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COMMENTARY

A promise of mobility? Migrant gig workers in multinational food delivery platform companies in the Netherlands

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This commentary examines highly educated migrant gig workers who drive for multinational food delivery platforms in the Netherlands. It is part of the collection on *The global politics of precarity and insecure work*. Our study finds that the relative ease of securing a position in a delivery platform company offers educated migrants entry to the Dutch labour market built on the hope that this will facilitate their ability to secure a position in their respective fields. Delivery platforms capitalise on workers in what we call ‘positional limbo’, attracting educated, high-performing workers for low-paid, low-skilled positions. This precarious form of employment is instituted and sustained within the framework of labour and immigration management in the Netherlands. We find that this form of migration through the performance of platform labour is shaped by an increasingly flexible labour recruitment system alongside the internalisation of neoliberal discourses on work. We argue that together these sustain platform companies, reproduce inequalities in the labour market and produce a form of mobility-precarity that exists in the intersection of migration and platform capitalism. Our findings contribute to the development of scholarship on the global political economy (GPE) of labour and how digital technologies are impacting the future of work and immigration.

Keywords gig work • platform capitalism • immigration regimes • future of work

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In 2022, Lei,¹ a 26-year-old Chinese man with a postgraduate degree in Atmospheric Engineering from Switzerland, applied for a *zoek-jaar* (search year) visa² to find work in the Netherlands. After sending out over 150 résumés and not receiving a single offer, Lei saw a Thuisbezorgd (Just Eat Takeaway in the Netherlands) advertisement

on Instagram for delivery riders. A third job agency handled his visa application and within a week of sending his résumé to *Thuisbezorgd*, he was delivering food. Lei explained, 'The job requirements are very low for English speakers. No one asks what your academic background is or whether you speak Dutch. And they process work permits very quickly.' Likewise, Cindy, a Lithuanian woman who completed her undergraduate education in Media Studies in the UK, first worked for Uber Eats as a driver before being interviewed for a manager position in the company. In her opinion, the company gave her, as a foreigner, the opportunity to develop a career after graduation: 'Uber Eats pays its riders quite well, and as long as you are resilient and willing to work hard, you can be promoted smoothly.' Both Lei and Cindy were drawn to the promise of mobility through entry into the Dutch market.

For Lei and Cindy, educated individuals from outside of Western Europe seeking employment in the Netherlands, this precarious work for a platform has surprisingly, as they explain it, offered them opportunities by facilitating their attempt to find work in Western Europe. They experience gig work for what it is, precarious and unsatisfying, but they also suggest that this work has helped their mobility, or at the very least facilitated their migration to the Netherlands. In this commentary, we make a three-fold argument. First, delivery platforms capitalise on workers in what we call 'positional limbo', attracting educated, high-performing workers for low-paid, low-skill positions, benefitting from their pursuit of access to the Dutch employment market. Second, we find that precarious employment is instituted and sustained within the framework of labour and immigration management in the Netherlands. Third, and taken together, we argue that the ways multinational platform companies mobilise transnational migrants represents a new form of mobility-precarity at the intersection of migration and platform capitalism. Our findings contribute to the development of scholarship on the GPE of labour (Harrod, 2002; Las Heras, 2019).

To support our claims about the intersection of migrant precarity and platform labour, we draw on the experiences of our interlocutors in a study of riders in delivery platform companies in the Netherlands, part of a larger project examining labour governance of multinational delivery platform companies in the Netherlands between April 2023 and August 2024. This reflection sheds light on how new companies organise and reproduce precarious labour and how delivery workers comprehend their personal situation in gig work.³ In the subsequent sections, we first discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions of our research to GPE and migration studies. We then explore what we mean by positional limbo, discussing how multinational platform enterprises expanded in consumption services and employment markets during the liquidity crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, we examine how individuals approach the promise of mobility, why they enter the platform labour market and how they imagine and rationalise their career choices in exceptional periods.

Migration and platform capitalism in the GPE of labour

GPE was slow to centre labour and migration in its scholarship, but attention has been increasing over the past decade. The absence and therefore need for an International Political Economy (IPE) of labour grew in the 2000s, drawing on critical scholarship (O'Brien, 2000; Harrod, 2002; Moore, 2012). We build from these traditions. At

the same time, platform capitalism has been a focus of recent scholarship as its importance has expanded. We understand platform capitalism as characterised by the ways companies create digital platforms and utilise data to generate and extract value while prompting new exploitative work modalities and consumption practices (see [van Doorn and Badger, 2020](#); [van Doorn, 2022](#)). Some studies assume the weakness of the nation state or state as an authority in the face of globalisation led by multinational enterprises ([Mueller and Farhat, 2022](#); [Ihlebaek and Sundet, 2023](#); [Meyer et al, 2023](#)), others criticise the exploitative system of platform enterprises themselves as new manifestations of capitalist social relations ([Schaupp, 2021](#); [Gilbert, 2024](#)).

With few exceptions ([Altenried, 2021](#); [Sun and Zhao, 2022](#); [Tandon and Rath, 2022](#); [van Doorn et al, 2022](#)), GPE research on the platform economy has largely overlooked transnational migration despite the important part it plays in the human resources of multinational platform enterprises. The emerging scholarship is paving a way for this new research agenda that recentres migration and migrants. Some regard platform companies as a kind of migration infrastructure that helps English-proficient migrants in small-language countries quickly find temporary work to survive ([Altenried, 2021](#)), while others regard platform companies as organisations that further stratify and marginalise migrant labour ([Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013](#)). These studies, however, have not challenged the role of migration regimes in institutionalising and stratifying migrant workers in platform capitalism. Moreover, we need to consider further the subjectivity and autonomy of migrant platform workers, centring their experiences and perceptions.

In our study, we found that migrant riders' experiences and subjective impressions reflect the role of the migration and mobility regime. We understand migration and mobility regimes to be the forms and expressions of a global migration governance 'complex' across multiple scales including but not limited to nation states, multinational enterprises, recruitment agencies and civil society broadly conceived ([Ennis and Blarel, 2022](#)). The arguments we discuss in this article stem from two empirical claims. First, the meaning of mobility in the context of global capitalism has changed under the influence of new economic and technological conditions. Second, understanding the re-invention of the meaning of mobility by individuals who migrate in the context of platform capitalism is important for understanding how contemporary migration regimes mobilise transnational migrants while simultaneously reproducing precarity.

Combining the lens of migration studies with GPE facilitates thinking about the social impact of multinational enterprises on individuals, showing how platform enterprises like Uber Eats reproduce a new precarious workforce by shaping new forms of mobility. We thus advocate that when studying the relationship between migrant labour and multinational enterprises, researchers pay attention to the original lives (and life imaginations) of individual migrants and how labour policies play a role in their labour process. This further develops a GPE of labour, emerging from earlier conversations on the IPE of labour pioneered by [Harrod \(2002](#); see also [Las Heras, 2018](#); [2019](#)).

We draw on research focusing on migrants sitting in a form of 'high-skilled limbo' ([Ennis, 2022](#)) to make our claims about a new form of mobility-precarity in the intersection of migration governance and platform capitalism. Most of the migrant platform labour workers interviewed in the context of our study were educated individuals. Some moved across borders through education, attained a *zoek-jaar* visa, while others applied externally to work in their field and others arrived with

refugee visas. We can define most of the interviewees as middling migrants who have migrated across borders. According to [Smith and Favell \(2006\)](#), ‘middling’ migrants refers to ‘the skilled and educated among the globally mobile’ but who would be hard to describe as ‘elites’ ([Smith and Favell, 2006: 2, 8](#)). [Ennis \(2022\)](#) discusses this status as a form of ‘positional limbo’, where a migrant’s agency is empowered by their education level and simultaneously constrained by their lack of embeddedness in elite networks. In her understanding, it is a ‘high-skilled limbo’. [Conradson and Latham \(2005: 229\)](#) have also analysed ‘middling forms of transnationalism’, emphasising that ‘transnationalism is in fact characteristic of many more people than just the transnational elites and the developing-world migrants who have been the focus of so much transnational research’. That is, it is those in-between the elite and the working classes that rarely receive attention.

In our research, we see our interlocutors as situated within this high-skilled limbo space. Expressing the anxiety and aspiration for mobility in the platform economy, this transnational migrant workforce struggle within a dilemma of class mobility potentialities promised by globalisation. That is, some of the middling migrants of the Global South harbour dreams of taking root in the stable, free, middle-class life of the Global North. Through this commentary, we identify three main political economy shifts through which this process is taking place in the Netherlands: first, as markets for consumer goods shrink, the goal of multinational platform companies shifts from discovering and creating markets to controlling the margin between profits and costs by capturing the surplus value of highly skilled (but non-elite) transnational labour. Second, platform companies have become a new organisational form of multinational enterprises. Multinational platform companies such as Uber Eats and Thuisbezorgd are intermediaries that link users, buyers and suppliers, minimising labour costs and shortening the value chain between users (buyers) and suppliers in the pandemic and post-pandemic period of the Netherlands. Third, in the expansion of platform companies as multinationals, the state has increasingly launched policies that encourage the localisation and investment of platform companies but fail to effectively regulate the flexible labour system within which they operate.⁴ These shifts created large numbers of temporary flexible labour: delivery platform companies urgently need labour and use payroll companies to efficiently arrange short-term work visas. Skilled migrants who are looking for professional work opportunities, but have difficulty obtaining work visas, can immediately fill this gap in the labour market. The platformisation⁵ of work runs hand in hand with the gigification⁶ of work, with large-scale outsourcing of work becoming the norm. Platform companies are desperate to find the most flexible workforce from the localised labour market. Thus groups already precarious due to their migration status become key targets of the outsourced labour system of platform companies. The forthcoming section will expand upon the production of positional limbo by analysing specific cases.

The production of positional limbo in platform capitalism

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the business of platform companies such as Uber Eats and Thuisbezorgd, which deliver food contact-free, grew rapidly in the Netherlands as elsewhere ([Floetgen et al, 2021](#)). As the consumer market expands, so does the local labour market brought about by these platform companies. Media

reports and union reporting on complaints suggest that platform companies started the large-scale use of foreign student labour during this shortage of local flexible labour supply (DutchNews, 2022; FNV, nd). Like other forms of capital, platform companies seek the lowest cost of labour to maximise their earnings. The crisis period facilitated their ability to draw on migrant labour in search of better opportunities within the Netherlands. Our study also found that many delivery workers were international students or recent graduates biding their time for a career-relevant opportunity. Many migrant platform workers are therefore an educated class, exercising their agency by choosing to work for platform companies offering easier access to the Dutch labour market. On the one hand, these workers are empowered by their education level and knowledge of legal means to secure employment. On the other hand, their access to upward mobility and the means to defend their labour rights are constrained by their lack of embeddedness in elite (or non-elite, but local) networks. This status of many migrant platform workers can be understood as ‘high-skilled limbo’ (Ennis, 2022), which is magnified by the dual precarity of their form of work and visa status.

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, platform companies benefitted from the opportunity to quickly access a pool of migrant student workers who were unable to find full-time jobs and had failed to obtain permanent work visas. The personnel shortage continued for some time after the pandemic, especially in low-threshold and unstable jobs created by those employers who need a flexible workforce to quickly fill oscillating demand in the consumer services market. A key example of this trend was the mushrooming of food delivery companies (Ahuja et al, 2021).

Many of our interviewees found access to delivery platform work to be easy, suggesting the bar was low. Many of the riders we interviewed were already consumers of mainstream takeaway platforms, and the majority of them had also experienced unstable employment or short-term unemployment during the pandemic. Two of the interviewees have Master’s degrees in Human Geography and Political Economy, and they have a critical political economy understanding of multinational companies. They were both attracted to the platform via job advertisements and by the low employment threshold of the platform’s deskilling and relaxed recruitment process and began working part-time. Many of our interviewees said that as long as you have a good command of English and no criminal record, you can basically get a job in the delivery platform company. Even Dutch language skills were not essential.

By using third-party recruitment companies, platform companies can quickly secure work visas and contracts for delivery workers. This rapid, user-friendly recruitment process is something that many highly educated new immigrants would not experience otherwise. Lei, in the opening story, is pursuing his career goal is to become a data engineer, and he possesses the necessary qualifications for such positions in data engineering companies. However, he perceives that companies manufacture excuses to avoid hiring him, and believes the real reason for his accumulated rejections is his proficiency in the Dutch language. Such reasons are largely absent from the recruitment process for food delivery platform companies. Lei reports that he continues to submit more than ten résumés a day in his field, only to be met with rejection. He thus finds that the temporary employment offered by the food delivery platform company has given him the only opportunity to continue to stay in the Netherlands, which, in turn, allows him to continue applying for data science positions.

Multinational platform companies mainly localise labour acquisition through labour agencies in other local markets. Since the entry of service-based platform

companies such as Uber Eats into the Dutch market, their recruitment contracts have mainly been issued by third-party payroll companies such as Randstad. The payroll contract system is a legal recruitment system that provides multinational companies with a flexible workforce. In the so-called local labour market, the migrant labour force is the most precarious and easiest to capture. Migrant labour without a long-term visa has become the ideal target group for delivery platform recruitment. Payroll contracts are usually short term and typically based on a fixed period or the validity period of the employee's residence card. The contract is terminated before the expiration of the residence permit. In other words, the multinational platform company, which is the actual recruiter, is not responsible for the residence visa of non-EU employees. The expiration date of the employee's residence visa is the date their employment ends. This is a common scenario faced by young graduates from elite universities (the world's top 200 universities) who have gone to the Netherlands to seek career development on a *zoek-jaar* visa. While on the one hand they enjoy the freedom of a one-year visa, on the other hand they are prone to exploitation by the payroll company and the platform enterprise, entering the workplace in a way that will not lead to long-term employment.

The flexible recruitment system benefits from the neoliberalisation of the state and its governance. That is, while the state faces some pressure to regulate in the favour of labour protection for platform workers, it also faces pressure from companies to ease restrictions. For example, in April 2023, the Supreme Court of the Netherlands passed a lawsuit against Deliveroo. The judge announced that self-employed people (employees who receive outsourced labour contracts and are responsible for their own social security and pensions) working for Deliveroo have the same rights and benefits as employees, and the company must pay their social security contributions (Rechtspraak, 2021). Despite this ruling, flexible employment models in food delivery platform companies continue to flourish. Up until the day we finished our interviews for this project in July 2024, we were still encountering interviewees who worked for platform companies as self-employed workers and were unable to secure these benefits.

Equally problematic, formal labour protection institutions seem to have little impact on the lived experiences of migrant platform workers. This is partly due to a lack of familiarity with labour rights, with the role of unions and with regulatory frameworks and processes that can be used to support workers. The unfamiliarity stems from the temporariness embedded within their work and their migration stays. Short-term jobs coupled with short migration times limits both exposure and interaction. Workers who seek out unions tend to be connected to networks of labour activists and union members. The autonomy of a platform gig job limits interaction with colleagues and the opportunities for knowledge exchange co-workers may bring. Many of our interlocutors seemed indifferent or did not seem to understand the role and benefits of union membership. Young migrant drivers' seeming indifference to the work of unions thus grows out of the autonomised, flexible, temporary system in which they work. Precarity in employment limits access to rights and protections, as Florisson argues elsewhere in this round table.

Studying the educated middle class situated in a position of dual precarity based on migration status and job form allows us to understand both an outcome and function of platform capitalism and how positional limbo unfolds. That is, we see platform capitalism reflecting capitalism's traditional predilections but adjusted to the technological moment (Harvey, 2010). We also see that the combination of

the migration regime and the platform recruitment system has co-created a group of highly educated migrants who have become or 'chosen to become' members of precarious employment.

Analysing positional limbo and precarity in platform capitalism

This section analyses positional limbo and precarity in platform capitalism, interpreting why educated migrant workers pursue gig work initially and how they explain and rationalise their choice or need. Our findings demonstrate how two discourses relevant for platform capitalism are internalised and reproduced by the workers themselves. Neoliberal narratives promise returns for hard work, and individual responsibility for success. Delivery platforms offer techno-fixes to fill gaps in the consumer market while also generating work and individual earning opportunities (Ennis, 2025). The general discourses of neoliberalism and the discourses of the economic potential of digital platforms for economies go hand in hand. Workers absorb and reproduce these common narratives in their explanations for becoming drivers for gig platforms.

Precarity is not uniform, and the way it manifests and is interpreted by those in a high-skilled limbo demonstrate how neoliberal narratives about hard work and temporary sacrifice for future success provide motivational and comforting explanations. Like Mourad also finds in her commentary, precarity is experienced on an individual level, in non-material and emotional terms, through comprehending freedom and security, and a sense of control over one's life as a migrant. Migration regimes and capital interests take advantage of both these self-interpretations and the vulnerability or need of those choosing gig work as a migration path to higher-skilled work.

Many of our interviewees were aware and critical of their difficult life situation and the instability of their working environment. Their precarity was felt and the knowledge that their jobs were insecure resonated loudly. However, their reasons for accepting unstable work are complex, diverse and individual. Their path to the Netherlands was also diverse. Some left their home country or country of study to come to the Netherlands in pursuit of more acceptance and liberal socio-political values, others fled war, while others sought less competitive work environments, or simply distance from family expectations. Several interviewees, for example, who identified themselves as LGBTQ explained that they came to the Netherlands to study and try to find work because they perceive the social environment in the Netherlands as more accepting of sexual minorities. Some of these individuals, whose parents can afford to support their studies abroad, gain independence by taking on part-time jobs. Others use temporary work as a form of physical exercise or as a buffer while they send out their résumés and interview for 'formal jobs'. Several interviewees who were unsuccessful finding work that matched their professional background said that they did not dwell on thinking about the meaning of food delivery work for their careers. They simply rationalised the time spent in gig delivery work as a 'gap year job' or a way of earning income. That is to say, they did not mind the work itself and were more interested in whether the work could provide an opportunity for them to 'take a break' after graduation. 'In fact, most work is meaningless. At least, cycling can train your body and get you fit,' explained one interviewee.

These interpretations of their labour and migration situation reflect mainstream neoliberal narratives about individual work-reward payoff. Such self-explanations

help justify both the form of work and make unfriendly migration regimes and experiences seem navigable. Neoliberalism promotes the idea that success is earned through hard work, talent and education. The highly educated migrant workers try to convince themselves that their decision to migrate and their choice to do gig work is ‘temporary’. They might downplay structural barriers (for example, immigration policies) and instead focus on their personal responsibility to adapt, continue and succeed. Rather than directly recognising the structural problems, many of the interviewees believe that their ability to secure employment in a competitive global market would be proven due to their merit and individual achievement. The difficulties of securing desirable jobs balanced with the ease of gig work show how the demand for cheap labour preys upon those in various uncertain situations. The need to extract surplus value from labour always supersedes. At the same time, the individual worker is provided with convenient, panglossian narratives about the end goal.

Behind these self-justifications, we also encounter a sense of ‘compromise’ and ‘escape’. Escape and compromise reflect the mix of aspiration (and in some instances desperation) of individuals to find new alternatives based on the mythologised promise of Western European middle-class life. Based on the personal profile of interviewees, the young *zoek-jaar* visa holders or English-fluent asylum seekers are mostly highly educated millennials (people who were born between 1980 and 2000) or Gen Zs (people who were born after 2000). Both groups generally hold cosmopolitan aspirations and migrate to find professional jobs and develop their career. They are also more exposed to a globalised, liberal, open-minded primary education than their parents who were born between the 1950s and the 1970s. And, as children of the middle class or professional-managerial class in their home countries, they have fewer survival pressures than their parents’ generation. Because their home countries cannot meet their educational and mobility aspirations, they choose to come to the so-called Global North, with the financial support of their families, in pursuit of a more (imagined) free and open educational and living environment that is in line with their life goals and values, and to re-establish their career.

Moreover, the hierarchy between the Global North and the Global South, as reflected in this reconstruction of positional limbo, still exists in the production of meaning by individuals. And this hierarchy is being reinforced by institutional barriers (that is, visa systems, recruitment systems) in the countries of immigration. Middle-class children from emerging and developing regions in Asia, Africa, Latin America, as well as the new generation of former socialist countries, see Western Europe as a place where they can more easily express their inclinations and fetishisation of the liberal West and at the same time earn a decent income.

The original intentions for countries such as the Netherlands to provide the one-year temporary work visas for graduates from decent universities around the world are to facilitate young professionals to work in Western Europe, attract talent and reduce companies’ recruitment costs.⁷ But this neoliberal confluence of state and corporate interests does not fully manifest this way for the young graduates we know working for platform companies. The state’s issuing of visas to encourage young, highly skilled labour is rather used and abused as a tool for companies to reduce costs and increase efficiency. Moreover, such companies that recruit temporary workers neither retain talent for the country nor promote the graduates’ upward mobility. With a right-wing, anti-immigration coalition government in the Netherlands,⁸ there is currently a paradoxical asymmetry in the market for platform company jobs. On the one hand

multinational companies, as important economic forces for the Dutch economy, rely on liberal economic policies and continue to recruit temporary migrant workers. On the other hand, the governing coalition, rhetorically in favour of liberated markets, produces and pursues anti-immigration rhetoric and policies.

Conclusion

The migrant platform workers at the heart of this article sit in a position of high-skilled limbo. They have the potential and ability to move, as well as the ambition to move, but they face the individualised dilemma of choosing between multiple mobility options that promise both migration and career development through the market. Joining platforms as gig workers, in some ways, is viewed as a choice and as a migratory path to ease their transition into Dutch work life. Most of our interviewees embraced, to varying extents, techno-optimist narratives that praise the possibility and freedoms introduced by new technologies for work (Scott, 2012: 55). Our interlocutors internalise these narratives to assert their own agency in seeking opportunities through platform work. However, this methodological optimism readily obscures the tensions and dilemmas in the real situations of migrating individuals negotiating new social positionalities. Politically, these migrants are defined by the current system of immigration governance as newcomers crossing borders to reap greater economic and social benefits, and economically, they are seen as potential *petite bourgeoisie*. Their state of positional limbo is embedded in the structural precarity and institutional dilemma of migration. The individual's imagination of social positionality and mobility also demonstrates the importance of intersectionality in GPE analysis. That is, we must consider the roles of class, gender, race and migration status and how they inform and interact with positional limbo in our critique of the inequalities involved in transnational mobility.

Let us bring the discussion back to the GPE of precarious labour in platform capitalism. The popularity of services and labour outsourcing has led to the rise of global platform companies. Food delivery services have spawned a typical agglomeration of intensive (flexible outsourcing) of labour. In countries with high human capital costs in Western Europe, such as the Netherlands, immigrants or new (student) immigrants are the main workers who can fill this labour market gap and keep the gig economy sustainable. Because at any time, a country's internal mobility may be slowed down due to sudden changes in the meso-political economy, but migration flows continue.

At the same time, young, educated migrant workers who grew up in an era of rapid development of the dot-com bubbles and platform business or lifestyle are more able to persuade themselves to join these types of multinational tech-companies with which they are familiar. Restricted by post-colonial and racialised visa systems (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2018), even with a higher education degree, young migrant workers are unable to quickly find jobs that match their professional abilities in an increasingly competitive job market. The difficulties of finding jobs and the reality of working part-time are justified through neoliberal imaginations of their hard work paying off. But these pronouncements are produced alongside an anxiety expressed as an emotional drain. Moreover, migrant students from non-EU countries face an even more anxiety-inducing reality than European workers – the need for a visa.

Returning to the story of Lei is illustrative in conclusion. After his *zoek-jaar* visa expired in May 2024, Lei returned to Chengdu, the capital and metropolitan city of Sichuan province in China, to live with his parents temporarily. He was forced to return because he could not find a position that could sponsor his *kennismigrant* (highly skilled migrant) visa after his time as a gig worker. In order to return, Lei intends to apply for another Master of Science degree in the Netherlands in 2025, and believes this will be a good investment for his future. Lei's story captures the essence of our claim that this form of migration through platform labour is shaped by an increasingly flexible labour recruitment system and neoliberal discourses on work. Together, these sustain platform companies, reproduce inequalities in the labour market and produce a form of mobility-precarity that exists in the intersection of migration and platform capitalism.

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Notes

- ¹ This commentary draws from our project 'Governing delivery platform companies'. All the names of the interviewees in this study have been anonymised and their workplaces have been changed in order to protect their privacy.
- ² A temporary one-year work visa provided by the Dutch government for non-EU passport holders who have graduated from Dutch or the world's top 200 universities. See: <https://ind.nl/nl/verblijfsvergunningen/werken/verblijfsvergunning-zoekjaar-hoogopgeleiden>
- ³ The food delivery platform companies covered in this study refer to delivery service companies that use digital technologies and existing commercial infrastructure to create and manage services that connect various stakeholders, such as producers (riders), consumers and restaurants or supermarkets. Food delivery platforms often promote and benefit from network effects, where the value of the platform increases as more stakeholders join. Examples of food delivery platform companies include Uber Eats and Thuisbezorgd.
- ⁴ Please see report in Sociaal-Economische Raad (SER) (September 2020): Hoe werkt de platformeconomie? 20/09. <https://www.ser.nl/-/media/ser/downloads/adviezen/2020/platformeconomie-hoe-werkt.pdf>. In this article, policy researchers discuss the market expansion of several types of platform enterprises, the use of labour and how the government is or should be formulating rules to maintain market fairness and protect the rights and interests of workers in response to the expansion of platform enterprises. However, this policy report does not pay attention to the precarious employment of migrants working for the platform companies, although the report did note that 'platform workers also tend to have a migration background'. We tackle this through examining platform workers in 'high-skilled limbo' created by the flexibilisation of platform economy and strict labour and immigration policies.
- ⁵ Platformisation emphasises the introduction of new work and employment management mechanisms by the company as an employer, further simplifying the process of exchanging labour for capital on internet platforms. The company becomes a platform per se for selling labour directly to consumers. In this way, the platform evades the direct employer-employee relationship in the new economy. Platform mediation and the multifaceted market have accelerated the 'super-exploitation' of workers (Felix, 2020).

⁶ Gigification is the concretisation of flexible, short-term, on-demand work. According to platform research and economic sociology, gigification of work is currently driven by the rising platform companies that sell or outsource temporary services (Vallas and Schor, 2020).

⁷ The search year visa sets a lower salary threshold for companies recruiting overseas employees than the regular *kennismigrant* (highly skilled migrant) visa. If an overseas jobseeker does not enter the workforce with a search year visa, the company will have to pay thousands of euros more in recruitment costs for them (for example, applying for a formal work permit, increasing the basic salary of the job seeker and so on).

⁸ The right-wing coalition, which formed in July 2024, collapsed by June 2025 over the issue of migration and at the time of publication is serving as a caretaker government until elections later in 2025.

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Ethics statement

Permission to conduct the interviews for the purposes of this research was obtained from all participants, who were fully informed about the purposes and intended use of this research.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no known conflict of interest.

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