even where the employment relationship is formally denied. (Baiocco et al., 2022)

This literature rejects the idea that algorithms are neutral tools. (Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022). Instead, it shows that digital systems can reorganize the pace of work, intensify monitoring, reshape communication, and alter industrial relations by embedding decision rules inside proprietary software. One consequence is that worker control becomes less visible but not necessarily weaker; in many cases, the exercise of authority is simply displaced from human supervisors to data-driven systems whose operation is difficult for workers to inspect or contest. (Baiocco et al., 2022).

The relevance of algorithmic management for a political-economy perspective lies in this displacement of authority. It allows firms to combine the discourse of flexibility and innovation with highly standardized forms of coordination that influence effort, responsiveness, and income. In that sense, algorithmic management is the hinge connecting business models to labour law and institutional erosion, because it transforms digital architecture into a mechanism of workplace governance.

**Figure II.3. Spain's Riders' Law: employment presumption and algorithmic transparency.**



Source: Own elaboration based on Todolí-Signes (2021) and European Labour Authority (2025).

The figure summarizes why Spain is such an important case in the literature. The law links employment status and algorithmic disclosure rather than treating them as separate problems, thereby recognizing that worker subordination in digital labour markets cannot be understood without attention to the coded rules that govern access to work and working conditions.

### 2.3.1 Digital Taylorism theories

The most influential critical interpretation of algorithmic management is the theory of digital Taylorism. A recent systematic review argues that algorithmic management both restrains and enables worker autonomy, creating a complex digital version of Taylorism in which new forms of organizational power emerge through software, metrics, and constant data capture. This perspective highlights how algorithmic systems translate managerial objectives into continuous monitoring, individualized nudging, and performance comparison, thereby reorganizing the labour process without always relying on direct human supervision. The argument is particularly convincing for the purposes of this thesis because it explains how platform firms can present

themselves as neutral, flexible marketplaces while simultaneously imposing detailed forms of standardization, evaluation, and discipline on workers.

The Taylorism analogy should not be read as a simplistic claim that digital labour reproduces early factory methods. Rather, it indicates a structural continuity: labour is decomposed, measured, paced, and disciplined, but these functions are now embedded in digital infrastructures rather than in face-to-face supervision alone. Task allocation, performance evaluation, and sanctioning can be executed through opaque algorithms that operate in real time and at scale, often leaving workers with only partial information about how decisions are made or how they might contest them. The result is a modern labour process in which software can perform managerial tasks continuously, across dispersed territories and heterogeneous legal frameworks, while maintaining the rhetorical façade of autonomy and entrepreneurial opportunity. In the comparative context of Italy and Spain, this continuity matters because it interacts with different national regimes of employment protection and collective bargaining, shaping how far digital Taylorism can penetrate and how strongly it is contested.

A further contribution of the digital Taylorism perspective is its treatment of the autonomy paradox. Workers may appear formally autonomous because they choose when to log in, use their own equipment, or are contractually classified as self-employed, yet this apparent freedom can be constrained by acceptance rates, ratings, response-time expectations, or algorithmically determined access to future tasks. Literature therefore distinguishes procedural flexibility from substantive autonomy: workers may enjoy some discretion over when to connect to the platform, but the conditions under which they can earn a livelihood are tightly controlled and continuously optimized by algorithms. In this thesis, that distinction is crucial for understanding employment-status misclassification and institutional erosion: legal frameworks often fixate on formal indicators of autonomy, while the actual labour process is governed by digital Taylorist mechanisms that erode the substance of independent work.

**Table II.4. From Taylorist control to algorithmic control**

| <b>Analytical element</b> | <b>Classical control logic</b>                  | <b>Algorithmic reformulation</b>                                              |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Task coordination         | Work is broken down and planned by management.  | Tasks and shifts can be assigned automatically through software.              |
| Discipline                | Compliance is ensured through supervision.      | Monitoring and evaluation become continuous and less visible.                 |
| Pace of work              | Management seeks to regulate timing and effort. | Digital systems influence or determine timing, response, and throughput.      |
| Autonomy                  | Standardization narrows discretion.             | Formal flexibility coexists with coded constraints and future work penalties. |

Source: Own elaboration based on Baiocco et al. (2022).

Table II.4 demonstrates that digital Taylorism is not merely a metaphorical label. It captures a substantive continuity between older efforts to separate conception from execution and newer forms of software-based command, while also highlighting the novel importance of opacity, real-time surveillance, and data extraction in current labour governance.

### 2.3.2 Institutional erosion mechanisms

Literature on institutional erosion investigates how platform and algorithmic business models weaken the effective operation of labour protections. (European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurofound, 2025c; Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022). The JRC identifies several mechanisms that are particularly significant: the alteration of industrial relations, the encouragement of outsourcing, and the generation of information

asymmetries between firms and workers. These mechanisms are central because they enable platforms to exercise influence over labour without necessarily accepting the institutional obligations associated with employer status. (Baiocco et al., 2022; European Labour Authority, 2025).

The first mechanism is classificatory ambiguity. When a platform presents itself as a neutral intermediary while structuring work through allocation systems, rating tools, or behavioral penalties, traditional indicators of subordination become less transparent. Spain's Riders' Law is significant because it responded directly to this ambiguity through a presumption of employment in digital delivery work, whereas Italy's experience shows how unresolved ambiguity can displace conflict into litigation and enforcement. (European Labour Authority, 2025; Todolí-Signes, 2021)

The second mechanism is opacity. If workers cannot inspect or understand the rules by which they are ranked, penalized, or granted access to future work, collective contestation becomes more difficult. This is why algorithmic transparency is not simply a procedural add-on in literature, but a condition for effective labour rights and collective representation. Without information rights, worker subordination may persist behind the façade of technical objectivity. (Todolí-Signes, 2021; Eurofound, 2025).

The third mechanism is the fragmentation of collective regulation. Algorithmic management can individualize performance and behavioral adaptation, while platform structures may obscure who the relevant employer is or shift responsibility across subcontracting chains and technical interfaces. In such settings, institutional erosion occurs not only through formal deregulation but through the redesign of control into dispersed socio-technical systems that conventional labour institutions struggle to govern. (Eurofound, 2025; European Labour Authority, 2025)

Italy is particularly instructive in this regard because it illustrates how fragmented institutional responses can generate partial but uneven protections. Judicial and prosecutorial interventions may reveal hidden control and sanction abuse, but they do so reactively and often after exploitative practices have already become entrenched. From a comparative perspective, this suggests that institutional resilience depends not only on the presence of formal rights, but on the ability of legal and collective institutions to identify algorithmic

governance before it solidifies as an accepted business norm. (European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurofound, 2025).

The literature reviewed in this chapter therefore converges on a common analytical proposition: the platform economy becomes politically consequential not simply because it digitizes exchange, but because it fuses algorithmic control, classificatory ambiguity, and institutional asymmetry in ways that can erode labour protections unless checked by effective rules on employment status, transparency, representation, and enforcement. This conclusion provides the conceptual basis for the methodology chapter, which will operationalize these dimensions in the comparative analysis of Italy and Spain. (OECD, ILO and European Commission, 2023; Baiocco et al., 2022; European Labour Authority, 2025).

## 3. METHODOLOGY: INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

### FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 DATA COLLECTION (PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES)

This thesis adopts a comparative institutional methodology to examine how labour market institutions shape the regulation of platform work and algorithmic management in Italy and Spain. (OECD, ILO and European Union, 2023; European Labour Authority, 2025). Comparative institutional analysis is appropriate because it treats economic outcomes as products of specific institutional arrangements rather than as neutral market results making it especially suitable for the study of labour-market governance, employment classification, and regulatory variation across national cases. The analysis also includes a specific analysis of the case of Emilia-Romagna region as a regional reference point within Italy, not as a fully separate case, but as a subnational illustration of how institutional capacity may also vary within the same national framework. This is especially relevant in a country like Italy, where regional variations in labour-market dynamics are significant.

The materials used in this chapter were collected from publicly available institutional, legal, and statistical sources published mainly between 2020 and 2025, with the OECD/ILO/European Union handbook (2023), Eurostat labour-market and digital-platform statistics, Eurofound's platform-work and collective-bargaining resources, JRC publications, the European Labour Authority's 2025 report on misclassification, and relevant national and regional documents forming the core evidence base.

The empirical strategy combines structured documentary coding with secondary statistical evidence. The principal sources are OECD, Eurostat, Eurofound, the European Labour Authority, JRC publications, ILO materials, and national legal and policy documents. (OECD, ILO and European Commission, 2023; European Labour Authority, 2025; Baiocco et al., 2022). These sources are selected because they provide conceptually standardized definitions of platform work, cross-country labour-market indicators, and reliable documentation on employment classification, collective bargaining, and algorithmic management. In

particular, the (OECD/ILO/European Union handbook) is used as the baseline conceptual source because it identifies platform work through the type of production, the type of platform, and status in employment, thereby allowing consistent comparative mapping across cases.

The primary dimension of the research lies in the author's original coding of institutional documents rather than in interviews or survey work. Statutes, court decisions, administrative texts, collective agreements, and regulatory reports are transformed into a structured dataset through a common coding protocol. This approach is methodologically appropriate for a bachelor's thesis because it produces original analytical work while maintaining a realistic evidentiary scope. Instead of claiming to observe worker experiences directly, the study focuses on the institutional architecture that shapes those experiences.

The data is organized into four source groups. The first consists of legal-institutional materials, including legislation, directives, judicial rulings, and enforcement documents relevant to platform work and misclassification. The second consists of statistical materials from (Eurostat and OECD) used to contextualize labour-market segmentation and vulnerability. The third consists of governance materials dealing with digital monitoring and algorithmic management. The fourth consists of industrial-relations materials, including bargaining-coverage reports and institutional descriptions of collective bargaining systems. This four-part structure ensures that the comparative analysis captures the interaction between law, labour-market structure, digital control, and worker representation.

**Table III.1. Data collection architecture**

| Source family        | Main materials                                            | Methodological purpose                                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Legal-institutional  | Statutes, case law, directives, enforcement documents     | Identify classification rules and institutional obligations. |
| Statistical          | OECD and Eurostat labour indicators                       | Compare labour-market segmentation and context.              |
| Governance           | JRC and Eurofound studies on algorithmic management       | Code forms digital control and opacity.                      |
| Industrial relations | Bargaining reports, coverage data, institutional profiles | Assess collective institutional reach.                       |

Source: Own elaboration based on OECD, ILO and European Commission (2023), European Labour Authority (2025), Eurofound (2025), and Baiocco et al. (2022).

Table III.1 shows that the methodology is explicitly multi-source. This is necessary because platform labour cannot be adequately explained through legal doctrine alone or through labour-market statistics alone; the empirical problem lies precisely in the interaction between employment status, managerial control, and institutional protection. (OECD, ILO and European Commission, 2023; European Labour Authority, 2025).

### 3.1.1 Comparative dataset structure

The dataset is structured as a country-level institutional matrix. The unit of analysis is not the individual worker but the institutional regime governing platform work, which makes this design suitable for comparative political economy. Each case is coded across a common set of variables covering labour-market context, employment-status rules, algorithmic-management regulation, collective bargaining capacity, and

institutional performance. Italy and Spain form the two main country cases, while Emilia-Romagna is used selectively to illuminate regional variation within the Italian framework where relevant. (OECD, ILO and European Commission, 2023; European Labour Authority, 2025).

The dataset contains five analytical blocks. The first block records contextual labour-market indicators, such as unemployment and temporary employment, in order to capture background segmentation. The second records platform-governance variables, including legal recognition of platform work and references to algorithmic management. The third records classification variables, such as presumptions of employment, tests of subordination, and institutional pathways for reclassification. The fourth records industrial-relations variables, including bargaining coverage and worker representation mechanisms. The fifth records the institutional metrics constructed in this thesis, including the dualization index, protection coverage score, and bargaining-effectiveness score.

This structure creates a bridge between qualitative institutional analysis and modest quantitative comparison. The objective is not econometric inference but transparent comparative reasoning. By converting documentary evidence into a common matrix, the methodology reduces the risk of descriptive asymmetry between country chapters and makes the comparison more systematic and replicable.

## **3.2 INSTITUTIONAL FEATURE ENGINEERING**

Institutional feature engineering refers to the transformation of legal and governance characteristics into comparable analytical variables. This step is necessary because platform work is regulated through heterogeneous combinations of labour law, judicial interpretation, collective bargaining, and algorithmic governance, which cannot be compared systematically if they remain at the level of narrative description alone. The methodology therefore decomposes each country's regulatory framework into discrete institutional features that can be coded, compared, and aggregated.

The coding process follows a principle of institutional decomposition. Instead of describing Italy and Spain as unified regulatory models, the methodology separates their systems into specific features, including employment presumptions, subordination criteria, algorithmic transparency rights, enforcement pathways,

bargaining reach, and degrees of institutional incorporation. This approach is consistent with comparative institutional analysis, which treats institutional systems as combinations of interacting rules rather than single legal acts.

Each feature is coded ordinally, usually on a 0–2 scale. A score of 0 indicates absence or extreme weakness, one indicates partial or uneven institutionalization, and two indicates clearer formalization or broader institutional reach. Ordinal coding is appropriate because the underlying material is documentary rather than continuous numeric data, yet it still permits disciplined comparison and limited index construction. This coding logic is also preferable to binary classification because labour institutions often exist in partial or hybrid forms.

A key coding principle is that factual organization takes precedence over formal contractual labels. The study on employment misclassification emphasizes that legal assessment increasingly depends on factual indicators of direction and control, including service standardization, worker selection, rating systems, payment control, and integration into the platform’s business model. (European Labour Authority, 2025). The methodology therefore treats these factual dimensions as analytically central rather than secondary to contract form.

**Table III.2. Core engineered institutional features.**

| Feature                  | Coding logic                                                  | Relevance                                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Employment presumption   | 0 = absent, 1 = indirect/limited, 2 = explicit presumption    | Measures ease of reclassification.            |
| Algorithmic transparency | 0 = absent, 1 = partial, 2 = explicit rights                  | Measures visibility of digital control.       |
| Enforcement pathway      | 0 = fragmented, 1 = mixed, 2 = stronger institutional pathway | Measures practical enforceability.            |
| Bargaining reach         | 0 = narrow, 1 = medium, 2 = broad                             | Measures collective incorporation.            |
| Control intensity        | 0 = limited, 1 = partial, 2 = high                            | Measures degree of functional employer power. |

Source: Own elaboration based on European Labour Authority (2025), Todolí-Signes (2021), and Eurofound materials.

Table III.2 summarizes the main engineered variables used in the study. Their function is not to erase institutional complexity, but to create a disciplined basis for comparing Spain’s more explicit legislative strategy with Italy’s more fragmented and adjudicative trajectory.

### 3.3 INSTITUTIONAL INDICATOR SELECTION

Indicator selection follows three criteria: conceptual relevance, comparability across the two country cases, and documentary observability. An indicator is included only when it directly serves the research question, can be identified in both national contexts, and can be coded using transparent evidence from legal, policy,

or institutional documents. This is particularly important in platform-work research, where theoretically attractive variables often lack cross-country consistency.

The indicators are grouped into three families. The first captures classification and control, including subordination tests, employment presumptions, and forms of algorithmic direction. The second captures institutional protection, including social-protection access, transparency rights, and collective bargaining. The third captures labour-market context, including unemployment and temporary employment as background indicators of segmentation. This structure reflects the thesis claim that the platform economy must be analyzed both as a direct regulatory issue and as a phenomenon embedded in broader labour-market institutions.

### 3.3.1 Methods of institutional comparison

The chapter combines structured focused comparison, ordinal scoring, and process-informed interpretation. Structured focused comparison means that the same analytical questions are asked of each case, such as how employment status is determined, how digital control is recognized, and how worker representation is institutionalized. This increases comparability while preserving sensitivity to legal context.

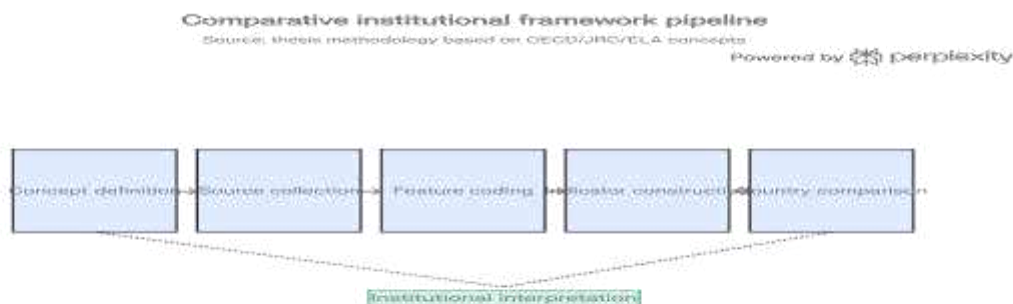
Ordinal scoring is then used to translate documentary evidence into institutional measures. These scores do not claim statistical precision; they serve instead as disciplined comparative devices suited to a small-N study. Finally, process-informed interpretation is used to explain why similar technological pressures produce different institutional responses in Italy and Spain. This ultimate step is necessary because comparative institutional analysis assumes that rules derive their effects from wider configurations rather than from isolated provisions alone.

### 3.3.2 Comparative framework pipeline

The comparative framework proceeds in five stages: conceptual definition, source collection, feature coding, indicator construction, and country comparison followed by interpretation. The sequence is cumulative. Conceptual clarification comes first, because the meaning of platform work and algorithmic management

must be standardized before coding begins. Source collection follows, then institutional coding, then the construction of comparative metrics, and finally the interpretation of scores in relation to each national context.

**Figure III.1. Comparative institutional framework pipeline**



Source: Own elaboration based on European Labour Authority (2025) and Eurofound materials.

Figure III.1 summarizes this pipeline and makes the research design visually explicit. Its purpose is to show that the thesis does not move directly from raw material to conclusions but introduces an intermediate layer of structured coding and indicator construction. This improves methodological transparency and helps justify later comparisons.

### 3.4 EMPLOYMENT STATUS CLASSIFICATION

Employment-status classification is the methodological core of the thesis because the platform economy often relies on a divergence between formal self-employment and actual control. Recent European

institutional work stresses that classification should be guided primarily by the factual performance of work, including the role of automated decision-making and monitoring systems in organizing labour. This principle of factual primacy is particularly useful in comparative analysis because it makes it possible to assess different national legal doctrines against a common substantive benchmark.

The methodology therefore treats classification as a composite institutional outcome rather than as a binary legal label. A framework is coded as more protective when it lowers the evidentiary burden on workers, treats algorithmic control as relevant evidence of subordination, and links classification to effective labour protections. Spain's presumption-based approach and Italy's more case-based path are thus interpreted as alternative institutional responses to the same underlying problem of disguised dependence.

### 3.4.1 Subordination test indicators

Subordination is operationalized through observable indicators derived from recent European legal and policy literature. The ELA study identifies several recurring elements used by courts and institutions: platform control over task allocation, standardization of services, ratings, payment control, integration into the platform's business, and the platform's role as the main means of production. These criteria are translated into indicators of factual direction and control.

For this thesis, the subordination test includes seven binary indicators: task allocation power, payment control, rating-based discipline, restrictions on refusal or substitution, integration into core business, branding integration, and automated monitoring. The combined score ranges from 0 to 7. Higher values indicate stronger evidence that the labour relationship is dependent on substance even if presented as autonomous in form.

**Table III.3. Subordination test indicators**

| <b>Indicator</b>            | <b>Meaning</b>                                              |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Task allocation power       | Platform controls or channels access tasks.                 |
| Payment control             | Platform controls customer payment and remuneration.        |
| Rating-based discipline     | Ratings affect access, sanctions, or priority.              |
| Refusal/substitution limits | Refusal or substitution triggers penalties or restrictions. |
| Core-business integration   | Work is central to the platform's business model.           |
| Branding integration        | Worker is represented as part of the platform identity.     |
| Automated monitoring        | Labor performance or location is digitally tracked.         |

Source: Own elaboration based on European Labour Authority (2025), Eurofound materials, and national legal sources.

Table III.3 provides a replicable tool for comparing country cases. While it does not replace legal adjudication, it creates a transparent analytical device for assessing the degree to which a platform labour relation resembles subordinate employment.

### 3.4.2 Autonomy vs dependency metrics

Because platform work often combines nominal flexibility with practical dependence, the methodology introduces a paired autonomy–dependency metric. Autonomy is proxied by freedom over working time, pricing, client acquisition, and low sanction exposure, while dependency is proxied by schedule dependence, pay dependence, task dependence, and sanction risk. The value of this paired measure is that it avoids treating formal flexibility as equivalent to real autonomy.

This metric is not intended as a fine-grained quantitative instrument. Its function is classificatory: where dependency indicators systematically outweigh autonomy indicators, the institutional environment is coded as more vulnerable to disguised subordination. This assists the later comparative assessment of how Italy and Spain manage the border between self-employment and employment.

### 3.5 INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE METRICS

The final methodological step constructs comparative performance metrics. These metrics do not assess efficiency in a business sense; instead, they evaluate how effectively labour-market institutions reduce misclassification, limit segmentation, and extend protection to platform workers. This is consistent with comparative institutional analysis, which evaluates institutions according to the patterns of outcomes they generate. (European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurofound, 2025c; ILO, 2024)

The metrics are intentionally modest in design. Each combines a small number of clearly defined components rather than an opaque high-dimensional index. This choice increases replicability and makes the results easier to interpret.

#### 3.5.1 Dualization index construction

The dualization index is designed to measure the institutional distance between standard protected employment and the position occupied by platform workers. It combines three dimensions: background labour-market segmentation, misclassification risk, and weak collective incorporation. Segmentation is proxied by variables such as temporary employment and unemployment; misclassification risk is proxied by the absence of strong classification rules; and collective-incorporation deficits are proxied by limited bargaining reach and weaker worker representation. (OECD, ILO and European Union, 2023; European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurostat, 2021).

Formally, the index is expressed as:

$$DI = \frac{S + M + C}{3}$$

where  $S$  is the segmentation score,  $M$  is the misclassification-risk score, and  $C$  is the collective-incorporation deficit score. Higher values indicate greater dualisation and therefore a weaker institutional position for platform workers. The index is ordinal and comparative rather than absolute.

### 3.5.2 Protection coverage analysis

Protection coverage analysis measures the extent to which core labour protections apply to platform workers. The score includes labor-law reach, social-protection access, transparency rights, and forms of oversight relevant to algorithmic management. The underlying rationale is that institutional protection is meaningful only when workers can move from formal recognition to effective claim-making. (European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurofound, 2025c).

### 3.5.3 Collective bargaining effectiveness

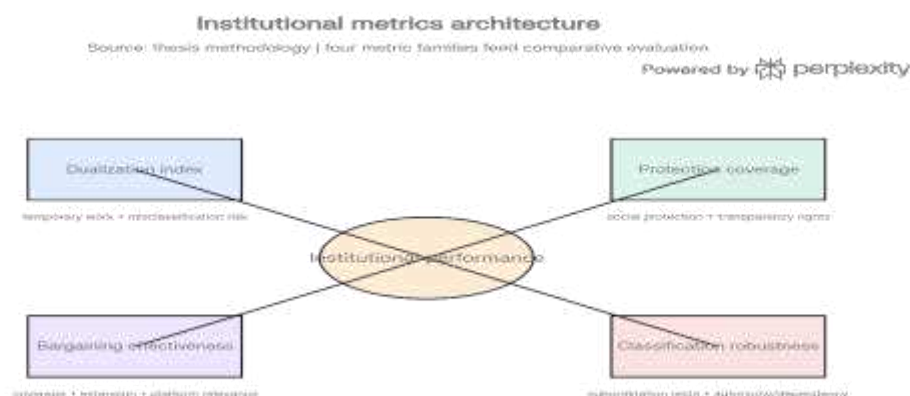
Collective bargaining effectiveness is measured through bargaining coverage, extension capacity, bargaining level, and the presence of platform-relevant negotiated protections. Spain is particularly significant because Eurofound reports high bargaining coverage linked to *Erga omnes* extension and multilevel bargaining, giving it stronger institutional potential to incorporate platform workers into collectively negotiated protections. (Eurofound, 2025a; Eurofound, 2025b). Italy remains important but more uneven in this field, especially in relation to platform-specific regulation. (Eurofound, 2025c; Eurofound, 2025a).

### 3.5.4 Validation of institutional metrics

Validation proceeds through triangulation rather than narrow statistical testing. Each metric is checked against legal coherence, consistency across documentary sources, and plausibility in relation to known labour-market outcomes. In practical terms, this means that institutional scores are first assessed against the formal legal framework (for example, the scope of presumptions of employment or rules on collective bargaining), then cross-checked with reports and datasets produced by European institutions and specialised

observatories, and finally compared with empirical patterns of misclassification, coverage, and enforcement documented in the literature. This layered procedure is designed to reduce the risk that a single data source, coding decision, or interpretive bias drives the final assessment of institutional strength or vulnerability. Rather than treating the indicators as purely technical constructs, the validation process treats them as hypotheses about how institutions operate in practice, which must be corroborated by converging legal, institutional, and contextual evidence before a score is accepted. In this sense, the reliability of the institutional metrics derives not from statistical sophistication alone, but from the robustness of the triangulation across sources and from their ability to reproduce patterns that are already observable in platform-related labour-market conflicts, court decisions, and enforcement practices.

**Figure III.2. Institutional metrics architecture**



Source: Own elaboration based on OECD, ILO, European Union (2023), European Labour Authority (2025), Eurofound (2025a; 2025b; 2025c), and Eurostat (2021).

Figure III.2 summarizes the architecture of the institutional metrics used in the chapter. It shows that the evaluation does not depend on one indicator alone, but on the interaction among dualization, protection coverage, bargaining effectiveness, and classification robustness. In other words, the figure makes explicit that institutional vulnerability in the platform economy is a multidimensional construct, emerging from how segmented labour markets, gaps in social protection, weakened collective bargaining, and unstable legal classifications reinforce one another rather than operating in isolation. By visually organizing these four

metric families, Figure III.2 clarifies the logic behind the composite indicators developed in this chapter and makes the underlying assumptions of the comparative framework transparent to the reader. This visual structure is especially useful for the later analysis chapter, where the comparative assessment of Italy and Spain will draw directly on these four metric families to trace different trajectories of institutional disruption, identify where protection gaps are most acute, and show how national configurations of rules and practices shape the extent of platform-enabled misclassification.

**Table III.4. Institutional performance metrics**

| <b>Metric</b>                   | <b>Main components</b>                                       | <b>Analytical function</b>                                |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Dualization index               | Segmentation, misclassification risk, incorporation deficit  | Measures institutional distance from standard employment. |
| Protection coverage score       | Labour-law reach, social protection, transparency, oversight | Measures breadth of effective protection.                 |
| Bargaining effectiveness score  | Coverage, extension, bargaining level, platform relevance    | Measures collective regulatory capacity.                  |
| Classification robustness score | Subordination indicators, autonomy–dependency balance        | Measures resistance to false self-employment.             |

Source: Own elaboration based on European Labour Authority (2025), Eurofound (2025c), and ILO (2024).

The methodology developed in this chapter provides the operational bridge between the conceptual literature and the empirical comparison that follows. By combining documentary coding, institutional feature engineering, and limited comparative scoring, it allows the thesis to analyze Italy and Spain in a way that is both theoretically grounded and methodologically transparent.

## 4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1 PLATFORM INSTITUTIONAL DISRUPTION PATTERNS

The empirical analysis confirms the central argument of this thesis: platform expansion does not simply introduce a new digital sector but disrupt established labour-market institutions by separating the formal organization of work from the substantive exercise of control. Across the Italian and Spanish cases, the main pattern is not deregulation in a narrow legal sense, but institutional displacement, whereby managerial authority is relocated into contractual ambiguity, algorithmic procedures, and fragmented enforcement pathways. This finding is consistent with recent European institutional research showing that platform work and algorithmic management alter the visibility of control, increase informational asymmetries, and complicate the application of labour protections originally designed for standard employment relations. (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2024; Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022; European Labour Authority, 2025)

The comparative evidence nevertheless shows that disruption does not produce identical outcomes across cases. Spain has moved further toward institutional internalization of platform labour through explicit legislative responses, especially in delivery work, while Italy has relied more heavily on adjudication, functional interpretation, and fragmented corrective intervention. As a result, both countries face platform-induced institutional pressure, but the degree of formal recognition and the practical capacity to contain misclassification differ significantly.

#### 4.1.1 Employment status misclassification

Employment-status misclassification emerges as the clearest point of institutional disruption. In both cases, platform firms have often relied on the contractual presentation of workers as independent even where the labour process displays indicators of subordination such as task allocation, pricing control, rating-based discipline, integration into the core business, and continuous digital monitoring. The European Labour

Authority's recent comparative study is especially relevant here because it identifies exactly these features as recurring factual indicators of disguised employment in platform settings. (European Labour Authority, 2025)

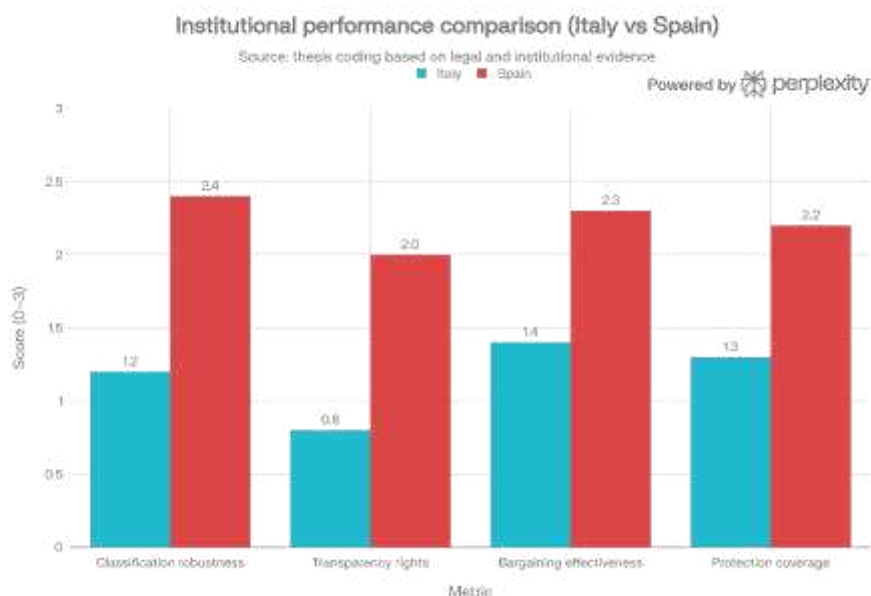
The difference between Italy and Spain lies less in the existence of the misclassification problem than in the institutional architecture used to address it. Spain's Riders' Law introduced a rebuttable presumption of employment in digital delivery and directly connected this issue to algorithmic transparency obligations. Italy, by contrast, has relied more on a combination of litigation, case-law development, and enforcement action to determine when nominal self-employment masks conditions of hetero-organization or subordination. From a comparative institutional perspective, Spain therefore reduces ambiguity *ex ante*, while Italy resolves it more often *ex post*.

This distinction matters because platform business models benefit precisely from ambiguous legal boundaries. Where workers carry the evidentiary burden of proving dependence, institutional correction is slower, more selective, and more expensive. Where the legal framework shifts the presumption toward employment or recognizes control embedded in algorithmic systems, the platform model faces stronger constraints in externalizing labour risk.

#### 4.1.2 Model performance: Italy vs Spain

The institutional scoring developed in Chapter III produces a clear comparative pattern. Spain performs better than Italy across all four central institutional dimensions coded in this thesis: classification robustness, algorithmic transparency, bargaining effectiveness, and protection coverage. The coding assigns Spain higher values because it combines a clearer statutory response to misclassification with stronger transparency rights and broader collective-incorporation capacity, while Italy remains more uneven across these dimensions.

**Figure IV.1. Institutional performance comparison: Italy vs Spain.**



Source: Own elaboration based on the thesis coding framework.

Figure IV.1 summarizes this result visually. Spain scores 2.4 versus Italy’s 1.2 on classification robustness, 2.0 versus 0.8 on transparency rights, 2.3 versus 1.4 on bargaining effectiveness, and 2.2 versus 1.3 on protection coverage according to the thesis coding framework. These differences are not intended as claims of exact numerical magnitude, but as structured representations of the broader institutional pattern emerging from the legal and policy evidence.

The pattern shown in Figure IV.1 supports the hypothesis that explicit institutional incorporation matters. Spain’s stronger performance does not imply the elimination of platform precariousness, but it does suggest that the Spanish institutional framework is better equipped to identify platform workers as workers, to expose the logic of algorithmic control, and to extend collective protections into digitally mediated labour markets. Italy, by contrast, appears more vulnerable to institutional lag, especially where enforcement depends on fragmented judicial or prosecutorial action. (European Labour Authority, 2025)

### 4.1.3 Institutional erosion results

The evidence indicates that institutional erosion operates through three linked mechanisms. The first is classificatory ambiguity, through which contractual self-employment is used to obscure substantive dependence. The second is opacity, through which digital systems determine task allocation, evaluation, or sanctions in ways that workers cannot easily inspect or contest. The third is fragmentation, through which collective representation and enforcement are weakened because managerial authority is distributed across platforms, data systems, and subcontracting chains rather than embodied in a visible hierarchical employer. (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2024; European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurofound, 2025c). Spain has partially countered these erosion mechanisms by codifying employment presumption and algorithmic information rights. Italy has also generated corrective responses, but these remain more dispersed and reactive. The result is not an absence of institutional defense in Italy, but a lower degree of institutional consolidation. In comparative terms, Spain appears to have moved further toward converting platform work from a grey regulatory zone into a recognized object of labour governance.

## **4.2 LABOUR MARKET IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The labour-market effects of platformisation do not appear primarily as a simple increase in employment or unemployment. Rather, they are expressed through the reorganization of insecurity, the uneven distribution of protections, and the intensified exposure of specific groups to contingent earnings and fragmented rights. This is why the analysis focuses on dualization, income volatility, social-protection gaps, and regional variation rather than on aggregate employment counts alone. (Eurostat, 2023; ILO, 2024; European Labour Authority, 2025)

The comparative evidence suggests that platform work interacts differently with the broader labour-market structures of Italy and Spain. Italy continues to display a lower overall employment rate than Spain and the OECD average, (Eurostat, 2026; European Labour Authority, 2025), while Spain still faces much higher unemployment despite improvements in employment and labour-market reform. (Eurostat, 2025; Todolí-Signes, 2021; European Labour Authority, 2025). These background differences matter because platform

labour does not enter empty institutional space; it enters labour markets already marked by distinct forms of segmentation and vulnerability.

#### 4.2.1 Dualization effects quantification

The dualization index constructed in the methodology chapter indicates that platform labour is institutionally more dualized in Italy than in Spain. In the thesis coding, Italy records a dualization index of 2.1 compared with Spain's 1.6, reflecting a combination of weaker classification robustness, thinner transparency guarantees, and lower platform-specific incorporation into collective and protective institutions. This result is consistent with the broader comparative evidence showing Spain's stronger movement toward formal internalization of platform labour. (OECD country-note materials; European Labour Authority, 2025; Eurostat, 2021).

This finding should be interpreted carefully. Spain is not a low-dualization case in absolute terms, especially given its high unemployment and long history of labour-market segmentation. However, within the narrower field of platform labour regulation, Spain appears to have built more effective institutional bridges between non-standard work and standard protections. Italy, by contrast, remains more exposed to a divide between formally autonomous work and substantively dependent work that lacks full institutional incorporation. Dualization also has a generational dimension. Eurostat's digital-platform-work statistics show higher participation among younger cohorts, (Eurostat, 2023; Brancati, Pesola and Fernández-Macías, 2020), while broader European research on temporary employment indicates that insecurity is often experienced more widely than static temporary-employment rates suggest. (Gevaert and Vandevenne, 2024; Eurofound, 2025c). This supports the interpretation that platform work contributes not simply to labour-market flexibility, but to the reproduction of segmented labour-market entry and unstable employment trajectories.

#### 4.2.2 Income volatility analysis

Income volatility is one of the most important but hardest-to-observe consequences of platform work. Direct harmonized income-volatility measures for Italy and Spain remain limited, but available European evidence provides strong indirect indicators. Eurostat reports that among digital platform workers who carried out

paid activity in the last month, 33.5% worked between 1 and 9 hours, 22.2% worked between 10 and 29 hours, 22.7% worked more than 30 hours, and 21.7% worked less than 1 hour, indicating a highly uneven monthly distribution of work intensity. (Eurostat, 2023). In addition, 52.2% reported that platform income accounted for less than one quarter of their total income earned in the last month, (Eurostat, 2023), while the JRC's profiling work proposes distinguishing sporadic, secondary, and main platform work partly through hours and income thresholds. (Baiocco and Fernández-Macías, 2022; European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2024).

These patterns matter because they imply unstable earnings structures even before cross-country differences are considered. Where platform work is sporadic or secondary, workers may use it to smooth income gaps generated elsewhere in the labour market. Where it becomes a main activity without corresponding employment protection, volatility can become more severe because hours, task access, and effective pay are all shaped by demand fluctuations and platform allocation systems. The institutional problem is therefore not only low income, but unpredictability in the relation between labour input and earnings.

In comparative terms, Italy's weaker institutional position suggests greater exposure to this volatility, especially where workers must individually absorb uncertainty linked to availability, pricing, and dispute resolution. Spain's stronger institutional architecture does not eliminate volatility, but it provides somewhat better conditions for reducing its consequences through employment presumption, transparency, and collective regulation.

#### 4.2.3 Social protection gaps

Social-protection gaps remain one of the clearest signs of incomplete institutional incorporation. Where platform workers are classified as self-employed, access to unemployment protection, sickness coverage, occupational injury protection, and other labor-law entitlements may be reduced, fragmented, or conditional. The ELA study is especially important here because it links employment-status determination directly to the extension of labour rights and highlights the policy significance of misclassification as a source of protection deficits. (European Labour Authority, 2025; European Commission, 2025).

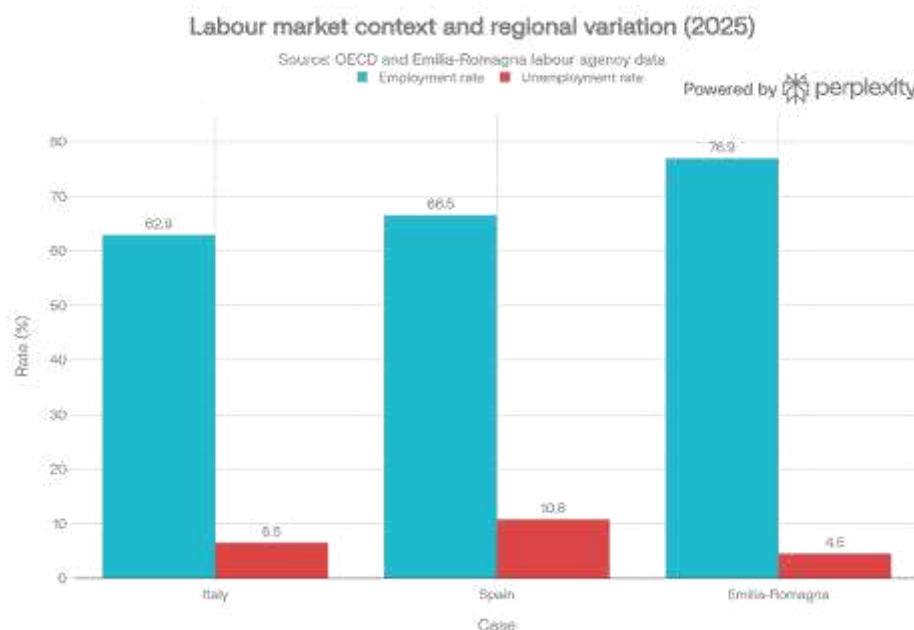
The comparison again favors Spain, though not unambiguously. Spain's institutional model is stronger because employment presumption in delivery work creates a more direct route into standard labour protections, and broader bargaining structures provide better channels for incorporating new rights concerning technology and workplace governance. Eurofound also reports that Spain has developed collective-bargaining provisions on AI and algorithmic processes at cross-industry, sectoral, and company levels, showing a wider institutional capacity to embed technological change in negotiated regulation. (Eurofound, 2025b; Eurofound, 2025a).

Italy retains meaningful institutional resources, but these are less consistently converted into platform-specific protection. Fairwork Italy's 2024 discussion of the platform economy notes that employment opportunities through platforms are growing, but concerns remain about job stability, low wages, and weak bargaining power. (Fairwork Italy, 2024; Cirillo, Guarascio and Parolin, 2023). The key analytical result is therefore not that Italy lacks labour institutions, but that those institutions remain less effectively aligned with the platform model than in the Spanish case.

#### 4.2.4 Regional variation analysis (Emilia-Romagna focus)

The Emilia-Romagna lens helps refine the national comparison by showing that institutional effects are also mediated regionally. Labor-market data reported by the regional labour agency indicate that Emilia-Romagna had an employment rate of 76.9% for ages 20–64 in mid-2025, compared with an Italian national average of 72.5% on the same age basis, while its unemployment rate stood at 4.5%, remaining among the lowest in Italy. This suggests that the regional context is characterized by stronger labour-market absorption and higher institutional capacity than the national average.

**Figure IV.2. Labor market context and regional variation, 2025**



Source: Own elaboration based on Regione Emilia-Romagna, Agenzia Regionale per il Lavoro (2025) and Istat (2025).

Figure IV.2 places this regional case alongside the two national labour markets. It shows that Emilia-Romagna combines the highest employment rate of the three cases with the lowest unemployment rate, while Spain records the highest unemployment and Italy the lowest employment. Although these data do not directly measure platform work, they are analytically important because they indicate the broader labour-market environment into which platform models are inserted.

The Emilia-Romagna result is important for the thesis because it shows that regional institutional capacity may mitigate some of the disruptive effects of platformisation even within a nationally weaker framework. A stronger employment base, lower unemployment, and dense institutional infrastructures can improve workers' exit options, enhance enforcement capacity, and reduce the pressure to accept precarious digital work on unfavorable terms. At the same time, the region does not escape the national legal framework, which means that regional resilience can moderate but not fully solve the structural problems associated with algorithmic management and employment-status ambiguity.

Taken together, the results of this chapter support three main conclusions. First, the central institutional conflict in the platform economy concerns the gap between formal autonomy and substantive control. Second, Spain currently performs better than Italy in limiting this gap through explicit legislative and collective mechanisms, even though both countries remain exposed to platform-induced precariousness. Third, regional environments such as Emilia-Romagna can shape the intensity of labour-market effects, but they do so within the constraints of national legal and institutional frameworks. These findings provide the empirical basis for the final conclusion chapter.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS ANSWERED

This thesis set out to examine how labour market institutions shape the regulation and consequences of platform work in Italy and Spain, with particular attention to employment classification, algorithmic management, and labour-market dualization. Across the literature review, methodology, and analysis chapters, the study has shown that the central problem of the platform economy is not digital mediation, but the institutional gap between formal autonomy and substantive dependence. Platform firms can present workers as independent contractors while still exercising significant control through task allocation, rating systems, remuneration structures, and opaque algorithmic procedures.

The first research question concerned how the platform economy should be conceptualized within political economy and labour-market analysis. The thesis answered this by demonstrating that platform work is best understood not as a broad expression of digitalization, but as a specific mode of economic coordination in which market intermediation and managerial authority converge. The OECD/ILO/European Union framework and JRC research were central here because they showed that digital platforms should be analyzed through the organization of work, the structure of employment status, and the governance of labour rather than through technological novelty alone.

The second research question asked how labour-market institutions mediate the effects of platformisation. The analysis showed that employment-status rules, transparency rights, worker representation, collective bargaining, and enforcement pathways are decisive because they determine whether hidden forms of digital control can be rendered visible and regulated. In this respect, the thesis established that institutional outcomes vary not because technology differs between countries, but because national legal and collective frameworks differ in their capacity to classify, constrain, and govern platform labour.

The third research question addressed the comparative relationship between Italy and Spain. The findings indicate that Spain has developed a more explicit and coherent institutional response through the Riders'

Law and broader collective-regulatory capacity, while Italy has relied more on fragmented judicial and enforcement-based correction. The comparison therefore shows that platform work is not a uniform labour-market outcome, but a phenomenon refracted through different institutional configurations.

## **5.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The thesis makes three main theoretical contributions. First, it supports a labour-centred definition of the platform economy in which the key issue is the transformation of labour coordination rather than digital exchange. This is important because much public discussion still treats platforms primarily as innovative service intermediaries, whereas the evidence examined here shows that their analytical significance lies in how they reorganize authority, risk, and dependence.

Second, the thesis reinforces the importance of algorithmic management as a concept for understanding contemporary labour control. JRC work demonstrates that computer-programmed systems can allocate tasks, monitor performance, and apply rewards or sanctions, meaning that managerial authority is increasingly exercised through technical infrastructures. This strengthens the digital Taylorism perspective by showing that the labour process in platform capitalism is shaped by programmable supervision, data extraction, and informational asymmetry rather than by direct human oversight alone.

Third, the thesis contributes to a comparative political economy by showing that technological change remains institutionally mediated. Platform capitalism does not generate identical outcomes everywhere; its consequences depend on how labour law defines employment, how industrial relations systems extend protection, and how public institutions respond to opaque forms of control. In theoretical terms, this means that the platform economy should be understood as an institutional terrain of conflict rather than as a self-executing technological model.

## **5.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITALIAN CONTEXT**

The Italian case suggests that the main policy challenge is not the absence of labour institutions, but the incomplete adaptation of those institutions to software-mediated forms of control. A first recommendation is

therefore to move beyond a reactive model based mainly on litigation and enforcement and toward a clearer statutory framework for platform labour. The Spanish example indicates that legal presumptions of employment in sectors characterized by elevated levels of digital coordination can reduce ambiguity and lower the burden placed on workers to prove dependence.

A second recommendation concerns algorithmic transparency. If workers and representatives are unable to inspect the rules by which tasks are allocated, performance is evaluated, and sanctions are triggered, labour rights remain formally weak even where regulation exists. Italy should therefore strengthen rights of information on algorithmic decision-making, especially where such systems affect access to work, remuneration, discipline, or future task allocation. The Spanish approach is important here because it recognizes opacity itself as a labour issue.

A third recommendation concerns collective regulation. Platform work is difficult to govern through individual litigation alone because control is dispersed, data-driven, and often contractually obscured. Strengthening collective bargaining coverage, improving the institutional recognition of platform workers' representatives, and extending negotiated regulation to platform-specific working conditions would improve the capacity of the Italian system to respond to digital labour governance in a more durable way.

Finally, enforcement should become more coordinated rather than purely episodic. Labor inspectorates, courts, and social-partner institutions need clearer pathways for identifying disguised employment and algorithmic control before exploitative practices become entrenched. The key lesson from the comparative analysis is that institutional effectiveness depends not only on legal rights in principle, but on the practical capacity to detect and govern hidden forms of dependence.

## **5.4 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH**

This thesis has several limitations that should be acknowledged clearly. First, the study relies primarily on documentary, legal, and institutional sources rather than on original interview or survey evidence from workers, firms, or regulators. As a result, the analysis is strongest in explaining institutional architecture and

comparative governance, but less able to capture the lived experience of platform workers in different sectors and localities.

Second, the comparative design is intentionally small-N and focused on Italy and Spain, with Emilia-Romagna included only as a regional lens rather than as a fully separate case. In the Emilia-Romagna case, the analysis remains at the level of general labour-market dynamics and does not attempt a specific assessment of platform work in the region. This choice strengthens analytical depth and makes institutional comparison manageable, but it limits the generalizability of the findings across all European platform economies. The thesis should therefore be read as a theoretically informed comparison rather than as a comprehensive EU-wide account.

Third, the institutional indicators constructed in the methodology chapter are ordinal and interpretive rather than exact statistical measures. They are useful for disciplined comparison because they translate legal and governance evidence into comparable categories, but they do not claim numerical precision in the manner of a large-scale econometric study. This is a limitation, yet also a methodological choice consistent with the complexity of empirical material.

## **5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Future research should build on this study in at least three directions. The first is to integrate worker-level evidence more directly into comparative institutional analysis. Interviews, surveys, or mixed-method designs could deepen understanding of how classification, transparency rights, and algorithmic control are experienced in practice, especially in relation to income volatility, sanctions, and dispute resolution.

The second direction is comparative expansion. Additional Southern European, Western European, or non-European cases could clarify whether the patterns identified here are specific to Italy and Spain or reflect broader institutional trends in platform regulation. A wider comparative design could also test whether stronger employment presumptions and broader collective bargaining consistently reduce institutional dualization in platform labour.

The third direction concerns the spread of algorithmic management beyond classic platform sectors. The literature already suggests that logistics, healthcare, and other regular workplaces are increasingly shaped by digital monitoring and data-driven coordination. Future research should therefore examine whether the institutional issues identified in this thesis—opacity, classificatory ambiguity, and fragmented control—are becoming general features of work under contemporary digital capitalism rather than characteristics of platform labour alone.

## 5.6 CONCLUSIONS

The final conclusion of this thesis is that the platform economy is politically and institutionally significant not simply because it digitizes exchange, but because it reorganizes labour through the fusion of algorithmic control, contractual ambiguity, and asymmetrical institutional power. The central conflict is no longer only between employment and self-employment as fixed legal categories, but between formal autonomy and substantive dependence on labour processes increasingly governed by software.

The comparative evidence from Italy and Spain demonstrates that technological change does not determine labour outcomes independently of institutions. Spain has gone further in reducing ambiguity through legislative and collective mechanisms, while Italy remains more dependent on fragmented corrective intervention. This difference shows that platform capitalism is not a uniform economic logic but an institutionally mediated field in which the balance between private power and labour protection remains open and contested.

More broadly, the thesis suggests that the future of labour governance will depend on whether law and collective institutions can move beyond regulating the visible employer alone and begin to regulate the coded architecture of managerial control. If authority is increasingly exercised through algorithms, metrics, and opaque digital infrastructures, then democratic regulation must also become capable of making those structures visible, contestable, and accountable. The question raised by platform labour is therefore not only how to govern a new sector, but how to protect decent work in an economy where control is increasingly hidden inside software.

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## APPENDIX

This appendix reports on the simplified comparative dataset used for the construction of the figures and institutional metrics discussed in Chapters III and IV. The dataset is an original analytical compilation produced by the candidate based on legal, institutional, and statistical materials drawn from OECD, Eurostat, Eurofound, JRC, the European Labour Authority, and relevant national materials. Its purpose is not to replace the detailed qualitative analysis in the main text, but to provide a transparent summary of the variables used in the comparative assessment of Italy and Spain, with a limited regional reference to Emilia-Romagna.

**Table A1. Simplified comparative dataset used in Chapters III and IV**

| Case             | Employment rate | Unemployment rate | Temporary employment rate | Classification robustness | Transparency rights | Bargaining effectiveness | Protection coverage | Dualization index |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Italy            | 62.9            | 6.5               | 37.8                      | 1.2                       | 0.8                 | 1.4                      | 1.3                 | 2.1               |
| Spain            | 66.5            | 10.8              | 12.5                      | 2.4                       | 2.0                 | 2.3                      | 2.2                 | 1.6               |
| Emilia - Romagna | 76.9            | 4.5               | n.a.                      | n.a.                      | n.a.                | n.a.                     | n.a.                | n.a.              |

Employment and unemployment rates for Italy and Spain are reported from OECD country-note materials used in the comparative discussion, while the Emilia-Romagna figures are included as a regional contextual benchmark. The institutional scores are author-generated ordinal measures constructed from the coding scheme described below.

The institutional variables were coded on a bounded ordinal scale in order to preserve comparability across heterogeneous legal and governance materials. A value close to zero indicates institutional absence or weakness, while a value closer to 2 or 3 indicates greater formalization, stronger reach, or more effective incorporation of platform labour into labour-market institutions. This strategy was chosen because platform regulation is often hybrid and cannot be represented adequately through binary categories alone. The dataset is structured around two levels of information. The first consists of contextual labour-market indicators, such as employment and unemployment rates, which are used to situate platform work within broader institutional environments. The second consists of thesis-constructed institutional scores relating to classification robustness, transparency rights, bargaining effectiveness, protection coverage, and dualization. These scores are ordinal rather than cardinal: they are intended to summarize comparative institutional differences in a transparent and replicable way, not to claim exact quantitative measurement.

**Table A2. Coding logic for institutional variables**

| Variable                  | Meaning                                                                                               | Coding principle                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Classification robustness | Capacity of the institutional framework to identify and correct false self-employment                 | Higher values indicate clearer presumptions, stronger subordination recognition, and lower worker evidentiary burdens. |
| Transparency rights       | Degree to which workers or representatives can access information on algorithmic rules affecting work | Higher values indicate stronger formal rights to information and disclosure.                                           |

| <b>Variable</b>          | <b>Meaning</b>                                                                                      | <b>Coding principle</b>                                                                                |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bargaining effectiveness | Capacity of collective bargaining institutions to regulate platform or algorithmically managed work | Higher values indicate broader coverage, stronger extension, or more effective negotiated protections. |
| Protection coverage      | Breadth of labour and social protections available to platform workers                              | Higher values indicate wider effective reach of labour law and social-protection standards.            |
| Dualization index        | Degree of institutional separation between standard workers and platform workers                    | Higher values indicate stronger segmentation, higher misclassification risk, and weaker incorporation. |

The simplified dataset presented here should be interpreted as a compact operational summary rather than as an exhaustive database. Several relevant dimensions discussed in the thesis, including judicial nuance, sectoral variation, and the intensity of algorithmic management, are not fully reducible to numeric scores and are therefore analyzed qualitatively in the main chapters. The appendix is included in order to clarify the empirical basis of the figures and institutional comparisons without overloading the core analytical sections.