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The System of Inequalities in Food Delivery Services
The Case of Riders in Tuscany

Mirko Scardoni
Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy

Abstract Starting from the examination of some measures to protect riders recently promoted by the Tuscany Region, the paper reconstructs the phenomenon of inequalities in food delivery services, within which work, health and racial inequalities are traced. Through qualitative research based on the analysis of regional documents and on discursive interviews with the social partners, it is hypothesized that this set of inequalities constitutes a system on which digital platforms have founded their economic success.

Keywords Riders. Food delivery. Work inequalities. Health inequalities. Racial inequalities.

Summary 1 Introduction and Methodology. – 2 Platform Work, Between Sharing Economy and Gig Economy. – 3 An Overview of the Policies for Riders in the Tuscany Region. – 4 Risks, Inequalities, and Practical Solutions. – 5 Conclusions. A System of Inequalities?

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1 Introduction and Methodology

This article presents the first report of a recent empirical research conducted at the Work Sector of the Tuscany Region and dedicated to the working conditions of riders operating for digital food delivery platforms. In line with the spirit of the *Inequalities* journal, the perspective adopted is that of the "sociology of inequality" (Beck 2008) which, for the case-study under discussion, manifests itself at multiple levels: as will be argued in the course of the contribution, in fact, in the world of riders there are intertwined work inequalities, connected to the different contractual regimes applied (self-employed or subordinate employment contracts), physical or mental health inequalities, caused both by the different impact on the body of the vehicles used (muscle-powered bicycle, electric bicycle, motorbike, etc.) and by the changing organization of work, and 'racial' inequalities, with platforms in which mainly native riders work (Just Eat and Deliveroo) and others where the share of immigrants is more consistent (Glovo and Uber Eats). It is hypothesized that the coexistence of these phenomena allows us to describe the food delivery universe as a 'system' of inequalities, within which riders are not only distinguished (by contract, salary and protections) from other workers with more traditional jobs, but also suffer a differentiation in their sector, depending on the platform they work for.

The paper reconstructs these issues by contextualizing them in the Tuscan territory where, between 2021 and 2023,[1] the Tuscany Region conducted studies and interventions to provide more protection to local riders. Particular attention is deserved by the path that led to the approval of the so-called *Memorandum of Understanding* (Resolution 946/2021), signed by the Department of Labor with the trade unions (CGIL, CISL, and UIL), the food delivery companies and the Regional Consumer and User Committee (RCUC). The dialogue with these actors and some Tuscan workers, interviewed through "discursive interviews" (Cardano 2011), combined with the "documentary analysis" (Arosio 2013) of the materials produced by the Tuscany Region and the AUSL, constitutes the empirical corpus of the research, useful for testing the aforementioned hypothesis, as well as for reflecting on the possible policies that can be developed to respond to the challenges of the "platformization" process (Casilli 2020).

The contribution is structured in three sections: the first, introductory, provides a general framework of platform work, illustrating its growing importance in public discourse and its effects in terms of

1 The complete list of initiatives for riders in the Tuscany Region (R.L. 18/2021, Technical Document, Memorandum of Understanding, etc.) can be viewed here: `https://www.regione.toscana.it/-/lavoratori-riders`.

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social inequalities; the second part presents the project of co-regulation of riders' work curated by the Tuscany Region, describing the measures adopted so far and the actors involved; the third section considers three types of risks (physical, organizational and connected to geographical origin) that affect workers and that are at the origin of inequalities in the food delivery environment. The conclusions reflect on the need to read these inequalities, which often appear to be overlapping and interdependent, in a 'systemic key'. It is with this logic that we can avoid approaching platformization in an excessively reductionist perspective, grasping instead its consequences in the various social spheres.

Before proceeding, two final clarifications are necessary, one of a 'methodological nature' and one of a 'terminological nature'. In terms of method, the research presented here is a qualitative investigation: qualitative methods are in fact suited to discovering new connections, causal chains and meanings (Delli Zotti 2021), in a logic that lends itself well to a systemic reading of inequalities. The techniques used, as anticipated, consist of documentary analysis and discursive interviews: the latter are semi-structured interviews in which the interaction between interviewee and interviewer is determined in the contents, but not in the concrete modalities, which are defined during the interaction (Cardano 2011). Specifically, 18 interviews have been conducted so far with the protagonists of the Tuscan project for riders, all between February and June 2024. Finally, as regards the terminological clarification, here the expression "system of inequalities" is used, taking it from the studies of Alain Bihr and Roland Pfefferkorn (2008). According to the authors, to truly understand inequalities it is necessary to grasp the relationships that are determined between them; that is to say, "la manière dont elles se combinent, se déterminent réciproquement, se renforcent en cumulant leurs effets". This reference to systems theory is therefore what our hypothesis for analyzing inequalities is also based on.

2 Platform Work, Between Sharing Economy and Gig Economy

As a general premise, it must first be noted that the debate on digital platforms has followed, in the years following the 2008 crisis, the gradual "disenchantment" that has characterized the history of the web (Bonifacio 2023, 29). Similarly to the common enthusiasm that accompanied the early Internet (Castells 2001; Formenti 2011; Herz 1995), platforms were also initially welcomed by a very positive climate, well represented by the expression of sharing or collaborative economy: the supporters of this perspective conceived

platformization as a process that would lead to a valorization of dormant resources, a reduction in waste and a relaunch of peer relations, in a 'mix of social, environmental and economic sustainability'. Jeremy Rifkin, for example, spoke of a new Collaborative Commons capable of revolutionizing the capitalist economy:

> Markets are beginning to give way to networks, ownership is becoming less important than access, the pursuit of self-interest is being tempered by the pull of collaborative interests, and the traditional dream of rags to riches is being supplanted by a new dream of a sustainable quality of life. (2014, 21)

This optimism, however, was soon accompanied by increasingly critical readings of this disruptive economic model, so much so that today it is referred to as the "gig economy" (Staglianò 2018), to underline its precarious and alienating nature (Pirina 2019). The paradigm shift has occurred in parallel with some trends: first of all, the concentration of platforms in the hands of a few companies, such as the infamous GAFAM, namely Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft (Susskind 2020), whose owners now act as "giga-capitalists" (Staglianò 2022); another phenomenon that has gradually received attention concerns the negative impact of platformization on many social dimensions, ranging from online interpersonal relationships, imbued with "digital nihilism" (Lovink 2019), to the gentrification of urban spaces and the crisis of the right to housing, through the rise of global realities such as Airbnb (Gainsforth 2019). Numerous studies have also documented that platforms tend to reflect and exacerbate inequalities already present in society, for example by reproducing mechanisms of 'ghettoization' in the labor market. In particular, it has been estimated that 60% of platform workers in the US are black and Latino (Steward 2023).

Work is undoubtedly one of the areas most influenced by these transformations, which have pushed scholars such as Antonio Casilli (2017) to identify digital labor with platform work. The latter raises numerous questions regarding work organization and its repercussions on workers' physical and mental health (Davis, Hoyt 2020). With regard to the first level of analysis, platform work, with its atypical contracts and piecework wages, has proven over time to be subjected to continuous and pervasive surveillance (Zuboff 2018), characterized by intense rhythms and overlap with private life, devalued and precarious (Somma 2019). Such work organization has problematic effects on the physical and mental well-being of gig workers, who often suffer from "occupational diseases", stress, anxiety and panic (Moore 2019). One sector in which these issues stand out clearly is that of food delivery. This is a field in which the gig economy has developed significantly, bringing multinationals such as Just

Eat, Glovo, Deliveroo and Uber Eats to the fore. This was possible, among other things, thanks to two elements: the first consists in the strength of the narrative that promoted the work of riders, presented as subjects free to choose "if, when and how much to work", in a "freelance work" dynamic on a digital scale (Armano, Murgia 2017); the second is a contextual factor that is equivalent to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which home deliveries were a fundamental way for consumers to make their purchases. In the same period, due to lockdowns and restrictions, many people lost their jobs and often found in the figure of the rider a solution to 'reinvent themselves'. In this sense, therefore, the pandemic was both an "accelerating factor" and a "reorganizing factor" for processes that had been underway since the early 2000s (Antunes, Basso, Perocco 2021), when the first digital giants had begun to take hold. The pandemic period finally meant, for Italy but not only, a phase of initial "awareness" regarding the risks and opportunities of the digital transition (Bandarin et al. 2023), which materialized for example in the Italian debate on the working conditions of riders, directly exposed to SARS-CoV-2 infection. This image of 'essential workers' prompted some media and political figures to urgently call for regulation of the gig economy, which was absent in Italy at the time and still is. It is in this emergency context that the measures to protect riders in the Tuscany Region took shape, within which the issues of health and safety have a prominent place, as will be noted from their analysis in the following paragraphs.

3 An Overview of the Policies for Riders in the Tuscany Region

The journey of the Tuscan project to defend riders officially begins with Regional Law 18/2021, approved by the Regional Council of Tuscany at the beginning of the summer. However, as highlighted in the 2021 Legislative Report,[2] the discussion had started much earlier, 'inheriting' the debate on the topic from the previous legislature and allowing plenty of time for the hearing phase with trade unions and trade associations. The Law, which is entitled *Provisions for the protection and safety of workers organized through digital platforms*,[3] had the particularity of having been proposed by the President of

2 The Report can be consulted on the official Regional Council website: `https://www.consiglio.regione.toscana.it/default?nome=rap-2021`.

3 The text of R.L. 18/2021 can be examined at the following link: `https://raccoltanormativa.consiglio.regione.toscana.it/articolo?urndoc=urn:nir:regione.toscana:legge:2021-06-04;18`.

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the Regional Council himself, Antonio Mazzeo, the first signatory of the related Bill n. 36. According to several witnesses interviewed, this is a rare sign of 'compactness' of the Council in favor of the issue, given that it is not usual for the President (in his *super partes* role) to be the first to sign a Bill. This therefore seems to confirm a certain sensitivity of regional institutions with respect to the transformations of work, which is reported as the first point among the interests of the Tuscany Region. The Regional Statute, in the first paragraph of art. 4, establishes in fact:

> The Tuscany Region pursues, among its priority objectives, the right to work and to adequate forms of protection of the dignity of workers, the right to safety in the workplace, to education, to lifelong learning, to knowledge.[4]

The 2021 Law, which the Region adopted in the exercise of its legislative power in the field of health and safety at work, mainly has the flavor of a 'declaration of intent': in the eleventh point of the preamble, it declares the desire to set out

> a path of study and analysis involving all the people […] operating in the various operational sectors with digital programs and platforms to acquire awareness of everything that needs to be prepared to allow safe work.

To this end, the Council undertakes to implement a project for the analysis and assessment of risks for workers (which will be called the *Technical Document*),[5] involving the Prevention, Hygiene and Safety in the Workplace Services of the AUSL and the Prevention and Safety Sector in Living and Working Environments of the Region.

In parallel with the process that led to the drafting of the Law and the related Technical Document, on 13 September of the same year, with Resolution 946/2021, a Memorandum of Understanding promoted above all by the Department of Labor (represented by Councilor Alessandra Nardini) and the Work Sector of the Region was definitively approved: this is the Protocol *Guidelines of the Tuscany Region for the protection of workers on digital platforms for home food delivery and for correct contractual application*

4 From here on, the translation from Italian to English is by the Author.

5 The Technical Document was finally approved with Resolution 665/2022: `https://www301.regione.toscana.it/bancadati/atti/DettaglioAttiG.xml?codprat=2022DG00000000817`.

(Cycle-delivery riders).[6] The Protocol is the result of a negotiation between the Department of Labor, the trade unions (CGIL, CISL, and UIL), the food delivery companies and the Regional Consumer and User Committee (RCUC), made up of local representatives of consumer associations. This Protocol, which was followed by the introduction of an Ethical Brand[7] for member companies, has an unmistakably different approach than the Regional Law 18/2021 and the Technical Document: it is in fact a sort of 'code of conduct' on the subject of labor protection, agreed between the public actor (the Tuscany Region) and the private actor (the subscribing companies), together with the intermediate bodies (trade unions and consumer associations). It therefore presents itself as a first experiment in regional co-regulation of food delivery platforms, to provide minimum guarantees for Tuscan riders and overcome some differences in treatment that are at the basis of the inequalities experienced by workers.

Although it is not possible to dedicate too much space to the issue, it is vital to frame the protagonists of the decision-making process from which the Protocol was born in a general scheme; Figure 1 is designed for this purpose. The colors attributed to the various actors take up the categories of the political scientist Bruno Dente (2011), but it is obvious that they should not be considered as 'absolutes': the unions, for example, can certainly be understood as "special interest holders" (perhaps because they are linked to the workers of a specific sector), but they are also "political actors" and, in some ways, "general interest holders". Given these premises, the scheme intends to highlight the heterogeneity of the subjects that followed the working tables of the Region, to then arrive at signing the shared Protocol. The only entity that ultimately abstained from signing (while applying the contents of the text) is Just Eat, due to some corporate policy problems.

6 The Protocol corresponds to the first Annex of Resolution 946/2021: https://www301.regione.toscana.it/bancadati/atti/DettaglioAttiG.xml?codprat=2021DG00000001083.

7 The Ethical Brand was then introduced with Resolution 1080/2022: https://www301.regione.toscana.it/bancadati/atti/DettaglioAttiG.xml?codprat=2022DG00000001337.

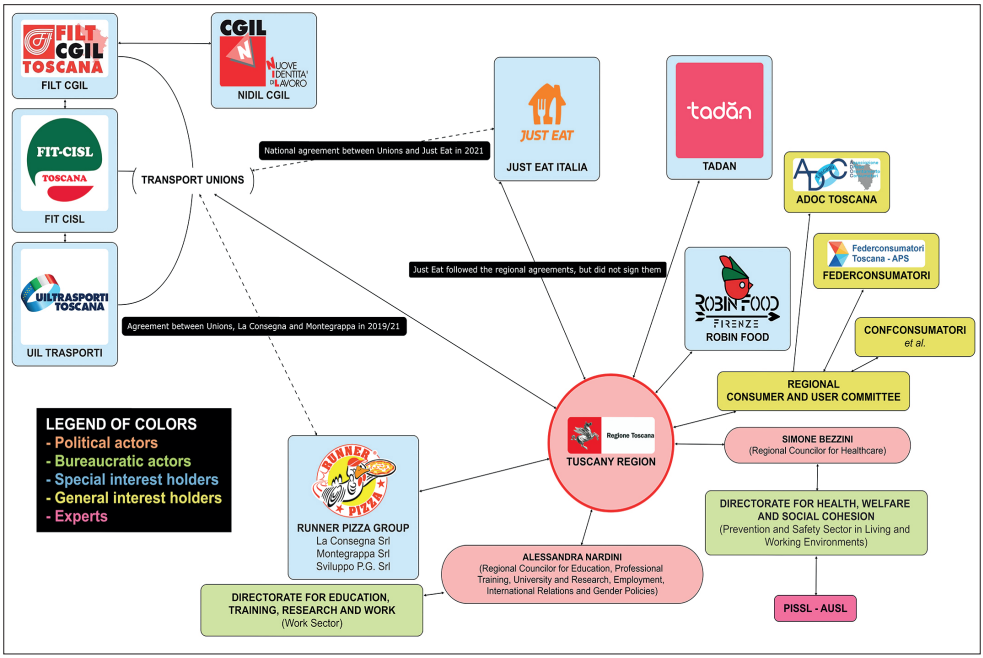

Figure 1 Policy Network Representation (by the Author)

An effective reconstruction of the reasoning that led to the mobilization of the different actors comes from the Councilor for Labor of the Tuscany Region, Alessandra Nardini, who in the in-depth interview given for this research declared:

> We inherited, let's say, a job that began in the last legislature, because the trade unions… when I speak of "trade unions" I am obviously talking about CGIL, CISL and UIL, which for us are the reference trade unions, in the sense of the 'confederal' ones… they had already urged the Region, but at the time that job had not gotten very far, because the companies had not been available, we did not have the possibility to put them at the table. So, we started again, but the idea was born above all from the requests of CGIL, CISL and UIL, who at the beginning of the legislature contacted us again in terms of the Department, the Department of Labor, and asked us to resume and complete this commitment. Obviously, in the meantime, the conditions had also changed, because the pandemic had certainly shown more the urgency of the issue; in the meantime, a discussion had also opened at European and national level… so there was also much greater attention. From there, let us say, we started to assume the issue again and

> we met CGIL, CISL and UIL, both as confederations and then also as categories, in particular transport and the categories of atypical workers. From there we started this journey and then we asked the companies to sit at the table. The companies, I must say, were consulted both through contacts that we had… we obviously looked for the 'large' ones… the 'small' ones also thanks to the availability that we received from the trade unions or also from contacts that we had with these small companies. The idea of involving consumer and user associations also came to me, as I am the President [of the RCUC] among my delegations and it seemed right to try, within this process, something that I also proposed to the trade unions, who immediately welcomed it: let's also try to raise awareness among those who then benefit from the work of the riders, that is, the users, the consumers, those who see those foods, those goods transported by the riders, arrive on their tables. The idea was precisely to say "let's try to foster widespread sensitivity, a critical awareness on this and on the need to also give ourselves rules from the point of view of ethical sustainability, and therefore social sustainability from the point of view of rights, etc." It was born a bit like that. I must say that I brought this proposal to the table of consumers and users, in one of the meetings we had, and it was immediately accepted; the Vice-President always participated… first the past one, then the current one [Leonardo Ferroni], because there was a changeover during the work… because I am the President, but as a Councilor obviously I did not want to represent that Committee at that table. And so, there was an additional representation, in addition to my presence… Usually the Vice-President participated, then sometimes both participated, as we continued the work started previously. That was kind of the idea.

Citing again the categories of Dente's policy analysis (2011), the unions would seem to have played the role of promoters or initiators of the decision-making process. One of their exponents, Michele Panzieri, General Secretary of UIL Trasporti Toscana, instead associates the role of "director" with Councilor Nardini:

> We have done a pioneering job […], also unfortunately determined by the acceleration it has had, also determined by the accidents that have occurred, also in Tuscany and not only, because unfortunately certain situations that are not regulated, not proceduralized, certain activities and jobs that were not historically unionized or in any case brought to attention often need an accident to be able to have more particular, more precise attention. And the thing that we have done in Tuscany, unlike others, is that we have managed to do it precisely with an institution; this also wanting

> to recognize [...] the sensitivity of Tuscany Region, but we must also give credit to the people then, right? Often the difference is made by the people more than by the institutions or even the trade unions… Councilor Nardini has actually tried to do the maximum possible on some matters.

A third significant role in decision-making processes is that of the "ally" or, more coherently with this case-study, of the "allies", which for the Tuscan case are equivalent first to the companies that have joined the Protocol, contributing to its writing. Specifically, we are talking about three local companies (Tadan, Robin Food, Runner Pizza Group) and the multinational Just Eat which, as anticipated, did not sign the document but followed its entire gestation. A different discussion must be made, however, for the other giants of the sector (Glovo, Deliveroo, Uber Eats, etc.) which, despite having initially sat at the table, did not continue the discussion, refusing to recognize their riders as subordinate workers. Panzieri says:

> They [the managers of Just Eat Italia] were unable to sign the Protocol, then the Councilor tried, because they were clearly more willing to answer her phone calls, to involve them. They did not sign it… now it is clear that these are informal things, but I am telling you because, in short, that is what happened… They did not sign it not because they did not think the Protocol was the right thing, on the contrary, in some way it further enhanced the agreement that only they had made at a national level with the trade unions… but because, at least that is what they said, their headquarters in London or I do not remember… in Amsterdam, maybe, their lawyers, in short, blocked the Italian branch of Just Eat from signing, because they said "if we do it in Tuscany, we should do it everywhere; we cannot localize something that is global". A motivation of this type… just as other associations did not sign it, there was Deliveroo, Uber Eats… They just did not want to tie their hands to something that they would then have had to, in some way, respect.

In this interview excerpt, reference is made to the national agreement that Just Eat Italia signed in 2021 with the confederal unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL), which led to the introduction of the subordinate employment contract in the company. This was a historic turning point since, as is known, all the other large food delivery platforms have always defended the thesis according to which their workers are not subordinate, but autonomous (with the various consequences of the case in terms of health protection, safety, etc.). As described by Gemma Pacella (2019), there have been numerous precedents for

trying to reach this goal, both at local[8] and national level (remember the 'dynamism' on the issue at the beginning of the XVIII legislature, with Luigi Di Maio as Minister of Labor); however, the attempts have always failed, with the exception of Just Eat.

The situation of food delivery in Italy, therefore, is currently quite complex: Just Eat is the only major to apply the subordinate employment contract, while the others remain attached to the more advantageous (for them) self-employment contract. This produces a condition of inequality both among companies (Just Eat has higher labor costs than its competitors) and among workers (Just Eat riders enjoy the rights and protections of subordinate employment, which does not happen for workers on other platforms). The disparities are also accentuated by the competition between companies that, since the pandemic, have been spasmodically competing for shares of the Italian market, with far from obvious outcomes. In the summer of 2023, for example, Uber Eats, following a heavy conviction for 'digital gangmastering' by the Court of Milan, announced the decision to sell off its activities in Italy, not considering them in line with the "expectations to guarantee a sustainable business in the long term".[9] Suddenly, the multinational has thus left thousands of riders at home, without work or guarantees (thus also receiving another conviction for anti-union conduct), continuing its operations in other countries. The unbridled competition between companies and the race to the bottom that fuels 'social dumping', inevitably, have repercussions on workers, many of whom are aware of this regime of inequality. Marco (fictitious name), a Just Eat rider, says about his company:

> One of the big disadvantages that, for the company, really does not allow them to move forward but only get worse is that Just Eat followed the instructions and said "Okay, let's make the contract", while Glovo and Deliveroo, which are the other two platforms and are huge, said "I will pay the fines and go straight ahead". That is, Just Eat got involved and complied and took a huge step that provided many riders with a contract; many riders, like me, were able to switch from bicycles to motorbikes… because if I did not have a permanent contract, there was no way I would have gotten a motorbike. Then I can tell you even more about that factor, because I

8 Gemma Pacella (2019) appropriately recalls the *Framework Agreement – Riders Toscana* of May 2019, signed by FILT CGIL, FIT CISL and UIL Trasporti with the company La Consegna Srl (which is part of the aforementioned Runner Pizza Group), which finalized the hiring of twenty riders with a permanent subordinate contract; the same thing happened in 2021, before the introduction of the Regional Protocol, with the company Montegrappa Srl (also part of Runner Pizza). For a clearer picture, compare Figure 1.

9 Uber Eats' press release can be read at this link: `https://www.uber.com/it/newsroom/uber-eats-dismette-le-operazioni-in-italia/`.

> have worked with a muscle bicycle, an electric bicycle, and a motorbike, so I have done them all, I have tried them all… And that [the permanent contract] basically makes them lose a lot of money, because Just Eat pays the riders even if they do not do anything, because maybe there are not any deliveries to be made or maybe they get the planning wrong and put too many riders in for those who should be there. They make a weekly estimate of how many people it should take for how many orders there are, and they say, "Theoretically there should be…". If it is all theoretical, Just Eat does not count for much… So, what should they do? They have to schedule you a week with riders to put on shift for the following week, but they say, "How do I know how many orders they will make for me?". So, on the one hand, you say, "Yes, there is a gap, but it needs to be filled not by Just Eat, it needs to be filled by putting Deliveroo and Glovo under contract as well". They should put pressure… I do not know if the unions or political stuff need to do this, I do not really understand… but the other two need to be put under pressure, the ones who are against Just Eat, let's say… the other two delivery companies should be put under pressure to try to get them to sign a contract as soon as possible. Otherwise, poor thing, Just Eat just loses… and they are right, because [the riders] say, "How much does Deliveroo pay?". Deliveroo pays you, I do not know, for a long delivery, it pays you thirteen euros. How much does Glovo pay you? Glovo pays you twelve euros. Just Eat, for a long delivery, pays you eight euros and fifty; but you must see that a long delivery with Deliveroo pays you thirteen euros and then, if you stay still, you only have your thirteen euros; a Glovo delivery, a long delivery, twelve euros and twelve euros remain. I [with Just Eat], in that time in which I make a delivery, I keep eight euros and fifty, yes, but if I then stay still for an hour, it is another eight euros and fifty without doing anything. So that is a good compromise.

A further element that complicates the Italian food delivery landscape is the *National Collective Agreement Riders* signed in 2020 by the UGL union and the employers' association Assodelivery, which includes the large companies in the sector, and from which Just Eat subsequently left. This category contract, which confirmed riders as self-employed workers, was strongly contested by other trade unions, who defined it as a "pirate contract" signed by a union that was not very representative of the sector. A possible solution to resolve the dispute regarding the classification of riders could come from the Directive on the matter adopted by the European Parliament in spring 2024. Councilor Nardini hopes that it can shed light on the issue:

> I think we need to work at a national level, but also at a European level. The Directive is a starting point. Even Minister Orlando,

> as Minister of Labor, had made some progress, from this point of view. I hope that Italy will take it on board and can also make further progress. I must say, however, that it seems to me to be something that has disappeared from the agenda of this government, and this worries me. I believe that we should try in the meantime, as the new Directive also indicates, to talk about subordinate work compared to self-employment. And this helps because, if the riders are classified as subordinate workers, they have all the rights of subordinate workers when they sign a contract signed by the most representative organizations. From this point of view, obviously there is also this issue, that is, the issue that the contract should be signed by the most representative trade union organizations, because the example I gave before of the UGL, which split the trade union front, risks instead creating a 'wound' and weakening even this strength, which instead I believe we should have.

The issue of subordination, moreover, is at the heart of the Protocol adopted by the Tuscany Region (Resolution 946/2021), which attempted to standardize at the local level the unequal working conditions of riders. In addition to the contractual issue and the resulting 'work inequalities', the Region highlighted a whole series of risks (physical, organizational, etc.) for workers, which are at the root of other inequalities. For each of them, prevention/protection measures have been developed.

4 Risks, Inequalities, and Practical Solutions

The first item of the Protocol and the Regulation of the Ethical Brand connected to it is dedicated to preventive information on the employment relationship and on the training of workers. With respect to this last point, employers undertake to guarantee training in health and safety, also with the help of the Region and its course on TRIO,[10] *Rider in the era of the gig economy*. In the materials relating to the Technical Document, the Region distinguished three types of risks. The first category can be summarized as that of 'physical risks', caused by factors such as: road traffic, with risks related to the use of bicycles or motor vehicles, such as motorbikes (collisions, falls, bumps, knocks, impacts); exposure to environmental agents (such as vibrations, noise, microclimate, solar radiation, dust, air pollutants); ergonomic factors (which vary based on the vehicle used and the way in which the load is carried).

10 TRIO is the web-learning platform of the Tuscany Region: `https://www.progettotrio.it/`.

Marco, who has been a rider with Just Eat in Florence for eight years, confirms in his interview the turning point that the evolution from the muscle bicycle to the motorbike (briefly passing through the electric bike) represented for him:

> At first, I moved around on a muscle bicycle. Then I started to feel the heaviness, because the deliveries gradually became worse, longer and longer, with less and less humanity on the part of the dispatchers,[11] who still have to do their job, I understand that… but some are more human, some are much more robotic. If the head dispatcher tells them "Do not reassign them [the deliveries] if they are not ten kilometers", some look and say humanely: "They are nine kilometers and eight, I will reassign them anyway". Others, on the other hand, basically did not. The muscle bicycle was tiring. With the muscle bicycle, I started to lose some parts, the bike started to wear out and so I switched, with a bit of difficulty, to an electric bike. Initially it was beautiful, so much fun… Practically not even a year had passed since I got the electric bike that I started looking around for a motorbike, because I could not take it anymore, because the electric bike is equivalent to… you can also go up hills, because you are almost on a moped, you have a little moped, so you go… but, when you find yourself having to make a delivery in… I do not know if you know the Via de' Bardi area, you know Costa dei Magnoli, Costa San Giorgio… there are some roads made like this [mimicking the slope of the roads with his arm]. "Eh, we do not have anyone, go do it…". Ok, I put it in minimum gear, in turbo, and I still struggled. And nothing, I said: "Enough, I will go on the moped directly. The only option is to take the motorbike – and I said – Go, I will take the motorbike".

To address the impact of work on the health of riders, the Region has established, in agreement with the 'social partners', some obligations (art. 3 of the Protocol), which consist of: subjecting workers to a preventive medical examination to ensure their suitability for the job; providing free clothing and PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) compliant with legislative provisions; suspending the service in the event of extraordinary weather conditions; ensuring the designation or election of Workers' Representatives for Safety; equipping or activating agreements with cycle workshops for the repair of vehicles; seeking suitable spaces with local administrations in which to wait for orders protected from the atmospheric agents. The last of these commitments is certainly of interest, even though it has not yet been put into practice, as Councilor Nardini explains:

11 Dispatchers are those who oversee the assignment of deliveries.

> We had included in our Protocol […] that there should also be suitable spaces, for example, to be able to take shelter or even to be able to have services. Among other things, on this, we would like to try to involve the Municipalities, at least the larger Municipalities, perhaps the provincial capitals, those where there are more riders, because obviously in some towns it would be complicated and there is not even this request. Obviously on this, however, it is also up to the local authorities. This was another of the things that we and the unions had said we wanted to do and on which therefore still… perhaps in the "step two" I was talking about we could try to work; as well as the whole issue of training on health and safety, and also the possibility of using the highway of the Employment Centers for a transparent matching of supply and demand. This was another qualifying point of our Protocol too.

Gabriele Brogi, Regional Manager of FIT CISL Toscana, who actively followed the working table, in his interview suggested some additions for this point regarding the waiting spaces for riders:

> I will tell you a simple thing: the Sebach toilets [referring to a supplier of portable toilets in Florence]. You go to Sebach and say with the Region: "Look, can you make me ten toilets to put where the riders wait? Maybe with a different shape, with the same shape, but covered with a film that says 'rider', in short, that attracts attention". I mean, you can do these things independently of… a shelter for when it rains… independently of the contract they apply to those people. These people exist, so how can I help them? Then do they need documents? A toll-free number, to say: "Look, if you need documents for citizenship…". Make an agreement with the patronages of all three categories, CGIL, CISL and UIL, where you say: "There is a toll-free number for riders; if you need help, call it here for the documents, anonymously". So, in this sense, in my opinion this was what should have been done. Here, really, reaching out more to actual needs […] and saying: "How can we help these people? Regardless of what they do. They are people who are at 40°, now with the heat wave, right?". With Just Eat it was done: when a certain temperature is exceeded or with the orange or red alert, you do not go out; or with a certain number of millimeters of rainwater forecast… you do not go out. Here, you can do these things regardless of the contractual application.

Continuing with the second category of risks for riders, after the 'physical' ones there are the 'organizational' ones, among which the Region mentions: the risks linked to verbal and physical aggression, increased by the transport of money; the risk of work-related stress, exacerbated by the ranking system, working conditions, time

pressures for delivery and customer complaints; the big risk of contagion from SARS-CoV-2 during the pandemic, due to direct contact with consumers. With respect to these dangers, the Protocol has provided, in addition to the ban on ranking and other merit classifications of workers, the application of the subordinate employment contract (Logistics, Freight Transport and Shipping Contract) which, at least on paper, has a positive effect in containing the stress of workers, no longer forced to 'chase' deliveries as in self-employment. Even for riders with a subordinate employment contract, however, other stressful factors remain, such as those connected to relationships with customers and restaurateurs. Marco, in this regard, reports some significant anecdotes:

> There is psychological pressure from the customer or from the restaurant when maybe they insult you, they order a lot… anyway, as happened to me, you arrive with wet pizzas: "Eh, but the box is all wet". You cannot turn around and tell them: "You dickhead, look, it is raining, I have a simple box, it is already a lot that you got the whole pizza!". […] Complaints about the food that arrives wet, complaints about the food that maybe, who knows, arrives cold, because you have to travel a long way anyway. Complaints because you do not go to the floor. Then, what else? […] Given the experience, it is also on the part of the customer, because maybe you arrive smiling, because you are working anyway, you smile because you have to and they look down on you as if you were the first shit in the country… they do not even say "thank you", or "good morning"…
>
> A restaurant I had to deal with, with which I had problems, was the one in Via Rossi [fictitious name], it is a restaurant in Via Rossi… they make like fried chicken wings, something like that… I do not remember what it is called, like "chicken" something… there once they made me get a demerit note because they had made a huge mess. They told me that the customer had cancelled the order; I told the dispatcher and the dispatcher told me: "Okay, go back to the starting point in the meantime". I went back and they said: "Marco, why didn't you bring the food?". And I said: "Eh, because the restaurant told me that the customer had cancelled the order"; "No, that is not true!". That is all. So, obviously, I said: "Enough. I do not want to go to that place anymore". I argued with them. You are making me risk getting a bad note like that; if you do not know how to work, you do not act against me. Enough.

The last category of risks to consider is also the most 'elusive', since it includes those linked to gender, geographical origin, age, and level of education. Not all of them can be considered here since each of them would require a detailed discussion. We therefore limit ourselves to

pointing out the salience of the risks connected to geographical origin, which affect the many immigrant riders involved in food delivery's universe. For them, the Tuscany Region has provided, in addition to Italian courses within the SOFT (Tuscany Training Offer System), a mechanism for matching job supply and demand at the Regional Employment Centers, where potential riders can turn to find a company that will hire them. This channel would thus aim to counter the phenomenon of the so-called 'digital gangmastering', into which migrant digital labor often risks slipping (Della Puppa, Perocco, Pirina 2024).

The variable of geographical origin also plays a significant role in the processes of 'segmentation' of the food delivery labor market, which were mentioned in the introduction. Several studies (Bonifacio 2023) have observed that some platforms (Just Eat and Deliveroo) have more stringent criteria in the selection of riders, for example not accepting short-term residence documents; this has transformed them, even in the eyes of the riders themselves, into the platforms "of Italians". Other companies (Glovo and the former Uber Eats) appear laxer in controls, giving the possibility of registering as a rider within 24 hours of the online request; registration procedures of this type end up encouraging digital gangmastering, based precisely on the exploitation of immigrant workers, often without documents, by the 'gangmasters', who simultaneously manage multiple accounts on the same platform. These mechanisms, together with the different payment methods and different earnings linked to the platforms, contribute to the segmentation of the food delivery labor market, in which rider profiles with highly varied requests can be identified. Ilaria Lani, member of the CGIL Secretariat of Florence, confirms the problem:

> I think there are three groups of workers in this sector: students, which is a group that has shrunk over time, who are interested in working the right amount, when they can, and getting a few cents for their expenses; then there is the group of migrants, who instead need to maximize their earnings. For them it is the same, it is that they have perhaps tried to work in logistics, in sectors where there is much more effort and low earnings, in any case sectors of tiring work. And so, overall, they prefer to do this job here because they have some guarantees. Even among them there have been some elements of regret… because then Glovo maybe makes you earn more for a period, then you go away for a month to your country, you come back and earn less. Even there some migrants have gotten angry. However, generally, that is a group that needs to maximize their earnings and has no problem working 13/14 hours a day. Instead of doing it under a boss, they prefer to do it with a job where you do not have someone yelling at

you. And then there is a somewhat singular group of Italians who do this job because they like it, they enjoy it… who are perhaps people who like to ride a bike to keep fit, people who perhaps also do other self-employed jobs and use this to make ends meet, who do not want to be under a boss or have other hassles. There is a group of lovers of this job, which I will now select for you because I have identified it over time. There are people who have been doing it for 5/6 years, who overall prefer to be with Deliveroo because they have fewer constraints… who they do it to make ends meet and because they like it a bit.

5 Conclusions. A System of Inequalities?

Based on what has been described in the previous paragraphs, it is possible to draw some initial conclusions regarding this Tuscan case-study. The documentary analysis of the institutional materials of the Tuscany Region and the discursive interviews conducted with the various actors mobilized in the world of food delivery, first of all, confirm the 'coexistence' of different forms of inequality among riders: work inequalities are those that stand out most clearly, being connected to the different contracts applied (self-employed or subordinate), to the methods of remuneration (hourly pay or piecework), to the times and spaces of work; equally important, however, are also the inequalities of physical/mental health, due to working conditions and, in particular, to the presence or absence of protections for riders; finally, as has recently emerged from the literature on the subject, racial inequalities can be traced among workers who, based on their needs and the documents they possess, tend to work more for one platform rather than another. This creates a 'racial segmentation' (or ghettoization) of the food delivery employment market, in which there are platforms 'for Italians' and others 'for immigrants'.

In this scenario, riders are not only subjected to more alienating, precarious and deregulated forms of work than workers with more standardized occupations, but they also suffer the effects of the 'internal differentiation' of the workforce to which they belong. This differentiation is the result of the inequalities created by the business models of the platforms, committed to intensifying and making work activities flexible to preserve their position in an increasingly competitive market. As the Tuscan case-study shows, companies that invest to provide greater guarantees to workers (see Just Eat or Runner Pizza) risk being 'crushed' by those that eliminate protections to reduce labor costs. In the absence of an organic response from institutions or 'critical' consumers, companies are therefore little encouraged to safeguard the integrity of workers who, today as in the past, end up paying the highest price for this situation. The intertwining

of labor, health, and racial inequalities among riders appears to be a structured and structural system, on which food delivery companies have so far relied to fuel their economic growth. Putting a stop to this phenomenon is a collective challenge for public institutions, unions, consumers, and workers, who all suffer (in diverse ways) the problematic consequences of the platformization of the economy and, in general, of society.

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