
Algorithmic Governance and Regulatory Blind Spots: Insights from Turkey for Platform Labor in the Middle East and Africa

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Abstract

This study investigates the governance mechanisms of on-demand digital platforms in Turkey, highlighting the role of algorithmic performance technologies in managing labor, and demonstrating, through the example of two recent reforms in Turkey, why recognizing these mechanisms is essential for developing effective policy and regulatory initiatives. Drawing on six semi-structured interviews conducted in 2023 with couriers employed by major delivery companies, complemented by analysis of union reports, policy documents, media coverage, and secondary literature, the study centers workers' experiences. It shows how platforms govern through indirect, data-driven mechanisms that foster behaviors aligned with neoliberal market logics of competitiveness, and profitability. This mode of governance shapes both how couriers work and why their conditions are marked by insecurity and severe risks

The findings reveal that algorithmic performance systems, pay-per-delivery income regime, ranking mechanisms for shifts and task distribution, and gamified bonus schemes constitute the central means governing platform labor. These technologies induce couriers to accelerate deliveries, accept life-threatening dangers, and internalize market-oriented conduct. Interviewees emphasized that explicit managerial pressure is mostly unnecessary as the design of algorithmic technologies itself directs them to compete against time, their peers, and their own bodily limits to secure a livelihood, often at the expense of their health and safety. This indirect mode of governance reflects neoliberal governmentality, shaping workers' conduct through algorithmic environments.

From this analytical perspective, the study demonstrates why recent policy interventions in Turkey remain ineffective. In 2025, two legislative reforms mandated licensing, protective equipment, and occupational reclassification, amid alarming levels of platform courier deaths. Yet, despite minor improvements, the reforms placed financial and bureaucratic burdens on workers without meaningful obligations on platforms and left algorithmic management untouched. By leaving algorithmic management systems untouched, the policies failed to address the mechanisms that drive couriers into speed, competition, and severe occupational risks.

The analysis presented with the Turkish case provides more than a descriptive account of platform work: Effective regulatory policies for platform work require an understanding of how algorithms govern labor. Without measures rendering algorithmic systems transparent and overseen, regulatory interventions risk remaining symbolic, leaving platform workers vulnerable to extreme risks and poor conditions. This insight is crucial not only for Turkey but

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for the broader Middle East and Africa, where platform work is expanding amid economic crisis, informality, and weak protections. By showing why these reforms fall short, the study informs regionally relevant strategies for designing effective policies in the platform economy.

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