

Riding in the dark: The algorithmic-bureaucratic precarization of migrant food-delivery workers in Italy

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Abstract

This presentation advances the concept of algorithmic-bureaucratic precarization to examine the construction of precarity among migrant food-delivery workers in Turin, Italy. Drawing on ethnographic data collected between 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the presenters will argue that the commodification of migrant labour in the platform food-delivery sector in Turin, while driven by platform logics, is rooted in and compounded by the contradictions and opacity of Italy's immigration regime. The presenters will build their argument by charting the growing centrality of food-delivery platforms in the political economy of migration and illustrating how migrant food-delivery couriers understand platform opportunities while navigating algorithmic and legal uncertainties. In so doing, the presenters will show how the interactions between shifting migration policies, the information asymmetries of digital platforms, and legal loopholes exacerbate the socio-economic vulnerabilities of migrant workers. The presenters will thus unpack the concept of algorithmic-bureaucratic precarization by describing the entanglements of legal and procedural failures that illegalize migrants and asylum seekers and put them at risk of exploitation. Drawing on the specific case of migrant couriers in Turin, this presentation will contribute to the legal geography literature on precarization by highlighting how the platform economy is reshaping the nexus of neoliberal flexibilization and restrictive migration policies.

Biographies

Gianluca Iazzolino is a lecturer on Digital Development at the Global Development Institute, University of Manchester. His research focuses on digital labour, data justice, humanitarianism, and technologies of surveillance between Africa and Europe.

Eleonora Celoria is an Italian lawyer and PhD candidate in Immigration Law at the Law and Institutions Doctoral School of the University of Turin. Her research focuses on administrative detention and its implementation at European borders.



Wednesday, March 29, 2023

Amarilli Varesio is a PhD candidate in Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Milano-Bicocca. She has worked on internally displaced people in Uganda, and her current research revolves around the social impacts of the social energy market in Africa.