

STATE DIGITALIZATION AND PLATFORM WORK AMONG MIGRANTS IN BRAZIL: OPPORTUNITIES OR TRAPS?

LILIANA ACERO*

Collaborating Professor and Post-Doctoral Senior Fellow supported by the Foundation of Research Support from the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) and based at the Postdoctoral Programme of Public Policies, Strategy and Development (PPED) at the Institute of Economics (IE) of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. CEP 22.290-902

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ABSTRACT

The study addresses the transformations brought about by platform capitalism in Brazil—both at the state level and in migrants' lives—following the introduction of digital technologies. It discusses the theoretical daily challenges faced by state agencies in integrating sophisticated digital systems into their operations while maintaining standards of cybersecurity, interoperability, and interconnection. Furthermore, it highlights the positive and negative consequences that digitalization brings to migration governance and the relationship between government and society, particularly regarding personal data privacy and security, given the heightened vulnerability of migrants. The paper characterizes the contemporary transnational nature of diasporas, wherein migrants experience a "double presence" by acting simultaneously locally and transnationally, and demonstrates how these processes intersectionally affect their subjectivities. The existing digital divide and the barriers migrants face in accessing these technologies are also illustrated. Methodologically, this is a qualitative, exploratory study consisting of a narrative-based, critical review of the academic literature and other relevant sources. Its main findings include a description of the radical changes in work organization generated by digitalization, how labor becomes precarious, and the ill-defined role of so-called "autonomous workers" within platforms, exemplified through a detailed analysis of platform drivers and delivery workers.

Keywords: State digitalization; Brazil; migration governance; platform-based delivery workers; platform-based transport workers; migrants' subjectivities; personal data privacy and security; international organizations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A new digital paradigm is in development, which Srnicek (2017) has defined as platform capitalism. The author explains that society is immersed in a context in which the extraction and processing of large volumes of data, the expansion of businesses operated via digital platforms, and the evolution of internet technologies have influenced the way work is perceived and performed. Its impacts are multifaceted, extending beyond the level of interconnection it brings about to significantly affect the economy, the market, and the organization of work.

Migrants play diverse roles in the economic and social landscape, influencing local demands, generating indirect financial flows, impacting human capital and knowledge diffusion, and reshaping social norms. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are

instrumental in the mobility process, as migrants rely on them for real-time information and advice before, during, and after their migration journeys. This heavy reliance has sparked both academic and practical interest and concern.

2.0 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1 The digital governance of public administration

National States have followed digital development through the establishment of digital platforms transversally, especially for public services, often designed for both migrants and hosts. In Brazil, this process started around 2016. Digital transformation has significantly advanced at the global level and has brought a change of paradigm in the administration's internal functioning and in the relations between public institutions and citizens, giving rise to a new form of governance called electronic governance or e-government. Governments are confronted with new challenges. They have to integrate more sophisticated digital systems into their operations and guarantee standards of cybersecurity, interoperability and interconnection (Ragulina et al., 2021). Three main perspectives that propose an analytic framework for the design of public policies are found in the literature on public digitalization. The first, refers to the updating of administrative processes; the second, relates to interactions with citizens and the third, to external interactions (Heeks, 2001; Palotti et al, 2020).

Conventional literature, since the beginnings of the 2000s, has argued that digitalization positively affects administrative procedural designs, transparency in resource allocation and a direct, non-mediated, relationship with beneficiaries (e.g. Abdou, 2021; Mendoza & Delgado, 2022). An 'axiom' prevails: this transformation will contribute to develop a 'virtuous cycle', as it does not depend on the bureaucrats' criteria or workload and limits the implementation of 'clientelism' in the allocation of public benefits.

From an alternative approach, electronic government could be considered as part of a new global paradigm in the governance of migration, where the State updates, in a subtle manner, its management and control of the direction of human mobility flows (Domenech, 2018). According to Buffat (2015), this transformation deserves to be very cautiously analysed as it presents practical problems related to efficacy and efficiency. Other authors consider e-government as a 'double-edged sword', because it distances citizens from their government and undermines their dynamic relationship with bureaucrats (Jansson & Erlingsson, 2014). Though it appears to provide a leading role for people, in practice, that role is secondary. The majority of human and economic resources used for digitalization and automation are destined to the endowment of the organizations involved. Moreover, many other factors influence the population's access to digital systems, for example, the level of digital literacy of different social sectors, genders and generations, as well as the existence, access and quality of internet connectivity (Touro-Maureira et al., 2025).

2.2 Digital diasporas, locality and transnationalism

In contemporary societies, migrants' diasporas are largely international digital diasporas, due to the influence of ICTs (Andersson, 2019). Migrant communities strengthen their ties with their countries of origin through these means generating an economic, social, political and cultural impact. They also establish new forms of interaction with the host countries and thus

construct mixed or hybrid identities. Digital diasporas share three constitutional elements: (a) their dispersion throughout space; (b) their orientation towards a real or imaginary homeland as a source of values and, (c) the conservation of the group involved (Brubaker, 2005). An 'online transnationalism' or 'digital transnationalism' is generated, according to Aizencang-Kane (2024).

Digital diasporas become possible due to the use of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) and other more specific applications (WhatsApp, WeChat, FaceTime). Practices include: group chats, video-calls, microblogs, electronic e-mails and messages, games, online purchases of goods and music, applications for digital work (such as Uber, Deliveroo and iFood), maps' applications, and comments within social media. These contribute to reshape online 'institutions' and condition the development of the experience of emotional, symbolic, cultural belonging and political activism in an immediate way (Ponzanesi, 2020). Network actors are simultaneously united and differentiated; i.e. they segregate themselves from other groups and, as active citizens, exercise an international political impact and one upon the hosts' society.

Digital interactivity is also especially valued by migrants because it allows anonymity, informality and immediate contact. Online practises fill in the gaps of off-line integration, contribute to regain a sensation of control over their lives and social relationships and reduce nostalgia (Brinkerhoff, 2009). According to Costa & Wang (2019), networks and applications generate among migrants a 'floating life', contributing to the sensation of feeling at home or in their own country and compensating the impotence in the lack of a home and/or familiarity in their life off-line.

2.3 Intersectionality and Subjectivities

Intersections among different categories of social differentiation, especially gender, race and nationality (Hill-Collins, 2002), have an effect upon migration experiences and in the shaping of subjectivities. The intersectionality concept (Crenshaw, 1991), emphasizes how the overlap between categories of differentiation constitutes oppressive social structures that produce inequalities in opportunities and in the life experiences of individuals (Anthias, 2012). Subjectivity shaping is mediated by the existence of 'situated knowledges. Haraway (2013), introduces the idea of the locality of knowledges- critical, partial and localized -by gender, race, age and sexual orientation, among other.

Identities are generated in the encounter with difference or alterity throughout the life cycle (Hall, 2014). International migration acts as a catalyser of subjectivity shaping, because it makes identity production more complex when it expands encounters with differences in the experiences and narratives of the lives of people (Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021). Two central factors change subjects: the migration process and the growing social digitalization that exceeds geographical borders.

In summary, the present study is based upon concepts relating the trans nationalization and locality of digital diasporas and e-governance in Brazil. These concepts are applied intersectionally, when possible, at least, by gender, generation and race, to analyse migrants' access and different uses of digital platforms and their effects upon subjectivity making.

The study's main aims, presented as questions are:

- When has State administration become digital in Brazil? How has this process affected the lives of hosts and migrants?
- What is the ethical use of migrants' personal data like?
- What digital barriers do migrants face?
- How is the organization of work transformed by digital applications?

2.4 Methodological approach

This study has been designed as one of an exploratory and descriptive nature, which uses secondary data, especially qualitative analysis of information and limited statistical data. It consists of a narrative-based, critical review of academic specialized national and international social science literature, an analysis of selected public documents, as well as upon information produced by relevant migrant/refugee collectives and pro-migrant NGOs in Brazil.

The narrative literature review is grounded on an analysis of two main aspects in Brazilian society: State digital services' effects on migrants lives and migrants use of digital means. It intends to present a general panorama of the constitution of digital platforms within Brazilian administration, the use of private digital platforms by migrants and their positive and negative effects.

Recent academic articles on State's and migrants' digitalization were retrieved, from specialized national and international journals, such as: *Migraciones Internacionais*, *Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana (REHMU)* and *Polis*. Google Scholar was used and the keywords: "administration digitalization"; "digital platforms"; "platform drivers"; "platform delivery services"; "DDW"; "migrant platform entrepreneurs"; "digital migrant transnationalism"; "digital work organization" AND Brazil. These keywords have been followed up in the titles and contents of the texts selected.

Very few empirical case studies on migrants' use of digital platforms in Brazil were found that quantify their numbers by sector/ occupation, or analyse migrants' narratives, experiences and behaviour. Often, the studies discuss platformization in general and/or do not distinguish between the digital activities performed by hosts and migrants.

The article is structured around the most recurrent themes in the literature reviewed, and the criteria for content analysis used includes: benefits and risks of platform capitalism; administrative digitalization virtuosity and handicaps; changes and risks in work organization, the pros and cons of migrants' transport and delivery work, migrants' work precariousness and insecurity; migrant transnationalization and locality, among other. Content analysis will consider phrases that represent some of the recurrent meanings in social and public discourse (Castro, 2004).

3.0 THE DIGITALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Public services' digitalization advanced quickly in Brazil in the last years, mainly centralized in the platform Gov.br and in the modernization of the Federal Police's and the Ministry of

Labour's systems. The digitalization of the Brazilian State radically transformed migration governance and the access of migrants/refugees to rights and public services. Platforms like SisMigra (the National Registry System of Migrants of the Federal Police) and the e-Sisref (Registry System of the National Committee for Refugees - CONARE) and even, the digitalization of The Unique Register (CadÚnico) for social welfare, that registers low-income populations for social assistance programmes, changed the bureaucratic dynamic of migrants' integration into the country. Most systems of regularization incorporated analogical processes that allow the follow up of requests remotely.

The Federal Law nº 14.129/02/2021 — Digital Government Law- is the core framework for the digitalization of the Brazilian public administration. Its key provisions include: digital delivery and access to public services; interoperability among government data-bases; the use of digital identification and electronic signatures, and the right to in-person services when digital access is difficult. This Law establishes principles, norms and instruments for Digital Government, and for the increase of public efficiency.

For migrants, the Digital Government Law is absolutely relevant because many migrants' labour and social protection services are now digitalized through Federal platforms. Norms regulate how migrants can access rights and public services, such as residence permits, labour documentation, health systems, education enrolment, and online government platforms. The Law emphasises accessibility and non-discrimination.

The Law of Digital Government took effect in August 2021. Among its main principles and guidelines are:

- The reduction in bureaucracy, the modernization, strengthening and simplification of the relationship between public power and society, through the use of accessible digital services;
- The availability, within a unique platform, of the access to information and public services;
- An incentive towards social participation in the control of administration;
- The elimination of requirements and formalities;
- Technical support towards Federal agencies for the implantation and adoption of strategies towards digital transformation.
- A definition of the rights of users that can use digitalized public services; and
- The names of the instruments to be used by each Federal agency for governmental digital platforms.

The Law also determines that public administration will participate in an integrated and cooperative manner in the consolidation of the National Strategy for Digital Government, defined by the Federal Executive Government, that will maintain the principles and guidelines of this Law.

3.1 International organizations working with migrants

The main United Nations organizations working nowadays in Brazil with migrants/ refugees are the Organization for International Migration (OIM) and the United Nations High

Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), though in this section, we will concentrate in the functions of the first. Many of their activities with and towards migrants are digital.

Since 1974, international organizations have designed a policy for the control of international migration. Migration for work and demographic growth gained a central part in these agencies' agendas. The IOM entered Brazil officially in 2015 when an agreement was established with the Brazilian Government through the Decree nº 8.503, in relation to the "Legal Position, Privileges and Immunities of the Organization". It then became central in the management and analysis of Venezuelan migration flows. Since then, it has built an extensive network in Latin America.

In Brazil, IOM has offices in two international frontier regions in the States of Roraima and Santa Catarina, sharing the same infrastructures than those of the Welcome Operation- a federal government and military policy to organize the massive Venezuelan migration flow (Acero, 2026 a; Zanforlin et.al., 2025). By 2021, the IOM had representation in different Brazilian cities and a number of 200 employees. The institution acts in projects that implement 'migration governance' together with the local municipalities and handles the organization of empirical data. As such, it establishes a very close integration with cities, where international migrants largely locate themselves. and provides much needed urban statistics on their distribution (IOM, 2022). Mansur (2014) considers that the IOM follows the European Union's orientations in relation to border securitization, i.e. the control and vigilance of the transit of foreign populations.

Data –gathering services are central among the activities of the IOM. For example, the global application of the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), has the aim of monitoring the routes of the population in movement and has been widely used in the Northern States of Brazil for tracking the flows of migrants, most especially, of Venezuelans. In Brazil, since 2018, twelve rounds of this type of monitoring process have been already implemented.

Domenech et.al. (2023) have recently described and analysed the implantation of this method in Latin America. In a detailed analysis of the DTM, for the production of rounds, surveys, graphic and cartographic representations, the authors show that a complex system of information and an extended digital data base are being implanted about migrant populations' displacement routes in Latin America during humanitarian initiatives. As argued by Santi (2020), to comply with security and an 'ordered migration', the IOM uses a global tool that allows to gather information for the control and vigilance of populations in movement.

International organizations exercise strong pressure upon government institutions at the State and municipal levels. However, the IOM also offers new knowledge, efficient technical and demographic supports to Brazilian migration, but also plays a political role where the human rights of migrants being 'protected' should be better included.

An increasing utilization of digital technologies by the State and different actors within humanitarian institutions can be observed, often, though not solely, relating frontier controls (Camargo & Alencar, 2024). There is also a high demand from people dislocated by force to provide significant quantities of personal data to access humanitarian services, often without sufficient information on how this data is being processed, a matter which involves significant

ethical risks (Leurs & Smets, 2018; Maitland, 2018). Substantive tension is generated by this process, as the digitalization of migration is taking place in a context of extreme digital inequality (e.g. Cogo et al., 2023). For example, 69% of Venezuelans declare not having access to Wi-Fi (R4V, 2020).

3.2 The protection of rights: privacy and security

Migrants benefit as users of federal, state, and municipal services. The Brazilian Law nº 13.709/2018 (the Law on the General Protection of Data -LGPD), moulded upon the European General Data Protection Regulation (GRPD), regulates personal data processing by both private actors and public authorities. The LGPD is expressly mentioned within the Brazilian Digital Government Law. Its most relevant themes involve: consented and lawful processing; data minimization; transparency obligations and the protection of vulnerable populations.

For migrants, data security assurance and privacy are especially important because: migration systems process sensitive personal data; biometric and identification databases are used in digital services and migrants may face heightened privacy risks. Particularly outstanding seems the work by Schlesinger et al. (2017) which explores the complexities surrounding the disclosure of migrant identity. Migrants are confronted with discrimination, exploitation, and physical harm when their personal information is exposed (Tabassum & Faklaris, 2024). They often encounter difficult, harmful and traumatic situations during their journeys, transit and resettlement processes, making them vulnerable to various forms of abuse and injustice (Acero, 2026b). Migrants also face other heightened risks, such as digital vulnerability, government surveillance, identity theft and the low quality of migration governance through digital means.

A number of themes are present in the discussion on migrants' privacy and security, mainly, the use of social media and digital connectivity, digital information behaviour, privacy perceptions of refugees and undocumented migrants, humanitarian work policies, vulnerabilities and mobile phone use. Moreover, critical literature emphasizes an advance of the 'surveillance State', whereby the massive gathering of migrants' biometric and personal data at the frontiers reconfigures the control of migration under the justification of national security (Latonero & Kift, 2018).

The convergence of social media and digital connectivity significantly influences migrants' experiences, adaptation and integration, revealing not only challenges but also potential benefits. Social media has a transformative potential in enhancing migrants' lives and facilitating their social integration and can play a central role in fostering connections and support networks.

Migrants suffer a new challenge, that of potential exclusion due to new barriers arising from the digital gap. Digitalization presupposes that the user counts with connectivity, an adequate device and digital literacy, which is not always the case. Linguistic barriers can also interfere with digital access. Younger generation relatives are often used by migrants to deal with these technologies. In some cases, applications demand cross-validation of data. For example, to create a Gov.br account with higher levels of security (silver or gold), the system demands facial biometry crossed with data from the Electoral Justice System or a driving licence; documents migrant newcomers do not possess. These digital bureaucratic handicaps

negatively influence their statistical visibility and even their registration for access to social policies at CadÚnico. They can become 'invisible' at the traditional public data banks for registration, e.g. at the Entry Portal – the portal for entrance of foreigners into Brazil.

4.0 DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND MIGRANTS

4.1 Digital Platforms, Work Changes and Legislation

The majority of digital platforms are organized as firms that present themselves, either as simple intermediaries between consumers and suppliers, or as participants of a collaborative type of consumption. These firms can be defined as a means of coordination and digital communication that operates through the production, analysis, flow and control of data. This business model 'on- demand' functions connecting the provider and user on line, but the services are offered off-line, as in any other traditional form of work (Todolí-Signes, 2017).

At present, the majority of digital platforms mobilize information as a property resource, having the capacity to control and extract an enormous amount of data from users and other sources (Grohmann, 2020). Due to their role as intermediaries, platform firms accumulate asymmetrical information and handle detailed and precise data about consumers' choices and interests through the use and continuous reformulation of algorithms (Shapiro, 2018).

Algorithms are a crucial part of work management and control (Dardot & Laval, 2016). They are produced by technology firms, but they are reformulated by the interactions of citizens. They function as an automated set of instructions that transforms data into desired results. World visions are involved in the construction of all technological artefacts as much as in the 'politics of algorithms' (Beer, 2017); these highlight some perspectives in detriment of others. Platforms are nurtured and structured by data gathering, automated and organized with the use of algorithms. Digital platforms are focused in attracting the right kinds of people and, in large numbers, so that the network can grow.

Platform capitalism affects labour relationships, consumers' rights, the right to compete, the protection of labour and welfare rights, the control, treatment and privacy of personal data and intellectual property rights. Digital service workers, formally considered as autonomous, have no access to the legal protection offered by labour norms (Dubal, 2017; Kaine & Josserand, 2019). This is questionable. The new work organization is unregulated, flexible, temporary and ever changing, while the expansion of private digital firms has become a global phenomenon.

Digital platforms that apparently channel information, such as, Google, or social interaction such as, Facebook, are very powerful instruments to extract information from their users freely, in order to continuously generate content data that will be useful in advertising (Fumagalli et al., 2018). Advertisements constitute 90% of Google's revenues and 96% of Facebook's (Srnicek, 2017).

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) shows the two sides of the new advances brought about by ICTs: (a) on the one hand, they offer new opportunities, mainly because jobs are generated in occupations inexistent before platform digitalization. They encourage a better balance between personal and flexible working life, higher productivity and competition; (b)

on the other hand, they increase the lack of protection of labour rights and lower the possibilities of workers' organization. Digital workers can be excluded from collective bargaining, either because their type of jobs are not legally contemplated or because they have little connection with a fixed work-place. This makes association among them more difficult.

In order to contain the transformations in work organization brought about by digital platforms and their influence upon many other social activities, governments have been globally trying to establish democratic control over them (Van Doorn, 2017). Shared definitions of what constitutes 'autonomous work' abound among different national legislations, including, those related to self-organization and non-exclusive labour clauses. However, legal specificities tend to vary; in some countries they are included in labour law, while in others, these definitions are residual to digital workers' dependency.

Brazil has incorporated the role of 'autonomous or self-employed worker' in the reformulation of the Consolidation of Labour Laws (CLT) during the Labour Reform of 2017. According to its article 442-B: the worker provides services of any nature and without exclusivity, to one or more service providers, as well as can refuse to develop the activities demanded. There can exist legal dependency, without defining the worker as an employee. Labour norms include: (a) workers' control over their services' modalities and schedules; (b) workers' provision of their own 'tools of work', such as: vehicle and smartphone; the development of their own data plan and the payment of vehicles' repairs, insurance policies, and associated expenses; and (c) the contract between workers and platforms explicitly establishes that the service providers are not employees, as well as that the firm cannot exercise any disciplinary control over them.

4.2 Digitalized transport and delivery services (DDW)

It is estimated that Brazil has approximately 1.7 million workers employed by digital applications. However, there is an important gap in official statistics. Local platformization has generated changes mainly in the service sector's employment and wage levels, as well as in occupational dynamics, given the greater flexibility, precariousness and informality of digital jobs, as well as the entrepreneurial liberal ideology associated with them (Antunes, 2018; Fleming, 2017).

It is well-known that platform work has reconfigured the Brazilian labour market and blurred the boundaries between formality and informality. However, the high proportion of informal work has been always present in the society - long before digitalization.

A longitudinal analysis carried out, between 2012 and 2023, by Roubaud et al.(2024) on drivers and delivery workers (DDWs) was based upon imperfect IBGE digital transport's statistical surveys and micro-data that included digital delivery workers based upon the Brazilian Labour Force Survey (PNAD Contínua). This study has tried to estimate the quantity, place and characteristics of the Brazilian workforce involved in platform work. The authors point out that the methodology to be used for identifying the platform economy in official and unofficial statistics has become a worldwide challenge, due to the variety, heterogeneity and invisibility of some of the jobs platform work encompasses. Roubaud et al. (2024) found that: (a) these jobs are not necessarily stepping stones towards the formalization of informal workers or the entrance of young generations into the labour market; (b) the number of DDWs has multiplied

by 3.6 between 2012 and 2023 – increasing from 829 workers in 2012 to 1832 in the last year studied. There has been a clear difference between the increase in digital drivers (+150%) versus that of delivery workers (850%); (c) in 2023, the earning gap had reached -39% compared to formal jobs and +16% relative to informal jobs; (d) in that year, DDWs had worked an average 44 hours a week - 3 hours more than formal workers and 9 hours more than informal workers; (e) these long working hours not only have an impact on job quality, but also upon work risk and ill health; (f) gender distribution prioritizes males (9 out of 10 workers are men) and race distribution shows that only a little more than half of platform jobs are held by non-white workers, and (g) in 2023, 25% of these jobs had attracted the age-cohort between 14 and 29 years old.

Unfortunately, platform labour is officially classified only in aggregate terms, meaning that differences between host and migrant workers' behaviour cannot be studied. The National System for Migratory Registration (SISMIGRA), handled by the Federal Police, tracks the formal occupation performed by migrants, but platform labour is usually carried out as informal work. This is why migrant workers become invisible in the formal employment Census, as many either do not count with the documentation necessary to open an account as individual micro-entrepreneurs (MEI) or are not registered under that specific occupation. Moreover, the variable of 'platform work' does not form part of the registration forms required to be filled out by migrants.

However, it has been estimated that there are more than 600 thousand digital drivers in Brazil. Also, that digital platforms present strong entry barriers for women due to job insecurity and high work-load – a topic to be further explored given the gradual feminization of migration (Jaramillo-Dent et al. 2023). Platform work, most especially in transport and delivery is an activity highly valued among migrants for three main reasons: the low barriers to entry, the lack of official regulation and the anonymity it entails, which often suits undocumented migrants (Ragulina et al., 2021).

In the next two sections, examples will be provided of the ways in which Uber and iFood function in Brazil, their workers' experiences and, when possible, those of migrants.

Example 1: Uber and digital drivers

To show differences in platform work organization from conventional forms of work, Uber can be analysed as an example of a delivery and transport application that facilitates the access to work but also establishes restrictive barriers (Abilio, et al., 2021). Uber was established in Brazil in 2014, at the city of Rio de Janeiro and nowadays, it is present in more than 100 cities. Later on, Uber has expanded into other sectors like, Uber Eats, delivery of food by bicycle, motorcycle or foot and Uber X Share for those passengers that use a common means of transport as they share similar routes.

The firm establishes a direct communication between drivers and clients through an application located in the workers' smartphones. None of Uber's drivers are obliged to offer their services exclusively to one platform, having often more than two apps in use simultaneously. But drivers do have substantive restrictions. For example, (a) drivers are not allowed to transfer their apps to any other person that would provide services; (b) the firm pays the drivers for

services and offers them prizes when conditions agreed upon are met; (c) it also pays higher wages to those drivers that have a client's acceptance rate of more than 80%; (d) however, the firm blocks those drivers that are inactive; it sends threatening emails to them to reactivate the platform and, (d) Uber's exercise of control takes place through consumers' evaluations and claims. Moreover, drivers are sanctioned if their behaviour is considered inappropriate. They are subjected to the rigid control inbuilt in the algorithms whose laws are predefined and inserted into them by the firm.

In a study by Rubilar Unda (2020), the author analyses the dialogues between 114 participants in WhatsApp groups where only digital drivers participate and observes 13 of these groups in Facebook. In their narratives, drivers show trust and respect among each other and they share information on the best time-periods for car rides, areas with large or small demand for their services, places to be avoided - due potential theft and police oversight - their doubts on the payment methods of platform firms, on bonuses granted, commissions paid for the services offered and contributions to solving mechanical and technological problems. Drivers criticize claims made by passengers and show dissatisfaction with the high tax commissions charged by firms (around 25% of the charge per ride), as well as, with the weak functioning of the cellular apps' supports. The authors estimate that around 10 % of these drivers are migrants, mostly belonging to the 25-35 age cohort and 30% having completed secondary or high school education. There is a majority of male drivers (81%) and, among migrants, only an estimated 5% are women.

Though Uber and Didi are active in Brazil, 63% of drivers prefer the first firm because of its higher demand. In São Paulo, their average monthly wage in Uber is of 901,64 US dollars, though the firm advertises much higher monthly wages, between 842,86 and 1372,10 US dollars. Workers keep stable routines with an average of 60 hours of work per week – well above the 44 hs, legal norm- and drive between 10 to 12 hours per day. They often denounce that they face high risks being exposed to city violence and fake users' registries, or else, being robbed or attacked by passengers. They claim they suffer constant oversight by street traffic authorities due to the unregulated character of their jobs. They also worry about their physical and psychological discomfort and exhaustion attributed to their long working hours and the demand that they should always be ready to work – a sort of 'digital slavery' (Antunes, 2018). The passengers' frequent and unjust critiques tend to affect negatively their self-esteem.

Though for only 5% of drivers, this has been their first job - as the majority have already been involved either in services or industry - most do not have any other source of income. Most of them, 'chose' this work due to previous unemployment. However, they also tend to value the jobs' flexible times. Moreover, many drivers have a certain distorted perception when they regard themselves as entrepreneurs or 'self-made men'. However, almost the totality of the drivers interviewed in the study being analysed, express being in favour of the regularization of their jobs.

Drivers suggest that firms have to update their services. They think that the system should include a detailed profile of the passengers, of their place of destiny and of ride payment in advance by card. They say that firms should lower the administration commission paid per consumer and raise the driving tariff that remains stable since 2015. They also demand that

firms should pay for accident, life and theft insurance, as up to now firms are not financially responsible for any of those harmful events.

In terms of health, 45% of drivers declare that it has not been affected. However, various studies have shown that there are many causes for ill health, such as, incompatibilities/conflicts between personal life and extreme work schedules, as well as, night and weekend shifts. These conditions tend to produce irritability and high anxiety. Moreover, the monotony of driving long hours in repetitive positions that demand effort can provoke symptoms like: muscular pain, tendinitis, overweight, leg tremors and other (Franco & Escudero, 2019; Veruska Narciso & De Mello, 2017).

A study undertaken by Zanforlin & Grohmann (2022) based upon an analysis of training programs for migrant entrepreneurs aims to show how the platformization of labour and the entrepreneurial discourse shape the relationship of São Paulo migrants recruited by the NGO Migraflif. This is another aspect to bear in mind: the important role played by NGOs to engage migrants as platform workers. For example, in the case of Migraflif, the NGO works in direct collaboration with Facebook and Uber and migrants enrolled in the institution's training programmes become dependent upon the NGO to access jobs in those platforms.

Example 2: iFood and delivery workers

Another well-known case of an expanding digital platform in Brazil is that of iFood. Carvalho & Nogueira (2023) show that delivery apps were introduced by a national company, in 1997, acting only in São Paulo. The name iFood began to be used in 2011, but the growth of the app started only in 2014. Its main competitors, Uber Eats and Rappi, entered the Brazilian market around two years later.

iFood has established itself as Brazil's leading app-based delivery company, with over 200.000 registered workers (Fioravanti, et al., 2023). In 2023, IBGE (2022) estimated that 39.5% of the digital workers that used apps for the delivery of food and other products, were black inhabitants of the periphery and workers within the 18-28 years old cohort, even younger than those involved in driving apps (Pires et al., 2026). Own or rented bicycles and smartphones are the only requirements to enter the sector, beyond their capacity of resistance to high physical exertion.

These workers have usually completed medium schooling or have incomplete superior studies (IBGE, 2022) in a somewhat higher proportion than non-digital workers (61% versus 48%). These young workers have usually held previous jobs in services, e.g. at supermarkets, fast food networks, civil construction or as waiters, security officers, office-boys and other. In São Paulo, delivery workers narrate they work 6 days a week, 10-12 hs. Daily, and aim to earn between 20 and 30 US dollars per day. Their average monthly income was 30% higher than that of non-platform workers. More than 60% had no social protection, while 77,1% were self-employed.

In general, the interviewees of Pires et al.'s study (2026) value 'working for themselves', as they feel free from having a boss or responding to rigid labour norms - given the authoritarian character of work hierarchies in Brazil. These workers tend to remain in the digital delivery sector till a better opportunity arises, for example, with the use of motorcycles or cars. But

almost none consider schooling as a way of social mobility nor do they expect to follow University-level training. Other of their expectations relate becoming entrepreneurs and handling virtual businesses in food, clothing or digital commerce, or else, investing in stock, bitcoins and online bets – under the influence of financial coaches or influencers.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The study has shown some of the benefits and problems involved within platform capitalism and analysed a number of the trends Brazil has developed. The academic literature presents polarized views in respect to ICTs, either assuring the ‘virtual circle’ they generate or emphasizing how they contribute to increase the distance between governments and citizens. The obstacles hosts and migrants face when dealing with digitalization, e.g. digital illiteracy, difficulties in connectivity, faults in the applications themselves and linguistic barriers within platforms are recurrently discussed to show new types of social inequalities. Digital technologies have demanded new governance modes from the State and societies; changing drastically, for example, the organization of work for hosts and migrants and the forms and frequency of daily communications.

Migrant populations have suffered the impacts of digitalization more intensively due to their prior vulnerability and lack of social integration, but they have also used them as an opportunity for self-reliance and for transnational communication. Digital apps contribute to implement a ‘simultaneous double presence’ of migrants within their countries of origin and those of settlement and, as such, affect the making of their subjectivities – reinterpreting them culturally and professionally in a different way- with important differences found by gender, race and generation.

The use and permanent recreation of algorithms, central in the extraction, creation and reformulation of the data with which ICTs work, confront society with a new problematic. i.e. the privacy and ethical use of personal information. A new phenomenon is at stake in Brazil, that is, the relevant role played by international organizations in the mapping and control of migration flows through digital means. The sophisticated digital tools being applied allow to gather personal information for humanitarian use. But also this information can exacerbate the control and vigilance of populations in movement. There exists little social awareness on these processes and misinformed consent among migrants of the destiny of the data gathered and its ethical use. Moreover, this data can be shared by the main institution in charge with unknown or unaccounted for third parties, who are not necessarily visible to migrants and might hinder their rights as personal data may follow unprotected pathways.

In short, if on the one hand, the digital transition promises agility, modernization and less bureaucratization of otherwise slow processes, on the other, these technologies can contribute to establish invisible barriers, diminish privacy and collective bargaining. They often act as new mechanisms for the social exclusion of migrants and other populations.

Digital platform jobs, occupied by ‘autonomous or self-employed workers’, are mentioned by Brazilian law. However, these workers’ labour is ill-defined and fragmented and they occupy an obscurely regulated place between the informal and formal work markets. This new phenomenon tends to hide a new type of workers’ exploitation, as has been illustrated through

the findings of the empirical studies on digital drivers and delivery workers at Uber and iFood, two prominent Brazilian platform firms.

Meanwhile, the amount of migrants in these types of jobs in Brazil is hard to estimate due to gaps in statistical data. However, they share with non-migrant digital workers precarious, underpaid and unstable working conditions, long working hours, no welfare benefits, high risks, stress and ill-health for which platform firms take on no responsibility. Local platform workers have suggested forms of work protection they require platform firms to develop and finance, e. g. insurance policies of different types. These demands and other could be introduced into labour law as public policy standards for all digital platform firms in order to guarantee a minimum of workers' and migrants' human rights.

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