

Call for Papers

International Conference

Feminist perspectives on the platformisation of care work in European cities

at Europa Universität Flensburg, 2nd–4th of July, 2025

Organised by the trinational research project “Urban Platform Economies”:
Sybille Bauriedl, Mê-Linh Riemann and Nicola Techel, University of Flensburg
Anke Strüver, Janne Martha Lentz and Helena Bellgardt, University of Graz
Karin Schwiter, Christiane Meyer-Habighorst and Sarah Staubli, University of Zurich
and co-organised by Emma Dowling, University of Vienna

In cities across Europe, digital care platforms have become increasingly central in mediating services related to social reproduction, including grocery shopping, the preparation of meals, cleaning, child and senior care. By reconfiguring domestic tasks, most of which had formerly been unpaid, they **transform the gendered and racialised division of labour** in everyday life (Ecker/Strüver, 2023). Large cities are particularly attractive for platform business models, as they provide access to a wide customer base and a large pool of marginalised workers, whose alternatives in the local labour markets are often limited (Altenried, 2021). On the one hand, care platform companies have been criticised for taking advantage of such disparities by offering working conditions that are widely experienced as precarious and insecure (Strüver/Bauriedl 2022; Richardson, 2023). On the other hand, scholars also note that platforms may lower labour market entry barriers for marginalised workers and selectively formalise care labour (van Doorn, 2021).

We understand the rise of platformised care services as a response to **the ongoing crisis of care** (Fraser, 2016; Dowling, 2021). A combination of societal challenges, such as the intensification and delimitation of paid employment, cut-backs in public services as well as changing household structures and living arrangements have led better-off households to turn to the market to fill care gaps (Hester/Srnicek, 2023). The arrival of platform companies is thus symptomatic for the current capitalist societal order that capitalises on social vulnerabilities whilst continuously outsourcing risks and responsibilities to individuals (Srnicek, 2017; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2023).

The rise of the platform economy has been a **key concern for feminist scholars**, who analyse entanglements of macro-political structures of platformisation with the micropolitics of everyday life (Huws, 2019). These connections are reflected in the lived realities of platform workers, who are often marginalised due to a number of different **intersectional vulnerabilities** relating to: limited language skills, temporary visas, the non-recognition of foreign academic credentials and professional achievements, as well as experiences of sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination (van Doorn/Vijay, 2021; Orth, 2023). These conditions, which are deeply intertwined with wider political processes (e.g., EU border regimes), enable care platforms to recruit workers by offering comparatively low entrance requirements.

The ways in which intersectional insecurities unfold in everyday life depend, among other factors, on the type of care platform labour performed. Working in private homes is, e.g., tied to uniquely gendered insecurities such as the risk of sexual harassment (Pulignano et al., 2023). Food delivery riders spend large parts of their working days in public, where they are at risk of accidents and forms of (racial) discrimination. What many platform workers share is that they encounter various (invisible) forms of algorithmic control, which can limit their agency in situations of conflict (Wood/Lehdonvirta, 2023). In addition, while they free up time of those who can afford to outsource their reproductive work, platform

workers themselves systematically lose time and capacity to address their own care needs (Zampoukos et al., 2024). In turn, they adopt manifold strategies of individual and collective survival and resistance (Orth, 2022; Ettarfi, 2024).

Our conference is concerned with advancing the empirical and theoretical debates on the role of intersectional inequalities in the transformation of care services in the platform economy. We are particularly interested in gathering contributions that address how intersectional inequalities shape individual and collective working realities, and the wider societal impact of platformisation on the gendered division of labour in everyday life.

Objectives and Formats of the Conference

The conference aims at bringing together a wide range of feminist perspectives on platform capitalism, with a particular focus on its impact within the realm of care work.

→ with contributions from scholars from **various disciplines and career levels**

The conference aims at providing a space for vivid discussions on potential futures of this type of labour with:

- a **keynote** by Professor Kristina Zampoukos, Mid Sweden University
- a **panel discussion** on “current perspectives and future challenges of feminist research on platform economies” with Dr. Dalia Gebrial (Kings College London), Dr. Barbara Orth (IRS Leibniz-Institute for Research on Society and Space), Yannick Ecker (University of Halle) and Dr. Mê-Linh Riemann (Europa Universität Flensburg) chaired by Prof. Emma Dowling (University of Vienna)
- **sessions** based on oral presentations, interactive formats or pre-organised thematic sessions in more academic or activist formats.

The conference aims at fostering the publication of a special issue on feminist perspectives on platformised care labour with:

-> up to ten contributions of this conference are intended for publication in *Geographica Helvetica* (tbc), a peer reviewed open access **journal** without fees for authors.

Organisational information

There is **no fee** for attending the conference. Limited financial support for junior and/or precariously employed researchers is available. Childcare facilities with supervision are offered on demand. The conference facilities are wheelchair-accessible. If you require additional disability support or have further questions, please contact Mê-Linh Riemann: me-linh.hannah.riemann@uni-flensburg.de.

The conference will take place **in person** only. Flensburg is located at the German-Danish border at the Baltic Sea, and can be reached by train from Hamburg in two hours.

We invite **abstracts** of 300-500 words to be submitted online by the 28th of February, 2025 via [this link](#). Applicants will be notified of acceptance by the 19th of March, 2025.

For further information about the research project (TICS), please visit our [website](#).

The conference is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) and the Interdisciplinary Centre for European Studies at the Europa Universität Flensburg (ICES).

References

- Altenried, Moritz (2021): Mobile workers, contingent labour: Migration, the gig economy and the multiplication of labour. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 56(4), 1113–1128.
- Dowling, Emma (2021): The care crisis. *What caused it and how can we end it?* London: Verso.
- Ecker, Yannick & Strüver, Anke (2023). Kommodifizierung, Fragmentierung, Restrukturierung städtischer Räume und Arbeit in technologischen Experimenten mit Hausarbeit, *sub/urban*, 11(1/2), 17–45.
- Ettarfi, Khaoula (2024): Conceptualizing labor agency through resilience: Practices of reassembling work on domestic services platforms, *Geoforum*, 156: 104130, 1–7.
- Fraser, Nancy (2016): Capitalism's Crisis of Care, *Dissent*, 63(4), 30–37.
- Hester, Helen & Srnicek, Nick (2023). *After Work: A History of the Home and the Fight for Free Time*, London: Verso.
- Huws, Ursula (2019): The hassle of housework: Digitalisation and the commodification of domestic labour. *Feminist Review*, 123, 8–23.
- Orth, Barbara (2022): Riders United Will Never Be Divided? A Cautionary Tale of Disrupting the Platformization of Urban Space. In: Strüver, Anke and Bauriedl, Sybille (eds): *Platformisation of Urban Life Towards a Techno Capitalist Transformation of European Cities*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 185–204.
- Orth, Barbara (2023): Stratified pathways into platform work: Migration trajectories and skills in Berlin's gig economy, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 56(2), 1–15.
- Pulignano, Valeria; Mara, Claudia; Franke, Milena & Muszynski, Karol (2023): Informal employment on domestic care platforms: a study on the individualisation of risk and unpaid labour in mature market contexts, *Transfer*, 0(0), 1–16.
- Richardson, Lizzie (2023): How is the platform a workplace? Moving from sites to infrastructure, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 49(1), 1–14.
- Rodríguez-Modroño, Paula; Agenjo-Calderón, Astrid & López-Igual, Purificación (2023): A Feminist Political Economic Analysis of Platform Capitalism in the Care Sector, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 55(4), 1–10.
- Srnicek, Nick (2017): *Platform Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Strüver, Anke, & Bauriedl, Sybille (eds.) (2022): *Platformization of urban life. Towards a technocapitalist transformation of European cities*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Van Doorn, Nils (2021): Stepping Stone or Dead End? The Ambiguities of Platform-Mediated Domestic Work under Conditions of Austerity. Comparative Landscapes of Austerity and the Gig Economy: New York and Berlin. In: Baines, Donna and Cunningham, Ian (eds) *Working in the context of austerity. Challenges and Struggles*. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 50–69.
- Van Doorn, Nils & Vijay, Darsana (2021): Gig work as migrant work: The platformization of migration infrastructure, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 56(4), 1129–1149.
- Wood, Alex & Lehdonvirta, Vili (2023): Platforms Disrupting Reputation: Precarity and Recognition Struggles in the Remote Gig Economy, *Sociology*, 57(5), 999–1016.
- Zampoukos, Kristina; Butler, Olivia & Mitchell, Don (2024): Who's got time for social reproduction? Migrant service workers as embodied infrastructures of the algorithmic city, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(15), 3805–3821.