

# Research papers

**Author**  
Francisca Pereyra

**Coordination**  
Cecilia Poggi

## Digital Platforms in the Domestic and Care Sector: A Proposed Taxonomy for Latin America and the Caribbean

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# **Digital platforms in the domestic and care sector: A proposed taxonomy for Latin America and the Caribbean**

## **Author**

**Francisca Pereyra**

Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento (UNGS)

## **Coordination**

Cecilia Poggi (AFD)

## **Abstract**

Over the past decade, digital labour platforms for domestic and care services have become increasingly prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean, albeit with varying degrees of expansion across different national contexts. Unlike in the delivery or passenger transportation sectors, one of the most notable features of digital labour platforms in this sector is the variety of business models in use. This has profound implications for the way workers are hired, and therefore for their working conditions and access to social protection. This paper, based on an analysis of online information about companies in the sector and a compilation of case studies from the region, aims to shed light on this phenomenon. Firstly, it presents a proposal for classifying the different models of digital intermediation of domestic service in Latin America and the Caribbean, focusing on the type of contractual relationship established with workers. Secondly, the analysis illustrates how each identified platform category impacts workers' access to formalisation, social protection, and labour rights in general. Finally, the paper reflects on the challenges posed by this diversity and complexity in terms of the regulatory needs of these new forms of digital intermediation within the sector.

## **Keywords**

Digital Labour Platforms; Domestic & Care Services; Social Protection; Labour Conditions; Latin America and the Caribbean.

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**Résumé**

Au cours de la dernière décennie, les plateformes numériques dédiées aux services domestiques et aux soins à la personne se sont largement répandues en Amérique latine et les Caraïbes, même si leur expansion varie d'un pays à l'autre. Contrairement aux secteurs de la livraison ou du transport de passagers, l'une des caractéristiques les plus marquantes de ces plateformes numériques est la diversité des modèles économiques utilisés. Cela a des implications profondes sur les modalités d'embauche des travailleurs, et donc sur leurs conditions de travail et leur accès à la protection sociale. Le présent document, qui s'appuie sur une analyse des informations disponibles en ligne concernant les entreprises du secteur et sur une compilation d'études de cas menées dans la région, vise à mettre en lumière ce phénomène. D'une part, elle propose une classification des différents modèles d'intermédiation numérique dans le secteur des services à domicile en Amérique latine et les Caraïbes, en se concentrant sur le type de relation contractuelle établi avec les travailleurs. D'autre part, l'analyse montre comment chaque

catégorie de plateformes identifiées influence l'accès des travailleurs à la régularisation, à la protection sociale et aux droits du travail en général. Enfin, cet article examine les défis posés par cette diversité et cette complexité en ce qui concerne les besoins réglementaires liés à ces nouvelles formes d'intermédiation numérique dans le secteur.

**Mots-clés**

plateformes numériques de travail, services domestiques et de soins, protection sociale, conditions de travail, Amérique latine et les Caraïbes.

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d'équipe à ce stade initial, ainsi que l'aide décisive apportée par les discussions finales sur cet article avec la Dre Ariela Micha. Les recherches et les éclairages offerts par des collègues de l'équipe d'économie de l'UNGS, Mariana Pellegrini et Violeta Guitart, ont également été essentiels à la rédaction de cet article. L'auteure remercie également les précieuses questions et contributions de Júlia Tavares Pereira à une version préliminaire de ce travail. L'article a par ailleurs bénéficié d'une série de commentaires et de suggestions reçus par l'auteure de la part des participants à la 9e Conférence du Réseau pour une réglementation au service du travail décent (OIT Genève) ; à la 20e Conférence sur les marchés du travail et l'équité (UNGS, Buenos Aires) ; au IIIe Colloque international « Soins, droits et inégalités » (USP, São Paulo) et au Séminaire « Nouveaux modèles d'entreprises dans le secteur des soins » (USP, São Paulo). Les résultats, interprétations et conclusions exprimés dans cet article sont uniquement ceux de l'auteure et ne reflètent pas nécessairement les points de vue de l'AFD, de l'UNGS ou de toute autre institution affiliée.

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## Introduction

Domestic and care services are one of the most important sources of female employment and its weight is particularly significant among women from vulnerable backgrounds (for example, economic migrants, racial/ethnic minorities and low-income sectors in general). In highly unequal regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the weight of these workers is particularly high: they represent 5.1% of total employment and 17.8% of female salaried work (ILO, 2023). In addition to performing household chores –such as cleaning, cooking, washing, ironing, and so on– these women may also meet direct care needs (such as those of children, the elderly, etc.). In fact, in a region that is among the fastest aging in the world, domestic workers represent half of paid caregivers for older people (Stampini *et al.*, 2025). However, despite the important contribution these women make in meeting many households domestic and care needs, their work is

often undervalued. As has been pointed out, this occupation is usually perceived as an extension of female household roles which often makes it difficult to conceive it as “real work” (Addati, *et al.*, 2019).

The historically relegated nature of the occupation led the International Labour Organization (ILO) to adopt Convention 189 in 2011. The Convention seeks to establish basic decent labour standards for these workers. It is important to note that, at the moment this document is written, almost half of the countries that ratified this Convention are in the LAC region (19 out of 40)<sup>1</sup>. This is why many countries in the region have recently improved the legal frameworks that regulate the activity bringing, in most cases, the rights of these workers to the level of the rest of salaried workers (see Appendix 1). And, most of them also implemented additional policies to promote decent work in the sector (Cebollada Gay, 2019). However, informality remains significantly high (72%), becoming the most pressing

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<sup>1</sup> The remaining 21 countries are distributed between Europe (9 countries); Africa (6 countries); Oceania (3 countries) and Asia (3 countries, including Turkey). This information (which is continuously updated)

can be found at:  
[https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_es/f?p=NORMLEX\\_PUB:11300:0::NO::P11300\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:2551460](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_es/f?p=NORMLEX_PUB:11300:0::NO::P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460)

problem of the sector. The situation remains critical as formality constitutes the main gateway to access basic labour rights and social protection. Thus, domestic service continues to be among the least protected occupations in the regions' salaried labour spectrum, leaving almost 15 million people –overwhelmingly women– outside of the basic social benefit schemes associated with their work (ILO, 2021).

While most households find workers through word of mouth, both globally and in LAC, intermediaries also play an important role. These include, among others, recruitment/employment agencies, private companies that provide services through salaried workers, cooperatives and, more recently, digital labour platforms (Fudge and Hobden, 2018). According to existing estimates, in LAC the proportion of jobs obtained through these brokers oscillates around 20%, although there is evidence that suggests that this is a growing trend (WIEGO, 2022; ILO, 2021). In line with global trends, digital labour platforms appear to be one of the most dynamic types of intermediaries in the sector that are

experiencing significant expansion in the region (Pereyra *et al.*, 2023).

What do digital labour platforms imply specifically for domestic and care services in LAC? Given that widespread informality in the occupation: How do platforms impact in this regard? Do they always constitute a source of increased precariousness? Or can they sometimes imply some type of improvement for workers? How can we classify platforms in the region in terms of their impact on workers' labour conditions?

In line with these questions, the objective of this work is to propose a classification of regional platforms of the sector. Undoubtedly, domestic & care service platforms can be classified according to several different criteria (for an analysis of the possibilities see Poblete, *et al.*, 2024). In line with the questions posed above, the exercise presented in this paper seeks to add value to existing literature by focusing on how these new intermediaries' impact in terms of the most challenging issue faced by domestic workers in the region: the need to increase stagnated levels of

formalisation<sup>2</sup> (so that they can access social protection and all the labour rights stipulated for the occupation).

In line with this concern, the central variable around which the taxonomy is built has to do with (i) the type of employment relationship platforms establish with workers, as this aspect appears to be the most significant predictor of (ii) chances of formalisation (and its associated benefits) as well as of other relevant aspects of the labour experience. However, as Halliday (2021) points out, a very usual complaint about digital labour platforms is that they misclassify workers (especially by declaring them freelance contractors rather than employees). Therefore, the taxonomy deploys two additional variables that seek to explore to what extent the contractual relationship promoted by platforms implies an appropriate framework to reflect the labour reality of workers. These include: (iii) the degree and the form in which platforms intervene in the relationship

between workers and the households receiving the services and iv) the level and type of control that platforms exercise over workers' labour performance.

It is certainly a taxonomy that takes up and uses elements of existing research – particularly the initial classification of Tandon and Rathi (2021) for South and Southeast Asia– as existing literature frequently alludes (explicitly or implicitly) to this classification. Yet, there is still no systematic and widespread application and adaptation of existing classificatory models to the problems and reality of LAC. This work seeks to fill this gap while also generating the broadest and more comprehensive collection of regional cases developed to date.

Thus, through a sample of 86 enterprises analysed, this article develops a taxonomy aimed to capture the most salient challenges posed by digital intermediation in the domestic and care sector across LAC. The analysis delves into each category of platforms identified, seeking to illustrate how the different

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<sup>2</sup> Informal labour has been historically regarded as a broad and complex concept for which several definitions and measurement strategies exist (see ILO, 2013). This paper relies on applied literature in LAC, which shows broad

consensus on the use of the lack of registration in the social security system associated to labour as the main way to estimate the informal work (Arias *et al.* 2018; Maurizio and Vázquez 2019).

contract and work arrangements impact on the possibilities of accessing formal employment (and its associated benefits) as well as on other relevant working conditions. Finally, the article reflects on

the challenges that the diversity and complexity found pose in terms of regulatory needs of these new forms of digital intermediation in the sector.

# 1. Previous research and study context

Research on digital labour platforms<sup>3</sup> for the provision of domestic and care services has been growing slowly but steadily in recent years. Whereas initially literature tended to focus on developed contexts –especially in cases from Europe and the United States– in the last years, studies in the Global South have experienced significant growth (for a detailed chronology, see Moreira Cardoso and Tavares Pereira, 2022).

When it comes to assessing the impacts of these platforms on the sector, existing reports show some convergence on some positive and negative aspects of the phenomenon. For example, there is a certain consensus that such companies provide quick job opportunities for women who face pressing urgent financial needs. In this sense, it is not surprising that many studies on the subject focus on migrant women (Van Doorn, 2023; Floros and Jorgensen, 2022; Rodríguez Modroño, 2022).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it has also been observed that the sector's platforms allow workers an important margin of time flexibility. This is regarded as being of fundamental value (although not exclusively) insofar as it facilitates the compatibility of the labour participation of these women with the unpaid care work that is socially assigned to them (Hunt and Machigura, 2016; Hunt and Samman, 2020; Tizziani and Poblete, 2022; Sibiya and du Toit, 2022). However, other studies emphasise problematic aspects. Among them, controversial practises associated to the algorithmic management of these platforms occupy a central place. Indeed, research has pointed out how algorithms introduced new forms of control, surveillance and sanction through ratings that strongly impact on access to work and earning levels.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In line with the type of companies analysed in existing literature, we use a broad notion of the concept of digital labour platforms, which includes from companies that make intensive use of digitally automated processes (usually involving algorithmic management) throughout all the stages involved in the provision of services –thus exercising considerable control over the work process– to other experiences in which the use of these techniques can be limited to basic initial operations such as linking supply and demand.

<sup>4</sup> While it is true that migrant women tend to have a significant weight in the sector in general, some studies suggest that their presence is even greater in these digital environments, given that platforms constitute an alternative to the lack of local networks and contacts for employment (Pereyra *et al.*, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Assessments are usually unidirectional and tend to fall solely on workers, who are not allowed to rate those who employ them.

This logic generates a work environment characterised by instability, self-exploitation and dependence on “digital reputation” (Van Doorn, 2017; Gruszka *et al.*, 2024). Another salient issue pertains to the problematic nature of the public overexposure of workers' profiles. The display of personal information on these platforms has no impact on or added value to the tasks to be performed (such as age, race, religion, etc.) and may lend itself to potential discrimination (Shoenbaum, 2016; Kalemba *et al.*, 2024; Rodríguez-Covarrubia and Álvarez Figueroa, 2024). In addition, platforms often invite employers to explore workers' social networks (Ticona and Maatescu, 2018).

However, when considering the impact of these companies on a key aspect such as the formalisation of labour relations, the picture becomes more heterogeneous (and may even seem confusing at first glance). On the one hand, many studies point out that these platforms may make work more precarious as many of them lead to the classification of workers as independent contractors. When workers are labelled as such, they are excluded from the possibility of accessing the social security associated with salaried work (Hunt and Machigura, 2016; Santiago and Piñeyro, 2021; Ferreira Vale and Rebecchi, 2021). On the other hand, some studies suggest that certain domestic and care platforms that act as intermediaries between workers and employer households have the potential to formalise labour relations.<sup>6</sup> This capacity, when identified, is related to issues such as the ‘digital trace’ (Piasna, 2020) left by these companies –related to the existence of the workers and the labour relations in which they are immersed– something that would encourage behaviour more conducive to formalisation among employer households. Authors such as Ticona and Maatescu (2018) have also pointed out that, especially when it comes to care services, these platforms may adopt a formalising narrative to sustain the perception that providers are ‘safe’. However, they note, this does not translate into a commitment to effective registration with social security but may involve actions such as the dissemination/exposure of regulatory information (pointing to both employer households and workers). In some cases, it was observed that platforms may include services aimed at facilitating the formalisation

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<sup>6</sup> The text refers to the potential to formalise (and not to a direct formalising effect) because these platforms offer environments conducive to employers registering workers (through services, tools and information) but, in the vast majority of cases, this is not a mandatory condition for using their services.

of workers. These can range from simple tools such as contract templates or payment interfaces but also services aimed to formalise workers on behalf of the employing household (Digital Future Society, 2021; Gruszka and Böhm, 2020; Lenzi, 2023). Finally, some cases in which platforms hire workers as their own employees have also been reported (see for example, Ilsøe, 2020; Dimitriadis and Coletto, 2024; Rodríguez Modroño *et al.*, 2022).

Undoubtedly, the divergent reports on the (in)formalising effect of these platforms –as well as on other decent work considerations not developed here– are due to the diversity of business models that they can assume and that need to be differentiated as clearly as possible.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in contrast to the standardised on-demand scheme that is emblematic of labour platforms such as passenger transport or delivery companies, those in the domestic and care sector present business models that can differ significantly.

While the first case studies on these platforms tended to describe the organisational set-up of the company analysed without contrasting it or referencing other business designs, the accumulated work of the following years began to allow for outlining comparisons among different business models. In this vein, the pioneering classification presented by Tandon and Rathi (2021a and 2021b) for India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Vietnam has tended to prevail in the current literature on this sector's platforms. The authors produced one of the first differentiations between on-demand platforms<sup>8</sup> and others that tended to limit their functions to linking supply and demand. In the latter case, some variants were differentiated. On the one hand, a group of platforms called marketplaces were distinguished. These function as an online job board, where employers and workers create their profiles and advertise job offers and their labour force respectively.<sup>9</sup> In these cases, companies do not

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<sup>7</sup> Among other relevant decent work considerations, and by way of example, is the issue of remuneration. While some platforms offer fixed prices or minimum floors, in others it is the workers who set their own rates, according to their needs. Commission charging policies are also highly variable. Some companies charge workers a flat fee for receiving job offers (and may even add an additional fee for applying for each job) and/or retain a percentage of the profits from each service provided. Other companies, on the other hand, only charge commissions to household-clients (Cebollada Gay, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> On-demand platforms are digital businesses that match customers and workers through algorithmic systems. While under this model workers are typically classified as independent contractors, platforms often exercise significant control over the allocation, monitoring, evaluation, and pricing of work through algorithmic management. The most typical examples of the on-demand business model (and the tensions it entails) are to be found in the widely studied cases of delivery and ride-hailing platforms.

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that, already in 2018, Ticona *et al.*, in a study that contrasted passenger transport platforms with those of domestic and care work in the United States, outlined a first differentiation between the on-demand model (which predominates in the transport sector) and the marketplace model (which is mostly associated with the domestic and care work sector).

intervene in any aspect related to the establishment of working conditions, which are subject to negotiation between the parties. On the other hand, another type of intermediary platform was detected, which the authors named digital placement agencies. In these, workers register digitally and receive offers of jobs (usually stable and of varying working hours) on their phones. Unlike marketplaces, these platforms may play a somewhat more active role. In particular, they generally suggest certain basic working conditions (including salary levels) at the beginning of the employment relationship. However, once this relationship starts, they tend to withdraw almost completely (Tandon and Rathi, 2021b).<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to note that, since the emergence of this taxonomy, literature on the subject has tended to adopt the proposed categories in order to indicate the type of company analysed. Moreover, the dissemination of this classification was used intensively and facilitated several comparative studies between two or more platforms (see for example, Digital Future Society, 2021; Marcolini and Pais 2024; Teixeira, 2024; Hopwood *et al.*, 2024). In fact, the taxonomy was recently applied in an extensive survey of domestic and care work enterprises in Spain (Rodríguez Modroño, 2024).

In LAC, among the pioneering exploratory approaches, an analysis of a selected group of seven platforms in the sector was carried out by Blanchard (2023). It showed that different business models coexist in the region –with varying impacts on workers– a phenomenon that undoubtedly needs to be explored in depth. The evidence accumulated in recent years certainly allows us to identify on-demand models (Fraga and Monticelli, 2021; Ferreira Rodrigues, 2023; Andrada *et al.*, 2023); marketplaces (Fragale Filho and Dos Santos Lima, 2024) and digital placement agencies (Moreno, 2022; Hidalgo Cordero, 2022; Pereyra *et al.* 2023). Nevertheless –while maintaining the original categories to preserve comparability–, the taxonomy proposed in this paper includes a series of adjustments. Such adaptation seeks, on the one hand, to achieve the proposed goal, which is to identify the different contractual/labour arrangements that platforms establish with workers and their implications in terms of access to formalisation and social protection. And, on the other

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<sup>10</sup> The authors note that in the cases they analysed, companies tend to re-intervene only in cases where there are complaints from one of the parties.

hand, this exercise also allowed a better adaptation of the classification to the reality observed in the region.

## 2. Data and Methodology

The paper is conducted through a comprehensive online-based search, developed from 2023 until the end of 2025.<sup>11</sup> Platforms were found through different means. First, existing case studies on the topic constituted an essential initial step to develop the quest, providing information on some of the more important companies of the sector. Second, grey literature on the subject also helped to guide the search, generating hints and information on the existence of many other platforms which are not covered by academic publications. The survey benefited from the use of different sets of keywords (which were, in turn, selected based on the readings on the topic). The search based on these keywords was carried out both on the general web and in mobile phone application stores, specifically in the Android Playstore and the iPhone App Store.

Once platforms were detected customer and employee profiles were created in order to navigate the applications, trying to explore every possible loophole that would allow gathering information about the rules and operation of the companies<sup>12</sup>. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, in all cases where possible, information on how the different platforms work was reinforced and deepened using available case studies.

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<sup>11</sup> Data collection was part of a team effort that required constant updates given the extremely dynamic nature of these platforms. A first survey was carried out with Ania Tizziani and Lorena Poblete (see Pereyra *et al.*, 2023). Such survey was later updated by Ariela Micha in 2023 (Micha 2024) and has been revised and modified again for this paper.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted, however, that this exploration was often interrupted at different points due to the fact that several platforms requested credit card payments in order to continue browsing their websites/apps.

### **3. A proposed classification based on contractual arrangements and access to social protection**

This section presents a first overview of the operation of 86 digital platforms for domestic and care services in LAC.<sup>13</sup> As it is a recent, expanding and highly dynamic phenomenon, the compilation is not intended to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the different modes of operation of this type of companies. Based on the exploration of these platforms, Figure 1 offers a classification in which, as anticipated above, the criterion used is mainly based on the type of contractual relationship between companies and workers. This main variable, in turn, has a profound impact on chances of formalisation, and thus on access to the benefits of social security and the labour rights stipulated for the occupation in each national context.<sup>14</sup>

As already mentioned, in order to avoid a classification based solely on the way in which the platforms themselves determine their link with workers, two additional variables were also taken into account. The first has to do with the degree and the form in which the companies intervene in the relationship between workers and households/clients. And the second points to the level and type of control that companies exert over workers' performance. These latter variables contribute to a better understanding of how working conditions are configured across categories and, in particular, how platforms may misclassify workers and restrict access to the labour rights to which they are entitled.

Before describing each category of platform, two considerations should be taken into account. On the one hand, it is important to remember that these are "ideal" or "pure" types: this means that, when analysing real cases, small variations or differences may arise with respect to the original description of each group. On the other hand, there are certain

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<sup>13</sup> Branches or franchises found of the same company in different countries are counted separately (given that, as will be seen further on, there may be variations in the way they operate in different contexts).

<sup>14</sup> As noted above, in recent years most countries in the region have sought –at least at the regulatory level– to incorporate domestic workers into general social security systems and to align their labour rights with those of salaried workers in the broader labour market. This, however, does not mean that significant shortcomings and discriminatory arrangements have disappeared, although the overall situation has improved considerably (ILO, 2021 ; IDF-WIEGO, 2023).

transversal tools or practices that cross the broad spectrum of sector platforms in the region (many of which have also been detected in studies from other parts of the world). These can be seen towards the bottom of Figure 1 (in blue).

**Figure 1. Proposal for the classification for domestic & care labor platforms in LAC based on the contractual relationship they establish with workers and the associated level of social protection.**

| <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b>   |   |  | <b>3</b>  |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>ON DEMAND PLATFORMS:<br/>A DISGUISED LABOUR<br/>RELATIONSHIP?</b>  | <b>PLATFORMS FOCUSED ON ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTION<br/>BETWEEN WORKERS &amp; EMPLOYER HOUSEHOLDS</b>  |   |  | <b>PLATFORMS<br/>AS EMPLOYERS</b>   |
| <b>Type of contractual relationship between platform &amp; workers</b>  |  |   |  |   |
| Workers defined as "independent".   | Workers are expected to be hired by households/clients.  |   |  | The platform hires workers as their own employees.  |
| <b>Access to formalisation, social protection and labor rights</b>  |  |   |  |   |
| <b>Very low</b><br>In the best-case scenario, workers may register as self-employed (expensive for them & limited social security benefits). Labor rights are usually restricted to salaried domestic workers.  | <b>Low to Medium</b><br>Households are supposed to formalise workers but, as it happens outside, they tend not to comply. Formalisation (and thus access to social protection and labor rights) increases when platforms offer to formalise on behalf of employers.  |   |  | <b>High</b><br>Platforms formalise workers and pay social security contributions. Workers access social security benefits and labor rights foreseen for the occupation.   |
| <b>Platform's degree and type of intervention in the relationship between workers &amp; households</b>  |  |   |  |   |
| High at all stages of the work process.   | Low & restricted to connection stage.  | Medium & mostly focused on connection stage.  | High & restricted to connection and contractual stages.  | High at all stages of the work process.   |
|   | <b>(A) MARKETPLACE</b>   | <b>(B) DIGITAL PLACEMENT</b>  | <b>(C) DIGITAL PLACEMENT WITH PAYROLL SERVICES</b>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prices set by the platform.</li> <li>- Payments channeled through the platform.</li> <li>- Platform's monopolisation of daily communication between the parties.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Works like a job-advertisement board: both workers &amp; employers publicise their ads.</li> <li>* The platform filters &amp; suggests candidates (workers seeking jobs or households seeking help).</li> <li>* Users are invited to contact candidates to arrange interviews (and eventually, salaries &amp; labour conditions).</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Similar to the model of traditional placement agencies where households are the clients.</li> <li>* Adds the digital match of supply &amp; demand focusing on the provision of "verified workers".</li> <li>* Some companies may suggest starting salaries (which are not mandatory).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Replicates model B adding optional Payroll services such as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formalisation on behalf of employers.</li> <li>- Payment of social security contributions on behalf of employers.</li> <li>- Confection of salary receipts.</li> <li>- Calculation of holidays and overtime pay. (Payroll services can also be offered independently.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prices set by the platform.</li> <li>- Payments channeled through the platform.</li> <li>- Platform's monopolisation of daily communication between the parties.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Platform's degree &amp; type of control over workers' activities</b>   |  |   |  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Intense algorithmic control of the daily labour performance. Usually includes:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Geolocalisation</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Control of workers' check in &amp; check out</li> <li>- Assessment of completed tasks/jobs</li> <li>- Use of scores/rankings to assign incentives or sanctions.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Once the initial connection between workers &amp; households is established, these platforms tend to withdraw.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">The only exceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provision by some companies of "guarantees" for a certain period allowing to automatically replace a worker if there is dissatisfaction with her performance.</li> <li>- Scores assigned to workers (usually based on clients' information) that may affect the obtention of new job opportunities.</li> </ul> |   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Intense algorithmic control of the daily labour performance. Usually includes:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Geolocalisation</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Control of workers' check in &amp; check out</li> <li>- Assessment of completed tasks/jobs</li> <li>- Use of scores/rankings to assign incentives or sanctions.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Common transversal practices: * Request of documentation from workers regarding training, employment references and criminal records * Public exposure of workers' profiles * Offer of paid training courses to workers * Offer of microloans to workers.</b>  |  |   |  |   |
| <b>PRECARISATION</b>  | <b>POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS</b>  |   |  | <b>INCREASED PROTECTION</b>   |

Source: Author's own elaboration

**Figure 2. Distribution of LAC domestic service & care labor platforms in the proposed typology.**

| ON DEMAND PLATFORMS:<br>A DISGUISED LABOUR<br>RELATIONSHIP?  | PLATFORMS FOCUSED ON ESTABLISHING<br>THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WORKERS<br>& EMPLOYER HOUSEHOLDS   |  |   | PLATFORMS<br>AS EMPLOYERS  |
|--|--|--|---|--|
|  | (A) MARKETPLACE  | (B) DIGITAL<br>PLACEMENT   | (C) DIGITAL<br>PLACEMENT<br>WITH PAYROLL<br>SERVICES  |  |
| <p><b>Argentina</b><br/>Duo0</p> <p><b>Brasil</b><br/>Parafuzo<br/>Donamaid<br/>Faxina da hora<br/>Ahoj Servicios<br/>Servicios<br/>Easy Bee<br/>Diarista Facil<br/>Tidmo</p> <p><b>Chile</b><br/>Mopit</p> <p><b>Ecuador</b><br/>Home Assist<br/>Cleon</p> <p><b>El Salvador</b><br/>Wi Jelp</p> <p><b>México</b><br/>Aliada</p> <p><b>Panamá</b><br/>Lavanda</p> <p><b>Perú</b><br/>Tu aliada en limpieza<br/>Loop<br/>Hadas</p> | <p><b>Argentina</b><br/>Babysits<br/>Sitly<br/>Cuidarlos</p> <p><b>Brasil</b><br/>Happy Home<br/>Nannys<br/>Babysits<br/>Sitly<br/>GetNinjas<br/>Odette</p> <p><b>Bolivia</b><br/>Nannys</p> <p><b>Chile</b><br/>Babysits<br/>Sitly</p> <p><b>Colombia</b><br/>Babysits<br/>Sitly</p> <p><b>Costa Rica</b><br/>HomePro</p> <p><b>Ecuador</b><br/>Babysits</p> <p><b>Guyana</b><br/>Safe Heaven</p> <p><b>México</b><br/>Babysits<br/>Sitly<br/>Yaztamx</p> <p><b>Panamá</b><br/>Sitly<br/>Nana</p> <p><b>Paraguay</b><br/>Babysits</p> <p><b>Perú</b><br/>Babysits</p> <p><b>El Salvador</b><br/>Babysits</p> <p><b>Venezuela</b><br/>Jomi</p> | <p><b>Argentina</b><br/>Cuidamia</p> <p><b>Brasil</b><br/>KDCare<br/>María Brasileira<br/>Mary Help</p> <p><b>Chile</b><br/>La Nana<br/>Portal Asesoras<br/>Zolvers<br/>SweetCare</p> <p><b>Colombia</b><br/>Portal Empleadas<br/>Zolvers</p> <p><b>Costa Rica</b><br/>Serena Cares</p> <p><b>Ecuador</b><br/>Casera</p> <p><b>México</b><br/>Zolvers</p> <p><b>Perú</b><br/>Bertha</p> <p><b>Uruguay</b><br/>Tu Nanny</p> | <p><b>Argentina</b><br/>Zolvers</p> <p><b>Chile</b><br/>Keeping<br/>Nana Mia<br/>Pide tu Nana</p> <p><b>Colombia</b><br/>Symplifica<br/>Homesquad<br/>Hogaru Aporta</p> <p><b>México</b><br/>Cleo<br/>Mujeres Sostenibles<br/>(Cooperative)</p> | <p><b>Colombia</b><br/>Hogaru<br/>Tap Tapp<br/>Home and Care<br/>Auxlimpieza<br/>Aseo Ya<br/>Casa Limpia<br/>Toc Toc<br/>Serv<br/>Ima Limpia<br/>(Cooperative)</p> <p><b>Costa Rica</b><br/>HomePro</p> <p><b>Dominican Republic</b><br/>Limpiafy</p> <p><b>Guatemala</b><br/>Betty</p> <p><b>México</b><br/>Mi Dulce Hogar</p> <p><b>Panamá</b><br/>Mi Maid<br/>Xpress</p> <p><b>Paraguay</b><br/>Helpers</p> <p><b>Trinidad y Tobago</b><br/>We Just Clean</p> <p><b>Venezuela</b><br/>Servizi</p> |
| PRECARISATION  | CONTINUITY   | POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS  | INCREASED PROTECTION  |  |

Source: Author's own elaboration

Regarding these transversal characteristics of platforms analysed, some of the more prominent ones can be commented.

On the one hand, as has been explained above, most platforms, in their attempt to generate trust among clients, require extensive documentation from workers in order to certify experience, training, criminal records, etc. On the other hand –and with the same trust-building intention–, these companies usually (over)expose the identity of workers (Shoenbaum, 2016; van Doorn, 2017; Hunt & Machingura, 2016). Finally, in the sector's regional platforms financial and training services aimed at workers also tend to appear frequently.

When it comes to micro-credits, they are offered to a population that generally does not access the formal banking system. Although in some cases it is platforms themselves that provide these loans, in general they do so in alliance with financial companies, with highly variable levels in terms of interest rates.<sup>15</sup> Training offers, for their part, are also very recurring and are usually offered on a fee basis. Generally, the training has to do with the services offered on the platform, and especially with those related to care.<sup>16</sup>

However, there are also courses related to cleaning skills, food preparation, and animal and plant care (Blanchard, 2023). Only a few companies –including the two cooperatives that were identified in the survey, as will be detailed later– do not charge for training. These companies offer a comprehensive curriculum, encompassing the subjects previously mentioned, as well as courses pertaining to labour rights.<sup>17</sup>

While Figure 1 summarises the main characteristics of the taxonomy of platforms developed, Figure 2 shows how the companies surveyed are located by country in each of the

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<sup>15</sup> In this sense, abusive rates have been reported within the framework of platforms such as *Parafuzo* in Brazil (Ferreira Rodrigues, 2023), going through other reasonable ones financed and supervised by an international credit organization as in the case of *Zolvers* Argentina (Tizziani and Poblete, 2022), to free credits granted by the platform *Hogaru* in Colombia (Blanchard, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> When it comes to the significant deficit of training observed in the case of caregivers for older adults observed in the region, the potential of digital labor platforms has been particularly highlighted (Stampini *et al.*, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> In any case, it is important to note that neither credit offers nor training provision constitutes a category within the typology proposed in this study. Rather, as previously indicated, both should be understood as transversal dimensions that cut across the different categories constructed in the analysis.

categories. After this visual synthesis of the taxonomy and the companies classified within it, the text focuses on analysing each subgroup/category of platforms.

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### **3.1. On-demand platforms**

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The first category of platforms points to the emblematic “uberised” model. In this case, the companies usually offer one-off cleaning services or regular jobs for very few hours. In line with what has been observed among the most emblematic occupations of digital labour platforms, this type of intermediation tends to erode stable labour relations (Aloisi, 2015). As shown in Figure 1, workers are considered and treated as independent –in fact, expressions such as “collaborators”, “associates” or “partners” are often used by this type of platforms– even when there are various indicators that call this situation into question. These indicators can be grouped in two dimensions. The first dimension has to do with platforms’ intervention in the relationship between workers and households. Indeed, this category of platforms is characterised by the systematic intermediation of firms both determining the price of each job and in channelling each payment made by clients. Furthermore, these companies tend to completely monopolise communication between workers and clients. A second dimension has to do with the control and surveillance exercised by platforms over the daily activities of workers. This includes strategies such as the geo-location of service providers and the use of algorithms to evaluate, assign and control them and the tasks they perform. All this is done without any contract between workers and platforms. These are practices that undoubtedly collide with the idea of independent labour and suggest disguised employment relationships (see Madariaga *et al.*, 2018; Di Stefano, 2016).

As shown in Figure 2, this type of business model has a relatively important weight in the region: 18 of the 86 platforms surveyed fall into this category. However, it is interesting to note that companies in this category tend to concentrate in Brazil. This happens because the legal definition of domestic workers in this country contemplates the possibility of independent labour. Indeed, workers who labour for a maximum of two full days a week for the same household (although they may have jobs in different households) are called

*diaristas*<sup>18</sup> and are considered independent. Even if a *diarista* manages to register with and contribute to the social security system in order to work formally, she remains excluded from the labour rights established for the occupation (such as leave entitlements, severance compensation, and annual bonuses, among others) which are restricted to salaried employees. Therefore, the first category of digital platforms described in Figure 1 depends on the most vulnerable group of domestic workers in that country (Moreno, 2022).

In fact, many of the platforms of this type surveyed in Brazil explicitly propose jobs for a maximum of two days a week in order to attract this profile of worker. Although *diaristas* can formally register as independent under the category of “individual microentrepreneur” and access certain social protections, in practice –as is often the case with proposals that seek to finance the social protection of this sector with the meager income of the workers themselves– the vast majority remain informal. It is interesting to note that accounts on this same situation, –where platforms take advantage of legal frameworks that allow the occupation to be carried out by independent workers–, have been documented in other contexts. This has been the case in countries like South Africa (Sibiya and du Toit, 2022) or Italy (Marcolin and Pais, 2023), as well as in urban contexts like the cities of New York and Berlin (van Doorn, 2021), just to mention a few examples. In other countries where domestic work can only be provided under salaried relationships, this category of platforms is less common to find (although it exists).

Nonetheless, and leaving aside the case of Brazil, in most countries of the region the regulation of domestic service stipulates that it can only be provided under salaried relationships (Navarro, et al., 2022).<sup>19</sup> In such contexts, this category of platforms is less common to find (although it exists). Indeed, in such cases, they would be encouraging, in principle, non-compliance with the legislation (Micha, 2024).

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<sup>18</sup> “Per day” in Portuguese.

<sup>19</sup> However, there are some gray areas. In many countries, these workers are allowed to register as self-employed if they declare compliance with certain conditions of self-employment (which are not monitored). Among the most common are not receiving direct orders from a household as a subordinate worker, setting their own prices, and/or owning their own work equipment.

Beyond the lack of social protection that this business model fosters (which may or may not be validated by the regulations of each country), the experiences of workers usually coincide in a series of assessments. Undoubtedly, the pressure imposed by algorithmic work management constitutes one of the most salient discomforts. The need to work fast, to move quickly throughout the city to visit several houses and to avoid conflicts with clients (in order to evade bad ratings, and often at the cost of accepting unfair situations), are constant in the reports of studies on platforms such as *Parafuzo* in Brazil or *Aliada* in Mexico (Santiago and Piñeyro, 2021; Ferreira Rodrigues, 2023). Likewise, the “impersonality” of the system is resented among workers. In particular, when they must report a personal difficulty or explain a specific circumstance that prevents them from completing a job, they usually encounter not only automated reactions, but also, many times, sanctions. In this sense, it is not surprising that in more than one piece of research on this type of platforms, interviewed workers refer to being treated “like robots” (Teixeira, 2024; Mantilla León and Maldonado Castañeda, 2024). Existing studies tend to highlight that one of the most important fears of workers has to do with deactivations (the causes of which are often not explained or understood) that deprive them of what in most cases constitutes their main source of subsistence. Aside from potential deactivation, scoring systems can block or enable access to offers for the highest-paying jobs (such as deep cleaning, for example) and can also involve rewards, such as monthly subscription exemption for the highest-ranked workers (Andrada *et al.*, 2023).

It is also important to note that companies in this category often charge workers not only a monthly fee for being part of their workforce, but also a percentage of the payment made by clients for each completed job (Fragale Filho and dos Santos Lima, 2024; Teixeira, 2024; Ferreira Rodrigues, 2023; Andrada *et al.* 2023).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Although existing studies generally do not specify the percentage of customer payments that the platform retains, in the specific case of *Parafuzo*, in Brazil, a figure of 30% has been consistently reported (Fragale Filho and dos Santos Lima, 2024; Ferreira Rodrigues, 2023).

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### 3.2. Platforms focused on establishing the connection between workers & employers

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As noted above, LAC has proven to be the region most committed to the cause of Convention 189. Therefore, most countries have updated, modified or replaced the regulation of domestic service. Among the changes promoted, there is a trend to frame the occupation under the modality of stable salaried work. This helps to understand why the second category of platforms shown in Figure 1 (“platforms focused on establishing the connection between workers & employers”) tends to prevail. Indeed, this business scheme is better adapted to these most protective regulatory frameworks since its intervention focuses on the selection of personnel and the establishment of links between supply and demand. From that point onwards, it is households– something that platforms often explicitly express– that are ultimately responsible for the employment relationship generated.

Although these services are very similar to those offered by traditional employment agencies, these companies also incorporate a range of practices that are typical of digital labour platforms discussed above. The most salient issue pertains to the utilisation of digitally automated processes (many times involving the use of algorithms) to match supply and demand<sup>21</sup>. Additionally, these platforms exhibit one-way scores systems designed to evaluate workers, something that usually affects their chances of getting new jobs.<sup>22</sup> This type of intermediation fosters relatively stable weekly or monthly employment agreements. It is worth noting that the vast majority of platforms offering direct care services enter in this category, as these are conducive to the establishment of relatively

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<sup>21</sup> This is a key feature that differentiates this type of platform from traditional placement agencies that operate through websites.

<sup>22</sup> Admittedly, in this category –which involves tasks limited to connecting the parties– it is sometimes difficult to discern the extent to which processes are automated. In fact, authors such as Rodríguez Modroño (2024) found that in platforms of this type, the recruitment and matching process usually involves a combination of manual and automated procedures. In this sense, the exact level of automation can raise doubts about whether these are truly “platforms” or traditional agencies operating through websites (undoubtedly, to rigorously determine whether they are platforms or not, each case would need to be studied in depth). This search aimed to go as much in depth as possible in determining the use of automated processes and, only when there were doubts it prioritised the self-identification of companies as “platforms”.

personalised relationships. Notwithstanding, it is also observed that the offer of short-hour contracts always tends to prevail.

Among the companies surveyed, more than half of them (50 out of 86) belong to this group (Figure 2). As platforms in this category position themselves as mere intermediaries, without imposing conditions on those who employ workers, they tend to reproduce the dynamics and working conditions prevailing in the sector (hence, Figures 1 and 2 refer to them in terms of “continuity” of labour conditions). However, three subtypes are distinguished (columns A, B and C in the Figures), with subtype C being one that could imply some improvement in workers’ labour situation, as will be analysed later.

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### **3.2.1. Marketplace platforms**

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As shown in Figure 1, subtype A works, in principle, very similar to a job posting portal. In this business model, the income generation strategy is based on attracting the largest number of workers and employers who pay to use the tool. Indeed, this scheme implies that, on the one hand, workers pay to publish their ads (and, many times, for each application to a specific job offer). On the other hand, potential employers do the same to contact workers who meet their requirements (Rodríguez Modroño, 2024). Since these companies privilege the volume of users, they do not usually check the workers’ background neither do they intervene in payments or other contractual arrangements. Nonetheless there are certain characteristics that differentiate this model from a set of job advertisements, such as the use of automated processes to filter workers according to clients’ requirements, the unidirectional measurement of workers’ performance by employers, and the fact that initial communications are exclusively channelled through the platform.

One of the companies with the largest regional expansion is *Sitly* –originally from the Netherlands and with a strong presence in Europe– that provides babysitting services. The platform invites families who demand care to establish a series of search parameters or filters. They must include details related to the required service (frequency, schedules, tasks

to be carried out with children, etc.) but they may also include characteristics of the workers such as age ranges, formal training, experience, hourly rate and geographical location, among others. Based on the information provided, the platform generates a list of candidates that meet the stipulated requirements. Clients are invited to “open the profile” of the applicant, look at photos, reviews from previous employers, and it is even suggested to explore the workers’ social media profiles in order to “learn more about the nannies’ personal life”<sup>23</sup>. The company suggests sending messages through the platform to the most attractive candidates for the position and arranging interviews with them. Ultimately, the selection work falls on the employing families, being the main contribution of this type of company the richness and scope of the database they can provide.

As already noted, this subtype of “platforms focused on establishing the connection between workers & households” implies, in principle, continuity with previous working conditions. These platforms do not require any documentation about the employment relationship nor do they carry out any monitoring after connecting the parties. A case study on an important platform of this type in Brazil –*Get Ninjas*– identifies certain vulnerabilities that workers experience in engaging with this type of companies in addition to those inherent to their occupation. Indeed, the investigation by Fragale Filho and Dos Santos Lima (2024) shows, on the one hand, workers can be frustrated when spending their credits to apply for jobs for which they are not ultimately selected. On the other hand, the authors point out that, although these companies can facilitate entry into employment, unlike traditional insertion mechanisms that are based on networks of proximity and trust, the impersonal nature of these contacts implies greater risks. For instance, there were workers who reported non-payment by clients after having provided their services. In these types of situations, the absence of common personal contacts or networks –together with the lack of intervention on the part of the platform–, implied workers’ were left completely unprotected.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.sitly.com.ar/diez-pasos-para-encontrar-ninera> (last reviewed March 14, 2025).

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### 3.2.2. Digital placement

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Subtype B platforms collect information about workers using relatively exhaustive personnel selection techniques. Based on this information, and in response to the requirements expressed by clients –who, in this case are usually the ones who exclusively pay platforms’ fees– the companies digitally match supply and demand. The value that this kind of platforms put at stake, rather than the number of workers (which is crucial for the marketplace subtype previously reviewed) is quality. Indeed, the websites and applications analysed place significant emphasis on presenting “verified” workers. As mentioned above, when it comes to selling “trust”, platforms may appeal to an extensive repertoire of filters that workers go through. Among the most frequent ones, there are criminal background checks, training checks, references from past employments, interviews and psychological evaluations. Once again, as documented by Rodríguez Covarrubias and Figueroa (2024) for this subtype of platforms in Chile, these inquiries many times derive the violation of privacy and the exposure of sensitive personal information irrelevant to workers’ labour performance (ranging from the existence of a partner and his/her country of residence, the number and age of her children, to social, dietary and religious practices). As has been pointed out, aside from the danger of facilitating discriminatory practices, this is a situation of profound information asymmetry between both parties of the employment relationship, since workers know very little or nothing about employers (Hidalgo Cordero, 2022).

Even though workers do not pay to apply for jobs through these platforms, many of these companies propose –as part of building a trustworthy profile– training courses for them. This proposal is particularly aimed to workers who offer care services, although there are also skill workshops and programs for cleaners. It is important to remark that this training is usually paid by workers themselves. And, although in general platforms’ webpages and applications do not state that such training is mandatory, everything suggests that, at the very least, they significantly improve workers’ chances of being selected. Although business models with this characteristic have been identified throughout the whole spectrum of the sector’s platforms, this subtype in particular concentrates several cases. For example,

*Serena Cares* in Costa Rica aggressively promotes choosing certified workers among its clients, through the training provided by *Sertify*, defined as a “sister company”. Companies like *Tu Nanny* in Uruguay have developed their own training initiatives like *Tu Nanny Academy*. Many of the most well-established companies have their own paid training courses. Interestingly, some platforms have succeeded in obtaining certification for these courses from local or national authorities, allowing them to be recognised beyond the platform itself. This is for example, the case of *Cuidamia* in Argentina which offers an annual course on elderly care certified both by the City of Buenos Aires government and the National Ministry of Social Development.

Going back to the verification process, it has also been observed that the intense interaction between platform and workers at this stage generates a certain feeling of “personalisation” that the subtypes analysed above lack. However, this greater proximity often generates expectations among workers that are quickly frustrated. The disenchantment arises when workers try to resort to the platform to resolve conflicts with employers and experience difficulties in communicating, inaction or evasive responses (Teixeira, 2024).

Indeed, just as it happens in marketplaces, this type of platforms does not impose specific requirements on employers regarding workers’ labour conditions. At most, some companies may suggest certain parameters at the beginning of the labour relationship. This is especially the case when it comes to compliance with the sector basic salaries. For example, as found by Blanchard (2023), amongst the best-case scenarios, companies like *Tu Nanny* in Uruguay do not allow job proposals with payment below the legal minimum stipulated for the occupation. And, more interestingly, the platform also intervenes when these job proposals offer remuneration levels which are below the sector’s market wage (as many times market wages are above the sector’s minimum legal wage). Along these lines, *Bertha* in Peru invites employers to click a link in order to explore local market wages before contacting proposed workers. The platform *Zoivers* in México and Colombia suggests a price per hour of labour but states that “this a suggestion based on market prices but you can agree with the worker a price you both think is convenient”. As can be seen, most of the times, these companies operate in line with recommendations. Therefore, a priori and in

general terms, for workers who obtain jobs through these platforms it is possible to assume continuity with respect to what happens in the sector in general.

The few existing regional qualitative studies on this form of intermediation suggest that workers perceive advantages and disadvantages, which have generally also been observed in other subtypes of platforms in the sector. For example, it is often pointed out that these platforms may provide broader and more accessible job opportunities by generating a new and dynamic channel for search (Villarroel Valdés *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, the predominance of stable short hour job offers allows putting together agendas which may facilitate the conciliation of paid work with the care responsibilities that are socially assigned to these workers. However, this chance of customising fragmented work schedules also entails costs. Among them, workers highlight the numerous transfers to multiple households as well as the wear and tear involved in negotiations with several employers. This latter issue is particularly accentuated since the sector's labour relations are marked by extreme asymmetry and, as pointed out above, platforms offer very little or no support to workers (Tizziani and Poblete, 2022).

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### **3.2.3. Digital placement with payroll services**

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This last subtype replicates the characteristics of the one described above but adds a set of administrative and accounting services related to the hiring of workers. Given the reality of the sector, formalisation services are of particularly relevance. These include the offer to write up labour contracts, to take charge of all the administrative steps to sign up workers with social security and even to periodically pay the corresponding monthly contributions on behalf of employers.

It is important to note that these services are optional for employers who use the platform. As an example, *Pide tu Nana* in Chile offers the drafting of employment contracts, salary estimates, as well as guidance for calculating the number of vacation days and the amount of compensation. *Domesticas* de Colombia is another case that promotes "payroll

management plans" to formalise contracts so that workers can "have all their legal benefits." *Zolvers* Argentina, in turn, through the system *Zolvers Pagos*<sup>24</sup>, which is optional, offers to take charge of paying the monthly salary of the workers on behalf of employers but also of several other optional tasks. These include registering workers with social security and paying the corresponding monthly contributions –always representing the employers and using scheduled debits from their bank accounts as a payment tool– (Pereyra *et al.*, 2022).

Given that employers may experience difficulties and/or lack of time to comply with all the procedures that their role entails, the services described above can facilitate the fulfilment of their obligations. In this sense, this subtype of intervention suggests a certain potential to increase the formalisation and, therefore, improve the situation of workers.

Regarding specific studies on this type of intervention in the region, a survey was conducted among *Zolvers*' workers in Argentina (the country where the company's headquarters are located and which is the only one where these administrative services are offered). Data collected shows that the formality rate of those employees whose positions were managed through the system *Zolvers Pagos* were higher than those of the platform in general –66% versus 44%– and more than doubled the registration rate for the sector at a general level – 66% versus 26%– (Pereyra *et al.*, 2022). This study was later complemented by research on the perceptions of those who hire the company's workers using this system through focus groups: in these exchanges *Zolvers Pagos* was presented on several occasions as the "perfect solution" to the fears generated by bureaucratic procedures and/or the time that the formalisation of workers may require. In this sense, employers emphasised that, for a monthly cost perceived as low, the platform "takes care of everything" and, in several cases, interviewees stated that this service played a decisive role in their decision to register workers (Pereyra *et al.*, 2023)<sup>25</sup>. In any case, it is important to note that only 35% of *Zolvers*'

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<sup>24</sup> "Zolvers' Pagos" in Spanish.

<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, and aside from these tools offered by the company it is necessary to consider that other variables may be influencing the higher rates of formalisation. For example, in a subsequent study it was explored whether that these platform workers' profile (younger, more educated and with more presence of recent immigrants) was interfering with the higher formalisation levels attained: no significant effects were found (Micha *et al.*, 2024) However, there are other variables that may be interfering which have not been measured yet. These include: 1) the "digital trace" left by this type of hiring –which means that the

stable jobs were managed using the *Zolvers Pagos* tool.<sup>26</sup> To this, it must be added that the in-depth study of this platform revealed a hybrid model. Not only because the use of formalisation services is optional –a trait that the company shares with the vast majority of platforms within this category– but because it was also detected that the enterprise allowed “one-time only” cleaning services to be purchased. The latter are not susceptible to being formalised by households.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the situation raises nuances that make difficult the univocal categorisation of this company.

Another variant of this type of platforms are those dedicated exclusively to payroll services: such is the case of *HomeSquad*, *Symplifica* and *Hogaru Aporta* which are responsible for social security affiliations, the payment of the corresponding fees on behalf of employers, as well as the drafting of contracts. These are platforms that any household can use to formalise a domestic worker, regardless of how she has been contacted (Blanchard, 2023).

Finally, in this category there is also one of the few cooperative options for digital intermediation –*Mujeres Sostenibles* from Mexico– strongly promoted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and an international development agency.<sup>28</sup> This platform exhibits a somewhat different modality from the previous ones, since the formal hiring of workers is compulsory (always advising and guiding employer households in the necessary steps for this purpose). Given the social nature of this company it is not surprising that it appeals mostly to the social awareness of clients. Although there are still no studies or reports on this experience and its results, it is undoubtedly a project that will be interesting to follow closely.

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platform leaves records of the contact established between households and workers– may make employers more prone to formalisation; 2) the potential differential socio-economic and cultural profile of employers who use the platform services to hire these services could be making them more likely to comply with the labour standards of the sector and/or; 3) the intense propaganda that this company disseminates regarding the benefits of formalization, both for workers and employers, may contribute to improve formalisation levels (Pereyra *et al.*, 2023). Undoubtedly, more research is needed not only to determine whether these higher rates of formality are repeated in other similar business schemes but also (if applicable) to delve into the reasons for the phenomenon.

<sup>26</sup> Many employers tend to reject it as it involves entrusting sensitive tax information to the company, especially fiscal passwords so the platform is able to carry out procedures on their behalf. (Pereyra *et al.*, 2023).

<sup>27</sup> They should be managed and regularized by a temporary recruitment agency.

<sup>28</sup> More specifically, it includes an organisation of domestic workers that focuses on training, three other NGOs which work on topics related to gender, work and care and the AFD.

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### 3.3. Platforms as employers

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The third and last category of platforms targets companies that directly hire domestic workers. As indicated in Figure 1, the daily general operation of these platforms is very similar to the “uberised” model. These offer occasional and short-time jobs mainly related to cleaning services, where prices are set by the platform, payments are made through the company, the communication with clients is monopolised by the enterprise, and daily tasks are managed and supervised through algorithms. However, the key aspect in which these platforms differ from the on-demand model has to do with the fact that they recognise an employment relationship with workers and, therefore, hire them as employees. In fact, most of these companies explicitly highlight on their websites the satisfaction of clients due to the fact that they are freed from any legal labour-related responsibilities.

As Figure 2 shows, 18 platforms fall into this category. Although they operate in several countries of the region, the data collected shows they tend to be dominant in Colombia. As Posso Quiceno *et al.* (2024) points out, the entry into force of decree 2.616 of 2013 in this country gave an important boost to this type of platforms, as it allows employers (of any sector) to make partial contributions to social security for workers who labour short hours. These contributions, in turn, can be adapted on a monthly basis according to the number of hours worked by employees. The flexibility of the employer contribution system is combined, as Poblete (2023) points out, with a more controlled scenario for employment agencies in the sector, as this is one of the few countries that has specific labour regulations and control mechanisms aimed at them.

Indeed, access to formal contracts and social protection represents an extremely important advance in this sector. As Blanchard (2023) observes in the case of *Helpers, Paraguay*, for many employees this type of insertion meant having a formal contract for the first time in their lives and, therefore, benefits such as paid vacations and annual bonuses. Regarding the Colombian companies that fall into this category, it is interesting to note that according

to one of the latest Fairwork reports (2023a), firms such as *Aseo Ya*, *Hogaru*<sup>29</sup> and *Auxlimpieza* have ranked among the best platform companies in both Colombia and LAC. Findings from this report indicate that these platforms guarantee salaries equal to or above the legally stipulated minimum, safety equipment, effective emergency response systems, and free labour insurance for employees. It is not surprising that it is within this more protective category of platforms that the second case of a cooperative company was detected. This Colombian social enterprise, named *IMA*<sup>30</sup> *Limpia*, was originally promoted by a union of workers in the sector –the Afro-Colombian Union of Domestic Service Workers– an NGO linked to gender and care and, again, the AFD (Pérez *et al.*, 2022).

In any case –with the exception of the cooperative version of these platforms that does not resort to the algorithmic management of the workforce– the greater social protection that workers experience usually comes into tension with discomforts very similar to those observed for the on-demand platforms. Research in Colombia indicates that employees of these platforms, despite the advantages of formalisation, suffer from mechanisms of “surveillance, supervision and monitoring against the clock” that are designed based on algorithmic management and geo-location (Mantilla León and Maldonado Castañeda, 2024 p.71). Likewise, also in this national context, the study by Posso Quiceno *et al.* (2024) highlighted mixed opinions among workers regarding the role of *Hogaru* when facing potential conflicts with clients. While some interviewees welcomed being able to resort to the company's intervention to enforce the terms and conditions established for delivering services, others suggested that this is a strategy they reserve for extreme situations. Indeed, this feature is thus classifiable as a “double command” that implies responding to a formal employer such as the platform, but also being evaluated by households, something that generated tensions. Thus, workers indicated that they often ended up accepting worse labour conditions than those guaranteed by the platform in order to avoid conflicts.

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<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that *Hogaru* –for many years a “pure” exponent of a platform as employer– has recently incorporated payroll services for clients who need assistance managing workers they hire on their own. This new service, *Hogaru Aporta* has been registered and classified as part of the subtype 2.C (Figure 1) described in the previous section.

<sup>30</sup>In Spanish, acronym for the terms “Indigenous, Mestizo and Afro-descendant”.

## 4. Concluding remarks on regulatory needs

As noted at the beginning of this article, following the ratification of Convention 189, the regulatory frameworks for domestic service in LAC have undergone significant progress – generally placing domestic workers on equal footing with other wage earners (see Appendix 1)–. However, the main obstacle to these rights becoming a reality is the high rate of informal employment. In such context, this paper sought to investigate the extent to which the expansion of labour platforms in this sector represents progress or setbacks on two fronts. On the one hand, it examined the contractual arrangements under which platforms engage workers, as these are closely linked to chances of formalisation, and thus, effective access to labour rights and social protection. On the other hand, the paper explored how working conditions in the occupation –which have recently been strengthened from a regulatory perspective– may be affected by developments associated with the platformisation of work. Based on the findings, this last section offers some reflections on regulatory challenges posed by the growth of digital labour platforms in the sector.

A first necessary observation has to do with the fact that although the platform economy has undoubtedly made inroads into the provision of domestic and care services, its intervention presents a much greater diversity than in other occupations (especially those that have been more extensively studied, which generally conform to the *Uber* business model).

Indeed, this article’s overview of domestic and care digital labour platforms in LAC makes clear the existence of an important variety of business models with different impacts on workers and thus, on the regulations needed. The proposed taxonomy accounts for a spectrum of situations ranging from the best known “uberised” model that increases the precariousness of an already vulnerable sector, to situations that tend to be restricted to the initial connection between the parties. These latter situations, if accompanied by payroll services, can eventually contribute to formalising contracts. Finally, the taxonomy also detects models that involve the (less usual) direct formal hiring of workers by platforms.

An important finding derived from this exercise of classification has to do with the fact that the prevalence of different types of platforms in different national contexts must be interpreted in light of local regulatory frameworks. For example, the aforementioned commitment of LAC countries to Convention 189 has led to the expansion of national protective laws that place this occupation almost exclusively in the salaried category (Appendix 1). Thus, the on-demand version of these platforms is not as widespread as the model that is limited to connecting households and workers (with or without additional personnel management services). Brazil constitutes a clear exception –bringing together the vast majority of on-demand platforms– since it is the only country analysed here that allow this occupation to be legally developed by independent workers. On the other hand, the fact that most of the platforms that directly hire workers are concentrated in Colombia is also due to characteristics of the local regulatory context (the country has an employer contribution system for part-time labour that adjusts to changes in hours worked each month). Of course, this does not mean that in this sector platforms invariably adhere to local regulations; in fact, a considerable number of them are often found in violation of the law. However, the present analysis posits that enterprises tend to adapt their conduct to existing regulatory frameworks.

Leaving aside for a moment the fact that some platforms clearly tend to make work in the sector more precarious while others may increase some aspects of workers' protection, the spectrum of companies surveyed shows that there are a series of transversal aspects to take into account when contemplating the potential regulation of these companies. Without the intention of presenting an exhaustive list we return to some of the characteristics that, at a first glance, are seen as potentially problematic in this first cartography of companies in the region.

One of the most obvious but also most important issues has to do with the need to clarify, especially in the case of on-demand platforms, the nature of the link between workers and companies. Dominant characteristics repeatedly observed in this and other sectors of activity, such as the tight control exercised by these companies on the cadence of work through algorithmic management, the intermediation of payments (and the withholding of

income in the process), the monopolisation of communications with clients, etc., do call into question the proclaimed independent nature of the work offered by these platforms (De Stefano, 2021; 2016; Contouris, 2019). Additionally, it is necessary to make this form of business administration transparent. Indeed, the opacity of algorithms, the high levels of uncertainty they engender within the workforce, and the need to make their functioning explicit are phenomena that have already been widely documented in the context of digital labour platforms in general (Mateescu and Nguyen, 2019; ILO, 2022). A further issue of concern, particularly in the context of the on-demand and marketplace platforms, has to do with charging workers for providing their services, something that goes against international recommendations on labour intermediation.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, this study shows that platforms seek to inspire trust among clients via the exposure of personal profiles of workers in many of the business models analysed. To ensure compliance with personal data protection, it is important to regulate both the type of data requested and displayed, as well as the way in which it is used.<sup>32</sup> In addition, even in cases where the platforms recognise a labour relationship with workers, it is important to establish agile and effective mechanisms to help them overcome the complexities of enforcing their labour rights in workplaces that are not directly supervised by the employer company.

Although the issue was not developed in this paper, the offer of loans by many of these platforms should also be carefully analysed and, eventually, regulated. Even if in some cases these loans may constitute a form of financial inclusion for a vulnerable population, it is necessary to ensure that the interest rates are reasonable and that the payment mechanisms comply with the law (avoiding, above all, wage garnishments). In fact, this topic could be the subject of further research in order to determine in detail the strengths, challenges and problems contained in the credit systems offered by these platforms. A comparable situation arises in the context of training services. Future regulation should address this offer, taking advantage of the opportunity it may represent for the

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<sup>31</sup> Convention 181 on Private Employment Agencies, ILO (approved in 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Undoubtedly, the need to regulate the use of personal data collected also applies in the case of clients who hire platforms' services.

professionalisation of the workforce, but preventing it from becoming a way to raise money at the expense of workers (in the case of platforms that favour those who have completed their courses). In any case, future research should explore in more depth the nature of the different training systems that platforms offer (if any), carefully assessing both their potential benefits and drawbacks.

Special mention should be made of the fact that the normative categories presented in this article's taxonomy may result in hybrid realities that need to be taken into account by regulators. This was illustrated, for example, when describing *Zolvers* in Argentina, a company that can be classified mainly in the subtype of digital placement with payroll services that promote formalisation, but which, strikingly, also included features of the on-demand category. This was also the case of *Hogaru*, an emblematic case of employer platforms, which has recently diversified to incorporate payroll services for clients who hire their own workers. Along the same lines, it was also observed in this article that, two cooperative platforms detected in the survey show nuances with respect to the category in which they fall.

It is thus imperative to advance in the regulatory analysis of all possible variants of digital intermediation for domestic and care workers in LAC. As is the case with digital labour platforms in general, their regulation remains an outstanding issue. In the pursuit to establish regulatory frameworks that ensure adequate protection of workers in the sector, it is important to classify, in as much detail as possible, the different forms of platformisation posed by existing companies (Digital Future Society, 2021). This paper proposed a taxonomy based on what is considered a crucial dimension of this occupation: the contractual arrangements that platforms offer to workers. Such arrangements are closely linked to opportunities for formalisation and, consequently, to the level of social protection and labour rights to which workers have access. The article also showed that the platformisation of the occupation entails a range of new and evolving regulatory challenges that need to be addressed. Whereas national authorities should use all available strategies in order to tackle the emerging issues posed by this growing form of intermediation in the sector, such initiatives would greatly benefit from the existence of international regulation on the matter.

As a matter of fact, at the global level, efforts and negotiations for the adoption of an international convention that establishes guidelines for regulating platform work (for all occupations and in all its forms) is the order of the day (Fredman et al., 2021; Fairwork, 2023b; ILO, 2025). In such context, more accumulated research on domestic and care services provided through platforms should be encouraged in order to generate all the necessary inputs for this historically neglected sector to be not only included but also adequately addressed in the regulation of digital labour platforms.

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# Appendix 1

| The regulation of labour conditions of domestic workers in LAC (based on available countries and indicators) |                                |   |   |   |   |               |                                |                 |  |  |
|--|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| Country  | Ratification of Convention 189 | Recent legal reforms to improve domestic workers' rights (last 20 years)  | Work regime for the occupation  | Working hours   | Weekly rest   | Paid vacation | Minimum wage vs. other workers | Payment in kind | Maternity leave                              | Maternity cash benefits                      |
| Argentina  | Yes (2014)                     | Law 26.844 (2013)   | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Bolivia  | Yes (2013)                     | -   | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners; longer for live-in workers | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Brazil   | Yes (2018)                     | Constitutional Amendment 72 (2013) Complementary Law 150 (2015)   | Salaried with the option of independent labour for workers with reduced working hours | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Chile  | Yes (2015)                     | Law 20.786 (2014) Law 21.269 (2020)   | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners; longer for live-in workers | Similar to other wage earners; higher for live-in workers | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Colombia   | Yes (2014)                     | Law 2.466 (2025)  | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners; longer for live-in workers | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Permitted       | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Costa Rica   | Yes (2014)                     | -   | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Lower than other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Ecuador  | Yes (2013)                     | Organic Law for the defense of labour rights (2012) Organic Law of Labour Justice and Recognition of domestic work (2015) | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| El Salvador  | No                             | -   | Salaried  | No established working hours                              | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Guatemala  | No                             | -   | Salaried  | No established working hours                              | Lower than other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Permitted       | Lower than other wage earners                | Lower than other wage earners                |
| Honduras   | No (in process)                | -   | Salaried  | No established working hours                              | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | None for DW                    | Not permitted   | Not recognized                               | Not recognized                               |
| Mexico   | Yes (2020)                     | Decree of 2019 (modifying Federal Labour Law in the case of domestic service)   | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Permitted       | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Nicaragua  | Yes (2013)                     | -   | Salaried  | Longer than other wage earners                            | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Permitted       | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Panama   | Yes (2015)                     | -   | Salaried  | No established working hours                              | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Lower than other wage earners  | Permitted       | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Paraguay   | Yes (2013)                     | Law 5.407 (2015) Law 6.338 (2019)   | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Permitted       | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Peru   | Yes (2018)                     | Law 31.047 (2020)   | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Dominican Rep.   | Yes (2015)                     | Resolution 14 (2022) Resolution 11 (2022) Resolution 551-08 (2022)  | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Not permitted   | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Uruguay  | Yes (2012)                     | Law 18.065 (2006)   | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Permitted       | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |
| Venezuela  | No                             | Organic Law (2012)  | Salaried  | Similar to other wage earners                             | Similar to other wage earners                             | Yes           | Similar to other wage earners  | Permitted       | Similar to or higher than other wage earners | Similar to or higher than other wage earners |

Source: Based on Gontero & Velásquez Pinto (2023) and ILO (2021). Some latest updates were added based on various regional governmental sources. Convention 189 ratification updated from NORMLEX/ILO: [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO::P11300\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:2551460](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO::P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460)

## List of acronyms and abbreviations

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>LAC</b>  | Latin America and the Caribbean        |
| <b>AFD</b>  | Agence française de développement      |
| <b>UNGS</b> | Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento |
| <b>ILO</b>  | International Labour Organization      |



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