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"I Don't Want to Underpay People": Platforms for Childcare and Migrant Mothers Navigating Belonging

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Abstract

Feminist scholarship engages with in flux and situational motherhood, childcare, and the boundaries between private and public domains. Decades of knowledge production have signaled undervalued care work and feminized global care chains. Against this backdrop, more recently, digital platforms or social networks connect childcare workers to migrant (and non-migrant) parents, with new or reconstituted implications for gender inequalities. While the limited research to date on childcare platformization has focused on experiences of domestic workers, there is a noticeable gap regarding parents' perspectives on engaging this care, especially that of migrant mothers. This article inquires as to why migrant mothers turn to digital platforms in addressing childcare needs, if they are aware of applicable childcare regulation, and if (and how) platforms mediate understandings of regulation and worker or employer definitions. It frames the discussion in terms of belonging linked to normative values of care. To do so, the article first offers background on the Dutch childcare regime. Then, empirical analysis includes a desk review of online childcare platforms, alongside a survey among 30 participants and 9 semi-structured follow-up interviews with migrant mothers in the Netherlands. On the one hand, findings indicate little or unclear knowledge of domestic work regulation, further obfuscated by platforms as an intermediary. On the other hand, negotiations of belonging in fluctuating contexts, as well as perceptions of exclusion and high costs of care, serve as the rationale behind turning to childcare platforms.

Keywords

belonging; care work; migrant mothers; platformization; social reproduction

1. Introduction

Scholarship has continuously addressed the distinctiveness of the domestic work sector and the global care chains that have emerged in Europe and globally over the past decades (Gil Araujo & Pedone, 2014; Herrera, 2012; Kofman, 2012; Sassen et al., 2006). It evidences that this form of labour is historically societally undervalued, often conducted in spaces of combined isolation, intimacy, or invisibility, alongside power imbalances between employer and employee, with dynamics that can engender dependent and vulnerable positionality (Peterson, 2007). Meanwhile, a proliferation of online platforms brokering either marketplace or on-demand domestic care services stands to recommodify, or at the very least, bear gendered, classed, or racialized consequences for reproductive care work (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2024; Schwiter & Steiner, 2020).

The vast majority of literature addressing the platformization of work has investigated delivery and logistics services, perhaps not least due to the more visible nature of these sectors (Altenried, 2021; van Doorn & Vijay, 2021). These studies often argue that platform companies can extract maximum value from workers while neglecting their physical, mental, or economic security (Altenried, 2021; van Doorn & Vijay, 2021). Others have examined how platform works link to migrant labor regimes (Alteinried, 2021; van Doorn, 2022), or have noted the gendered and racialized patterns in this type of work (Kampouri, 2022; Woodcock, 2021). A much smaller fraction of burgeoning scholarship examines the domestic or care work at an intersection with platformization; scholars have called for further investigation of how digital platforms affect long-standing exclusions and inequalities in the sector based on, inter alia, gender, race, class, ethnicity, and legal status (Hunt & Samman, 2023; Ticona & Mateescu, 2018).

These observations raise questions as to whether platformization reconstitutes or maintains former systems of invisible and undervalued care work with the state and capital offloading costs onto gendered and racialized migrant (and non-migrant) workers (Dowling, 2018; van Doorn, 2020). Importantly, these trends present further obstacles to the formalization or regularization of the sector. In considering regulation of the sector and classification of employers and employees, it is important to point out the gaps in literature investigating perspectives of those parents engaging child care labor, either in the physical or digital sphere (Lundström, 2013; Sibiya & du Toit, 2022; van Doorn & Vijay, 2021). For example, a recent project in the context of the Covid-19 crisis in the Netherlands has noted how employers were unaware of the legal status of domestic workers until the crisis hit, and that education or awareness is insufficient among this population (Böcker & de Lange, 2023).

Within this context, the Netherlands serves as a relevant case study as it falls under EU regulatory frameworks, yet has not signed on to the ILO 89 convention, and national legislation regulating domestic or care work employment is critiqued (van Hooren, 2018). It has formalized certain types of domestic work, but remains under scrutiny for sub-standard employment protections and benefits; it is argued that the domestic work regulation legitimizes and promotes poor quality and substandard employment, marginalizing and segregating care work (de volder, 2017; International Labour Organization, 2016). Moreover, studies offer ample evidence of (irregular) migrant domestic care work (de Kort & Bekker, 2024; Siruno & Siegel, 2023; Soraya, 2020). Regarding recent events in applicable EU frameworks, the Directive (EU) 2024/2831 on improving working conditions in platform work theoretically should mitigate some of the pitfalls of platform work, including facilitating the determination of the correct employment status of persons working for these

platforms and allowing them to benefit from any corresponding labor rights. Member states are required to implement the Directive by December 2026, and establish a legal presumption that the platform is an employer; however, in principle, it will still be up to national courts to decide each case, and national case law to date indicates that childcare platform models are often not litigated (Durri et al., 2025; Hießl, 2021).

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to understand the perspective of migrant mothers turning to digital platforms as a care strategy when contemplating the overall political economy of social reproduction at the intersection with platformization. In the Netherlands, there is an indication of migrant communities relying on online social support (Hofhuis et al., 2019). However, there is no research into how migrant parents specifically turn to online networks for care; there are a few studies as to how migrants may use social network sites and smartphones for online support while in Amsterdam and the wider Netherlands (Hofhuis et al., 2019; Patterson & Leurs, 2020).

As part of this, it is important to note the broader feminist literature that has investigated migrant mothering and the politics of care and belonging within which they operate (Svašek, 2008). This article takes as a point of departure how, in migration circuits, the gender politics of social reproduction operate both within and beyond households, inextricably interlinked with the dynamics of material inequalities and cultural norms (Peterson, 2007). For migrant mothers, care responsibilities can be redistributed among state, market, and family, with implications for these women's experiences against social reproductive dynamics (Ikizoglu Erensu, 2025). Moreover, heavily gendered power relations in (re)negotiations of social reproduction across the life course can take place and remain specific to each individual's migratory trajectory (Locke et al., 2013). In looking at family dynamics and migrant mothering from the perspective of the migrant mother "employer" rather than from the (justifiably sought) view of the migrant worker, this expands investigation of platformization of care going forward; it incorporates an understudied, yet integral, perspective in teasing out dynamics of privilege, oppression, and inequalities in social reproduction and care.

Via this Dutch case study, this article seeks to fill in gaps in platformization inquiry by better understanding the perspectives of why migrant mothers seeking childcare outside of their origin contexts turn to digital platforms, and if they are aware of the regulation applicable to the paid childcare that they find through these platforms. This article's theoretical framework draws on feminist scholarship related to reproductive labor and transnational mothering and places the work in relation to digital migration studies and literature addressing the platformization of care work. It then provides an overview of the Dutch context in relation to domestic work regulation and platformization, as well as the childcare system. Finally, on the one hand, it analyses empirical data from a review of existing web platforms and an anonymous survey of 35 migrant employers; on the other, the main analysis consists of nine follow-up interviews with mothers from the survey. Conclusions in response to the dual research question are several. Firstly, it is observed that those surveyed are largely unaware of the applicable domestic care work regulation and/or workers' legal status and rights, or as to the role of the platform as employer versus intermediary. At the same time, the interviewed mothers express interest in becoming better informed. Secondly, participants appear to turn to digital platforms in the context of a lack of network and a crisis of care, as part of an overall negotiation of their sense of self and belonging that includes aspects of care, mothering, migrant status, and perceived gender roles in fluctuating contexts. Ultimately, the article fills existing gaps in the literature by examining the experiences and expectations of migrant mothers who rely on or seek paid care in their overall migration and life trajectories.

2. Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework first overviews feminist theory and migration studies, examining social reproduction, family dynamics, and mothering; then it bridges to digital migration studies, and finally canvases literature addressing the platformization of care work. It then links this context to Yuval-Davis' (2016) conceptualization of the politics of belonging and its intersection with care. These various strands of research are gathered here because, as Kofman (2012, p. 154) notes, the study of migrant family life versus migrant labor often represent divorced fields of inquiry, which prevents "a more complete picture of the migrant caring subject within a broader perspective of the social reproduction of their own and other families."

Social reproduction is understood as the interplay between various actors in a dynamic network that can be grouped broadly into state, household, capital, and civil society categories (Katz, 2001, p. 131). Migration studies related to care have been critiqued as limited to work on transnational mothering, South to North flows, and a structural globalization argument premised on assumptions that lack nuance (Kofman, 2012). Such transnational mothering has noted how women's experiences of social reproductive dynamics involve continually renegotiating, varied and context- or situation-specific gendered power relations across their migratory trajectories (Christou & Michail, 2015; Kraler et al., 2011; Locke et al., 2013). While this work notes that combinations of mothering and paid labor can be transformed in these differing material and social circumstances (Dyck, 2018), a great deal of it speaks to so-called "low-skilled" migrants from developing countries (Locke et al., 2013).

There is less literature dedicated to migrant mothering from the standpoint of women with the resources to seek out paid care; much of the literature on this demographic explores themes of transnational elites, trailing wives and their shifting identities (Slobodin, 2025), and the social norms of "expat bubbles" or dynamics of third culture parenting (D'Attoma & Germann Molz, 2024). However, there is a call to more thoughtfully approach the gendered ethics of care embedded across moments, cultures, and spaces in individual migration trajectories, and to explore how these individuals negotiate care obligations with different actors in these contexts (Kofman, 2012; Kofman & Raghuram, 2022). In terms of digital migration studies, work has been conducted on the lives of migrant profiles like the so-called "expatriate" or "middle-class transnational," and how they may use social network sites and smartphones for online or hybrid support networks, both globally as well as in the Netherlands (Hofhuis et al., 2019; Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018; Patterson & Leurs, 2020). It follows that migrant mothers with resources may be tapping into platforms for paid care as they negotiate their care obligations in new contexts. This presents a very particular gendered dynamic of mobile subjects employing other mobile subjects. The gap in examination of migrant mother "employer" perspectives as relates to their childcare expectations and understandings of paid care work (Lundström, 2013)—evidenced as frequently performed by migrant workers—is the focus of this article.

In light of the above, it is important to also address the platformization of work at an intersection with care. Platform work has been evidenced as gendered and racialized labor, with men more represented in the food services and delivery sectors, and women disproportionately represented in domestic care (albeit this can vary globally based on context, regions, and levels of development; see Balaram et al., 2017; van Doorn & Vijay, 2021). Overall platform scrutiny to date can be classified into strands of research addressing worker misclassification or exploitation, issues of low skills and migrant worker access, and enhanced precarity (Baum,

2024). At the same time, some studies on platform and gig work also point to the agency that it can offer, in terms of new opportunities and independent decision making (Katta et al., 2024).

Within this, a burgeoning body of work has begun to point to the specificities of carework within platformization (largely in cleaning services, but sometimes relating to child or elderly care). There are varied qualitative studies, inter alia, in Australia (Kalemba et al., 2024), Argentina (Pereyra et al., 2022), Canada, (Hopwood et al., 2024; Yin, 2023), Germany (Altenried, 2021; Baum, 2024), India (Rathi & Tandon, 2021), Netherlands (van Doorn & Vijay, 2021), South Africa (Hunt & Samman, 2020; Sibiya & du Toit, 2022), Spain (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2024), and the US (Ticona & Mateescu, 2018). In the European context, empirical evidence underlines how care platforms target or exploit specific migrant communities, and intentionally allow registration with minimum documentation (Floros & Jørgensen, 2022). Ultimately, many of these studies or reports argue as to the exacerbation of inequalities for workers, given: insufficient remuneration to sustain quality of life; a lack of control over work time; no union representation and collective bargaining power; pressure from algorithmic ratings or adverse effects of algorithmic supply and demand matching; algorithmic discrimination; or platform-facilitated driving down of wages or undervaluing carework even further (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2024; Sibiya & du Toit, 2022). In short, work remains precarious, undervalued, and unprotected, and platformization entails capitalizing on preexisting global care chains or reconstituting neoliberal dynamics in care (Hunt & Samman, 2020; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2024).

In light of these thought trajectories informing the study of platformization of care, this work attempts to better flesh out the perspective of migrant mothers seeking paid care work via digital platforms. In particular, the research question must take into account the politics of care and belonging inherent to the subject at hand. To do so, this section finally touches upon the work of Yuval-Davis (2016). On the one hand, she addresses belonging as a concept—a dynamic process, multilayered and multiscalar, with individuals belonging in different ways to different attachments. Construction of self and identity form part of this, and how these are evaluated by the self and others (Yuval-Davis, 2016, p. 371). On the other hand, she distinguishes the concept of belonging from political projects of belonging, or contestations around discourses of inclusion and exclusion; these are often inextricably linked with normative values of care. As women participate in the labor market, alongside neoliberal, globalized economy demands that result in a care gap or crisis, a growing dependency on migrant workers raises questions as to inclusionary or exclusionary political projects of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2016).

Finally, a clarification on terminology concerning migrant mothers seeking care: While this article refers to literature employing the term “expatriate,” it is noted that there is a critical examination of the category of “expatriate” and “migrant,” with expatriate often understood as skilled and temporarily mobile, white, and from the Global North (Kunz, 2023). These profiles are positioned as privileged and valuable human resources compared with the positioning of the “migrant” as the other and disempowered (Croucher, 2012).

In sum, tackling questions of care work at an intersection with platformization requires melding several fields of study and interdisciplinary approaches to provide a comprehensive framework in which to examine empirical evidence that grounds the very nuanced and context-specific nature of this research. For this reason, the theoretical framework overviewed feminist theories related to social reproduction and global care chains, as well as migration literature addressing migrant mothering and digital migration studies, before reviewing studies on platformization—particularly those to date at an intersection between platformization

and carework. Going over the work in these disciplines is important in asking what societal and institutional shortcomings may be informing the rise of care platformization. Finally, this section situates Yuval-Davis' (2016) understanding of the politics of care and belonging in the context of these interlinked strands; it serves as the lens through which the research questions are examined.

3. Background and Context as to the Dutch Case of Care Regimes and Regulation

The sociocultural context of the Netherlands may inform its current regulation regarding domestic work. While post-war society framed the male as the breadwinner, women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Netherlands becoming party to international treaties for equal rights, led to the premise that all individuals are to support themselves with paid labor rather than via family relations (van Walsum, 2011a). However, provisions for subsidized childcare and parental care are considerably less generous than in other comparative European welfare state countries (de Volder, 2017).

While the outsourcing of domestic work remains lower in the Netherlands compared to other countries, an imbalance remains between employment and caregiving responsibilities; women continue disproportionately serve as primary caregivers and homemakers, as evidenced by the high proportion of part-time employment among women in the country (van Walsum, 2011b).

Some work is subsidized by the government via subsidized daycare or "guest parenting" in private homes, but private domestic work in the Netherlands remains under-researched (de Volder, 2017). The Dutch market-driven approach to childcare springs from a series of policy reforms beginning in the 2000s, increasing competition and private services (van Hooren, 2021). Childcare in the Netherlands is primarily composed of childcare centers and childminders, both of which are subsidized by the government in an income-based approach (Emery, 2020). Most parents use a formal form of childcare with another form, according to the Netherlands Statistics Bureau (2022).

Understandably, studies note a high childcare penalty in the country, with mothers' earnings 46% lower compared to their pre-birth earnings trajectories and also versus fathers' unaffected earnings (Rabaté & Rellstab, 2022). Formal childcare costs have steadily and sometimes sharply increased, thanks in part to shortages in the sector (Verkooijen & Hovius, 2023). A report found that the average 2023 hourly rate in North Holland (9.96 euros per hour) would entail 2388 euros monthly for daycare, five days a week, with prices rising (BOiNk, 2023). Low-income parents can receive 96% of billable childcare costs for up to 230 hours per month, while high-income parents can receive 33% (with a range of income-driven rates in between; see Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2024).

If not using subsidized daycare or "guest parenting" (i.e., *gasthouders*), key legislation important to understanding regulation of domestic care in the Netherlands is the Home Services regulation (HSR). The HSR is specific to domestic care work, and entails that, regardless of legal status, domestic workers who work for less than four days (weekly) for the same employer are entitled to holiday allowance (8% on top of wages), four weeks of sick leave annually, six weeks of sickness benefit (at 70% wage), one month notification of termination of employment, and paid emergency and maternity leave (Bijleveld & Cremers, 2010; de Volder, 2017). As signaled by activists and scholars, the HSR falls short of other rights and, for this reason, migrant organizations lobby for the ratification of the ILO (van Hooren, 2018). If working four or

more days per week, employers are obligated to deduct taxes from their workers' salaries, as well as contribute to the health insurance system (van Hooren, 2018). Academic studies and advocacy reports reveal that there is a rampant lack of compliance with the HSR, while existing regulatory frameworks seldom provide support to irregular workers. Moreover, these regulations can even have adverse effects on declared workers and the sector as a whole, particularly in that they can lead to inadequate social protections (de Kort & Bekker, 2024; de Volder, 2017).

Finally, in the context of the Netherlands and the platformization of care work, it is important to mention the case of Helpling. Helpling, a gig cleaning site, primarily functioned as a platform for migrants with varying backgrounds and migration trajectories, but few income opportunities (Altenried 2020; van Doorn & Vijay, 2024). After a migrant domestic workers' union brought Helpling to court, an Amsterdam Appeals Court (in a September 2021 decision) reclassified Helpling's cleaners as temporary agency workers; in other words, the court held the platform accountable as the employer (Hießl, 2021; Piletić, 2024; Van Doon & Vijay, 2024). However, Helpling later pivoted its business model, taking fees from clients rather than cleaners, and acting as a gig platform with independent contractors supposedly falling under the HSR (Piletić, 2024). Helpling ultimately faced bankruptcy in the Netherlands (Piletić, 2024). At the same time, based on the review of platform sites further below, it seems many childcare platforms have modelled after the Helpling pivot: They establish themselves as a marketplace model and place responsibility on the employers or parents seeking care on those sites. This is an important point given how parents may be unaware of their responsibilities as employers in informal childcare arrangements; the fact that the platform's employer status is litigated on a piecemeal basis can compound this murky territory.

In sum, even with proper enactment and enforcement of existing domestic work regulations, platformization presents a real risk of increased (and compounded) exploitation, as indicated by a growing body of literature. New regulations on platform and gig work could be a pathway to reforming the sector; at the same time, as with other country contexts, the sector often involves informality and a lack of interest in regulation enforcement (van Doorn, 2022; van Hooren, 2018). In the Dutch context, this is particularly evident both in the literature to date on the failed or unclear implementation of the HSR, and the contestation around the roles and responsibilities of platforms for domestic work, as well as definitions of who is the employer in these childcare arrangements.

4. Methodology

This section includes a description of the methodology and the data canvased, before proceeding to the following section, which provides an in-depth analysis of the qualitative interviews. Firstly, a systematic Google search was conducted to identify digital platforms, using seven different search queries with varying combinations of the English words "babysitter," "online," "Amsterdam," "Netherlands," and "nanny" set to an Amsterdam IP address. English was used in order to capture the non-Dutch population. Ultimately, twenty sites were identified for desk review. A separate analysis of these sites was conducted with special attention to any regulatory or compliance-related aspects (Boland, 2025). Of these sites, Facebook Groups, Sitly, and Charley Cares were identified as platforms that offered a marketplace exchange between parents and caregivers, had the most users, and were most accessible to non-Dutch parent populations (and caregivers).

While this article does not provide an in-depth examination of the desk review, it is worth noting that the identified sites pitched themselves as facilitator of connecting with qualified caregivers. Images on the landing and main pages of the sites often feature smiling caregivers, and information is available in friendly and accessible English. Then, in a more obscure terms and conditions section of the site, they often indicated they were not to be considered liable as employers or a temporary agency, and that the onus was on the parent for employment arrangements or screening the candidate. This reflects other work interviewing migrant platform employees in Amsterdam, who reported that sites did not conduct background checks, for example (van Doorn & Vijay,2021).

Drawing on this, secondly, in collaboration with community managers, an anonymous survey was posted in English and Spanish-speaking Facebook groups designed for parents in different regions and communities in the Netherlands. Participants were asked to complete the survey if they did not hold Dutch nationality and had used one of the identified sites (Facebook Groups, Sitly, or Charly Cares) to solicit or currently receive live-out cleaner and childcare services. The survey and interview questions were reviewed by a migrant union representative and migrant worker in a collaborative research approach to ensure that questions captured their concerns and views as to what should be addressed in research on this sector (Hearn et al., 2022). The snowball method and consequent selection bias of this methodology are noted (Kalimeri et al., 2020). Both surveys and interviews took place from April to September 2024. A total of 35 surveys were completed, with the bulk of the analysis here relating to the follow-up, semi-structured interviews (complementary interviews with a community manager and platform founder are also excluded from the analysis). The nine migrant mother volunteers from the survey participated in semi-structured interviews organized in follow-up, with anonymized data coded in Atlas.TI. Interviews were accompanied by an information sheet and consent procedure, and the entire research project, as well as participant recruitment, was approved by an institutional ethics committee. The information sheets and consent forms assured participants that the researcher would not indicate which respondents correspond with which demographics, at the risk that those details might make the respondents identifiable.

5. Analysis

This section proceeds to offer insights regarding the interviews. All of the self-identifying women were between the ages of 25 and 45 and did not originally hold Dutch nationality, and included both EU and third-country nationals. They also all held legal status in the Netherlands. All except one were in a two-parent household. Some acknowledged privileged socioeconomic positions, and the single-parent household participant explained that she needed care assistance given the demands of her well-paid employment. All interviews were conducted in English and lasted from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. A first main observation was that they found or perceived a real crisis of care in the Dutch context, and often turned to platforms as they lacked support or networks. The second observation relates to the research question on knowledge of regulation: Participants remained unclear on the regulation applicable to domestic work in the Dutch context, although they often differentiated domestic labor from other categories, as the Dutch legislation indeed does. It also seemed that they were not seeking to exploit or undervalue labor. The final main observation that surfaced, particularly when inquiring via the lens of the politics of care and belonging, included that a multifaceted and dynamic mothering identity: Participants' belonging and identity remained evolving and impacted by complex normative values of care (inextricably intertwined with platform-mediated dynamics), which they straddled across their individual or migratory trajectories.

5.1. Turning to Platforms Due to Perceived Lack of Support in Navigating or Securing Childcare

Of course, as one of the main and fundamental research questions in this investigation, mothers were asked why they had turned to online platforms in the first place. Overwhelmingly, it was evident that they felt they did not have sufficient childcare support, knowledge, trust, or contacts to look for help otherwise. As one mother explained:

> I mean, I can speak a little bit of Dutch, but yeah, [it's] really terrible. And when we lived in [former neighborhood]…I would never have asked one of the neighbors to, like, watch my children. Right. Just, just absolutely not. Now living in [current neighborhood], we've got some teenage girls across the street. Okay, maybe. Yeah, maybe they could babysit. But like, we're not quite there yet. And I'm too afraid to talk to teenagers….So, yeah, [we are] just, like, navigating all of that. It's not, like, I've got, yeah, like, a sister I can call. (P4)

In addition to struggling without a network, the accessibility of privatized daycare in the Netherlands was a repeated challenge. As one mother explained, while they initially had a place for their child, moving within the Netherlands meant an unsuccessful waitlisting process:

> And we just went into, like, panic mode, of course. Like, what are we going to do? We don't have, you know, any network here. We have no family here…and we had…you know, not long been [sic] in the area that we lived in, because we [had] moved from Amsterdam [to be] outside of the city for a bit more space and what have you. (P8)

Similarly, P5 turned to online networks because of difficulties accessing the daycare option:

> So, basically, we had to look online everywhere because, when we were pregnant last year, you know, we heard everyone saying, like, "get in early," but we didn't really take it that seriously, to be honest with you. And then, when it came to, like, a few months before she was born, I started inquiring, and they're all, like, oh no, we are full for the next year. Try next year, again, the following year. And I was like, what? Like, that can't be true. Yeah. And then I started looking online on platforms, like, everything I could find, Facebook, Google. (P5)

This participant also explained that they saw support for raising a family as something unavailable to migrant families without local family:

> So…the sentiment here is that the grannies watch the kids. So, I know my neighbor, I see her mom come over, fetch the kids in the morning, and then drop them off in the afternoon. So I think that also happens, um, the days they don't go to the school. (P5)

Indeed, whether due to their knowledge or embeddedness in the community or not, some found difficulty in securing a spot in the government-subsidized private daycare facilities. As one participant described: "Well, I think, in the end, we don't want to do daycare in general, but I didn't even really have the option. Like, they only gave me one day, eventually. And that's not enough if we work full time" (P8). Aside from migrant status, this perhaps reflects the Dutch statistics on women's participation in the workforce.

5.2. Unclear on Regulation and Largely Viewed Paid Carework as Different From Traditional Labor

While not the main data analyzed here, when asked if they were aware of any rules regarding hiring domestic workers or contracting childcare services in the Netherlands—and if so, which ones—the vast majority of respondents replied they did not know, had no idea, or said they had some idea but then demonstrated that their understanding was incorrect. Only two demonstrated complete familiarity with the regulation within the Dutch system. The same general question was asked in the follow-up interviews with the migrant mothers, again demonstrating that participants were largely unaware of the HSR or their responsibilities in contracting child care (from a platform or otherwise).

For example, several were unaware of the current minimum wage, a requirement of the HSR. One participant asked: "What is the minimum, actually? I don't even know" (P1). As with answers in surveys, some assumed that online platforms were responsible or should communicate that information. Another mother recounted:

> I would have thought that if you're going through a site like this and you're paying, because we pay for lots of insurance and additional things, that they would be taking care that that was all covered. Yeah. It's certainly not clear that it's not covered. (P8)

Another mother pointed out the difficulty of looking up or understanding what regulation applied in domestic work and what their role was as an employer:

> I mean, it's hard enough to figure out all these rebates [privatized daycare government subsidies] and what you are entitled to. And if you, now, have to figure out, if you hire a nanny, what do you need to do, and what do they have to do, and, yeah, my goodness, it becomes complicated. (P9)

For example, P7 assumed that the Dutch system worked the same way as it did in their country of origin:

> [I assume you provide the worker with] Minimum wage and pay their related income tax on their behalf, right? Like, they're an employee of yours, right? But if you hire someone to be a babysitter in a one-off instance…like, you don't have to file taxes on their behalf because it's just kind of a one-off thing….So I just kind of assumed there must be some similar mechanism for that here.

While knowledge on the topic of child care regulation and their role as employers remained confusing, particularly as related to platforms and their corresponding responsibility, the mothers interviewed demonstrated an interest in attempting to abide by employer responsibilities and seeking to remunerate care work appropriately. The same participant asked the interviewer:

> [I would] like if, at the end of this, you could produce some sort of, like, best practice, right? [For] parents, like, what's the minimum wage? What are your responsibilities when hiring someone on, like, a contractor basis, right? Like, is it okay to pay someone cash for a one-off service if they don't have a visa, I don't know. I just think, like, all those things might be really helpful for parents. (P7)

> I actually don't know, like I was saying, I don't know the minimum wage, but I pay more than that….I need to pay you more [than minimum wage]. Especially because I like you, and I feel like I would be able to trust you…I don't want to underpay people. (P2)

On the one hand, the participant expressed the intention to value care work; on the other, she was not aware of state regulation on its value. The parents' obfuscated knowledge of worker rights mirrors studies with migrant care workers seeking or gaining employment on platforms, which find that workers are often not aware of their labour rights, including minimum wage (Hopwood et al., 2024; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2024).

5.3. Belonging and Situational Meaning of Motherhood in Flux

Insights from participants reveal that they lack the network necessary to pursue childcare "offline" and are thus forced to turn to online communities, platforms, and other alternatives to the Dutch privatized daycare system. Beyond the initial lack of support or recourse in balancing work responsibilities and securing paid childcare, their narratives also reveal evolving identities as they navigated the intersections of work and family life, gender roles, and caregiving—set against a backdrop of exclusionary politics of belonging and deeply embedded care norms.

P5 expressed that their difficulty in securing daycare was not due to a general crisis of care per se, but rather to exclusion stemming from her family's migrant (non-Dutch) status:

> I mean, other countries are much cheaper with schooling. I don't know how, how it's so expensive here. Like, the amount of tax you pay. It doesn't make sense…they don't really want to deal with people who don't speak Dutch or the kids who don't speak Dutch.

Another mother explained she was not comfortable with the childcare she had secured, but felt she had no choice:

> I had to bring him to the daycare. And I know those ladies…I have no photo, no update. I have no clue what he's doing all day. They are…now they have decided that he should not nap anymore. Although he really needs to nap. Yeah. But they decided it [won't happen]. So you know, it's like, Jesus, I pay 1000 euros for three days. (P1)

Another interviewee described how in they felt continuing their participation in the labor market was related to their sense of belonging:

> I do think it's important to keep on working…as a woman. Because you get out of practice with work, your career can stagnate, and later on, your pension's going to be affected. That's my reasoning for needing to continue working. And also because…because I think exposure to different people [matters]….Not just me, especially when you're isolated. (P2)

Finally, some had found security in their trajectories of navigating childcare in their new context. P4 noted that she was grateful for the childcare options in the Netherlands, despite the price, because it afforded their children a connection to the community:

> So it's kind of, like, I think it's outrageous. I think it's so expensive, but then at the same time, I'm also, like, at least you're getting a provision of care…ah. We love the Dutch daycare system, honestly, just because it teaches our kids Dutch. (P4)

One participant also reckoned with their experience of mothering in evolving and sometimes unknown contexts that came with navigating family life on the move. Their choices remained difficult within a complex, multiscalar process of finding belonging in various geographical situations across space and time:

> And all you can do is be the best advocate for your child and make sure that you're leaving them in care that you're comfortable with and, like, it will be fine. My kids are…eight and five, and they have definitely had some questionable situations. They're all still okay….Everybody survived, we still have a long way to go, but I'm feeling pretty good. (P7)

In sum, patterns emerged in responses to the research questions. Regarding the query as to whether they understood the regulations for childcare when hiring paid work through these platforms, it became evident that they largely were not aware of the HSR, and some even thought the platforms were responsible for compliance, which a desk review indicated these sites intentionally shrugged off responsibility. The reasons why they turned to online networks to seek childcare in the first instance spoke to negotiations of belonging or perceptions of exclusion and difficulty in access to traditional childcare.

6. Conclusions

While investigation into platformization in the care industry has increased, it still significantly lags behind the inquiry into other sectors. Moreover, given the involvement of various mobile subjects in these processes, feminist literature, migration literature, and digital migration studies could reach improved dialogue to understand the complex trajectories of both migrant families and migrant workers negotiating care in the context of this proliferating platformization.

Here, the underdeveloped perspectives of migrant mothers using these platforms are addressed; the lens of belonging as both a politics and a multidimensional concept proved useful. Regarding the first approach, the reliance on migrant labor regimes and commodifying care in the face of an unresolved care crisis came to the fore, in the reasons behind why families turned to online platforms to seek alternative methods of care to the common Dutch practice of privatized daycare. Some perceived the costs of privatized daycare, even with government subsidies, as inaccessible; others found it inaccessible regardless of cost; and still others did not receive sufficient coverage from or access to daycare. As for conceptions of belonging linked to both the concept as construction of identity and self, the participants also expressed varying levels of belonging, including dimensions of mothering and care: they experienced both exclusion in their new communities and grappled with their construction of self and identity as they embarked on journeys of mobility and contemplated gender roles and responsibilities; they also found identity in motherhood. On the one hand, this reflected the multidimensional construction of belonging; on the other hand, as they negotiated gender roles and their role in society and the labor market, they found themselves contending with the normative values of care and the political project of belonging.

Limitations include the positionality of the researcher and the scope of the study. Firstly, the researcher attempted to remain reflective of their own intersectional dimensions of privilege as well as their proximity in identifying as a mother and migrant. However, it is difficult to untangle binary and exclusive "insider" versus "outsider" divides, as rapport was established via dynamic combinations of nationality, gender, age, professional and parental status, and migratory status (see Ryan, 2015). Moreover, solely around a third of

the survey participants volunteered for the semi-structured interviews—and the fact that they volunteered could entail selection bias. Finally, participants drew from diverse migration trajectories and cultural and societal backgrounds that could inform very different perspectives, although they were united by common experience as newcomers in the Netherlands.

Despite this last caveat as to the homogeneity of the group, it is clear that the Netherlands is not exempt from the rising costs of social reproduction documented in the literature to date. Questions raised by this study include whether the mothers' lack of access to daycare had some relation to their migrant or non-Dutch background, or whether the difficulty in daycare access and cost, which has been evidenced in the Netherlands, is equally difficult for all parents. It has been posited that, to date, in the Netherlands, platformization has not disrupted traditional childcare but serves as a temporary stopgap (Piletić, 2024). Still, a first takeaway for further research is that, with the costs of childcare rising and platformization proliferating, the stopgap claim could be tested in longitudinal studies, particularly in varying contexts (including in other European welfare states).

Moreover, it could be argued that platformization allows these mothers to operate in isolation from physical communities in their family strategies. At the same time, further examination is required as to the distinction between migrant trajectories and in- or exclusion, versus the general challenges of the ethics of care and decision-making parents face regardless of migrant background. Undoubtedly, gendered norms and expectations continue to operate alongside the rising costs of social reproduction, and there are overlooked categories of migrants navigating these.

The literature is concerned about private actors beyond individual employers and the state, stepping into the domestic space and potentially operating with impunity. In this case, the mothers interviewed expressed a willingness to value carework, but their understanding of platforms was obscured and confused. As such, as increasing attempts at regulating platformization take place in national and international contexts, further research should take into account the specificities of the care sector (and the multiple distinctions within it, including childcare versus elder care, etc.), and that the sector continues to remain less visible, less litigated, and its regulation less implemented. Such inquiry could go towards better informing industry best practices, parents' awareness of careworker rights, and attempts at platform regulation. Ultimately, further research should incorporate the nuances of the ethics of care across transnational contexts, taking into account all stakeholder perspectives, if seeking to understand the phenomenon of platformization and how to mitigate any of its potential consequences.

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Conflict of Interests

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Data Availability

Data is archived on the Radboud Data Repository with closed access settings according to the research ethics design of the study.

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