

Between precarity and pride: negotiating masculinity and migration in Turkey's platform economy

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Abstract

Purpose - This study examines how human–technology interrelations in platform work shape male migrant workers' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Turkey, and how these experiences intersect with masculinity, responsibility, and everyday solidarity under precarious conditions.

Design/methodology/approach - The study draws on 27 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with male migrant food-delivery workers in Istanbul. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. The data were analysed thematically using intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity as interpretive frameworks.

Findings - Inclusion and exclusion were shaped through socio-technical arrangements combining algorithmically mediated task allocation, customer evaluations, performance metrics, organizational rules, and migration-related inequalities. Migrant men also negotiated tensions between breadwinner expectations and precarious work, while platform metrics acquired gendered meanings linked to competence, responsibility, and masculine worth. Informal solidarity provided recognition, belonging, and practical support but did not replace organizational responsibility.

Originality - The study contributes to EDI scholarship by showing how inclusion and exclusion in platform work emerge through human–technology interrelations and by highlighting responsibility for outcomes attributed to "the system." It also identifies "metrics-driven masculinity" as an empirical process and extends solidarity research by showing how worker mutual support coexists with socio-technical arrangements that shape inclusion and exclusion.

Practical implications - Platform organizations and EDI practitioners should treat task allocation, ratings, performance metrics, prioritization, and contestability as potential EDI concerns.

Research limitations/implications – Gendered and linguistic dynamics may have shaped interview interactions and interpretation.

Keywords: Migration, Masculinity, Platform Labour, Algorithmic Management, Solidarity, Inclusion

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Food delivery platforms have become a major component of the global gig economy, relying on algorithmic systems to allocate tasks, monitor performance, and evaluate workers. While these platforms promise flexibility and autonomy, they frequently operate beyond traditional labour protections, generating new forms of precarity and inequality (Dieuaide and Azaïs, 2020). Migrant workers are often concentrated in delivery and logistics occupations due to the sector's low barriers to entry and limited qualification requirements (Milkman *et al.,* 2021). As managerial functions such as task allocation, performance evaluation, and prioritization become increasingly mediated through algorithmic systems, questions of inclusion and exclusion also become questions of how responsibility is distributed between technological systems and the human actors who design, implement, and rely on them.

Turkey provides an important context for examining these dynamics as a major refugee-hosting country with substantial migrant and refugee populations from Syria and other countries (Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylacı, 2021; Yükseker *et al.,* 2024). Despite their growing participation in the labour market, migrant workers frequently face legal uncertainty, discrimination,

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language barriers, restricted access to formal employment, and widespread informalization (Yaylacı and Çarpar, 2019). These constraints channel many migrant men into precarious sectors characterized by unstable incomes, limited labour protections, and few opportunities for upward mobility.

In this context, these structural inequalities not only generate economic exclusion but also shape gendered experiences of work. While platform labour enables migrant men to contribute to household livelihoods, its instability often undermines breadwinner expectations and generates emotional strain, status loss, and insecurity (Churchill *et al.,* 2019; Dinh and Tienari, 2022; Zhou, 2024; Wang and Choi, 2025). Migration and platform labour therefore intersect in ways that make masculinity an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a stable source of privilege. Migrant men may also be positioned within anti-migrant discourses as threats to social order or failed breadwinners lacking social legitimacy (Kelkar, 2024; Öcal *et al.,* 2024; Rygiel *et al.,* 2016; Çetin *et al.,* 2017).

Although platform management is often presented as neutral and meritocratic, growing evidence suggests that algorithmically mediated workplace processes may reproduce inequalities associated with migration status, language, national background, and social position (Ray, 2019; Van Doorn, 2017). Consequently, migrant workers may experience exclusion, restricted opportunities, and intensified forms of digital surveillance despite the apparent neutrality of platform technologies. Yet such outcomes should not be understood as produced by technology independently of human action. Platform systems operate through an interrelation of human, organizational, and technological components rather than through algorithms in isolation (Benlian *et al.,* 2022; Floros, 2024). Customer evaluations and other human inputs may also interact with algorithmically mediated processes of evaluation, ranking, and allocation. This human–technology interrelation raises an important EDI question concerning responsibility: when apparently technical systems produce unequal outcomes, responsibility for inclusion and exclusion may become obscured or displaced onto "the system" itself.

In Turkey, migrant men occupy a paradoxical position in which masculine expectations intersect with legal precarity, labour-market exclusion, and social marginalization, highlighting the importance of intersectional approaches to inequality and inclusion (Nkomo *et al.,* 2019; Amis et *al., 2018;* Benschop, 2021; Primecz and Mahadevan, 2025). What remains less understood, however, is how such inequalities are produced through the interrelation of human actors and platform technologies, and how responsibility for exclusion is negotiated when consequential decisions appear to be made by "the system." While existing research shows that solidarity and collective coping can provide workers with resources for navigating precarity and sustaining belonging and agency (Boyacı, 2020; Çağatay *et al.,* 2023; Plotnikof *et al.,* 2022), less attention has been paid to how solidarity relates to the socio-technical arrangements through which inclusion and exclusion are produced. This is particularly relevant to EDI because it directs attention beyond interpersonal support among workers toward responsibility for these arrangements and their consequences.

Against this backdrop, this study draws on 27 semi-structured interviews with male migrant food-delivery workers in Turkey to examine how human–technology interrelations within platform work shape migrant men's experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and how these experiences intersect with the negotiation of masculinity, responsibility, and everyday solidarity.

By bringing together scholarship on migration, masculinities, platform labour, and workplace inclusion, this study contributes to EDI scholarship by showing how inclusion and exclusion in platform work are produced through human–technology interrelations rather than by either human actors or technological systems alone. The findings demonstrate how apparently technical processes, including task allocation, ratings, customer evaluations, and

performance metrics, interact with migration status, national background, language, and gendered expectations to shape workers' access to opportunities and recognition. In doing so, the study draws attention to the question of responsibility when unequal outcomes are attributed to opaque platform systems, highlighting the need to understand algorithmic governance as a socio-technical rather than purely technological process. Within these relations, the study also shows how platform-generated performance measures become intertwined with existing expectations of breadwinning, responsibility, and masculine worth. Finally, the study extends existing discussions of solidarity by showing how workers' mutual support coexists with socio-technical arrangements through which inclusion and exclusion are produced.

Theoretical Framework

The Gig Economy

The gig economy has transformed global labour markets by offering flexible, app-mediated work through platforms such as Uber and Deliveroo. While promising autonomy and low entry barriers, this model often bypasses conventional labour protections, leading to algorithmic surveillance, unstable earnings, and heightened precarity (Vallas and Schor, 2020). Research highlights the sector's reliance on marginalized groups, particularly migrants and racialized minorities, who are overrepresented in physically demanding and public-facing jobs such as food delivery (Van Doorn, 2017). However, research has predominantly examined labour control and precarity, leaving the implications of platform work for identity and social recognition, particularly among migrant men, relatively underexplored.

Importantly, algorithmic management should not be understood as operating independently of human and organizational decision-making. Although platforms automate functions such as task allocation, performance monitoring, and evaluation, their criteria, data, and implementation remain shaped by organizational choices and human inputs. Algorithmic management is therefore better understood as a socio-technical arrangement through which technological and human forms of control become intertwined (Benlian *et al.,* 2022).

Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define hegemonic masculinity as a context-specific ideal that legitimizes male dominance over both women and non-hegemonic masculinities. Rather than being fixed or universally attainable, this ideal is dynamic, exclusive, and sustained through cultural, institutional, and social structures.

This framework is particularly useful for examining how migrant men experience and perform masculinity within platform economies. Even under conditions of displacement and precarity, men continue to face expectations associated with breadwinning, authority, and family provision. When access to stable employment is restricted, participation in informal or gig labour may undermine men's ability to perform these socially valued roles, producing both material and symbolic forms of loss (Donaldson, 1993; Donaldson and Howson, 2009). Migration, therefore, frequently requires men to reconstruct their gender identities within contexts characterized by diminished social status, labour market exclusion, and institutional marginalization (Montes, 2013; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2020).

Masculinity in these contexts functions not only as a social position but also as an ongoing social accomplishment (Bird, 1996). Access to masculine recognition is uneven, as classed, racialized, and institutional hierarchies shape which masculinities are socially valued (Sang and Calvard, 2019). Migrant men may therefore experience structural disadvantage while remaining subject to dominant expectations of provision, authority, and self-reliance (Hearn, 2004). Migrant masculinities thus emerge as relational and context-dependent, shifting between dominant and subordinate positions across institutional settings (Sabur, 2024; Leszczyńska *et al.,* 2024; Hopkins and Giazitzoglu, 2024).

Intersectionality and Inclusion in Platform Economies

The intersectionality framework, first introduced by Crenshaw (1991), provides critical insight into how overlapping social categories, such as gender, race, migration status, and class, interact to produce compounded disadvantage and reinforce systemic inequalities. In the context of Turkey's gig economy, this approach is especially valuable for examining how migrant men are positioned within multiple systems of exclusion operating simultaneously through labour markets, migration regimes, and platform economies.

From an EDI perspective, workplace inclusion involves more than formal access to employment; it also concerns recognition, belonging, participation, and organizational voice (Nkomo *et al.,* 2019). Recent EDI scholarship emphasizes that workplace inequalities emerge through intersecting systems of power rather than isolated categories of difference and calls for greater attention to diverse institutional and socio-political contexts, including those found in emerging economies (Amis *et al.,* 2018; Benschop, 2021; Mahadevan *et al.,* 2023; Primecz and Mahadevan, 2025). In this respect, the experiences of migrant men in platform economies offer a particularly revealing lens through which to examine how masculinity, migration status, and labour precarity intersect.

Although platforms promise flexibility and meritocracy, migrant workers may encounter opaque evaluation systems and inequalities embedded within platform ecosystems that reproduce existing social hierarchies while appearing technologically neutral (Wood *et al.,* 2019; Cameron and Rahman, 2022; Keller *et al.,* 2022). Recent research on algorithmic fairness similarly challenges assumptions of neutrality, demonstrating how automated systems may reproduce existing biases while obscuring accountability (Katta *et al.,* 2024). Platform algorithms therefore function not only as technical tools but also as organizational mechanisms that shape inclusion, exclusion, visibility, and access to opportunities.

Understanding these processes as socio-technical also raises questions of responsibility (Jarrahi *et al.,* 2021). Rankings, task allocations, customer ratings, waiting times, and performance evaluations may appear to workers as automated outcomes, yet they emerge through systems whose criteria are designed, configured, and implemented within organizational arrangements and may incorporate human inputs such as customer evaluations. When exclusionary outcomes are attributed to "the algorithm," responsibility may consequently become obscured or displaced from the human and organizational actors involved in creating and governing these systems (Besio *et al.,* 2024). From an EDI perspective, this makes accountability for algorithmically mediated decisions an important dimension of inclusion: technological mediation does not remove organizational responsibility for the unequal consequences of workplace systems (Horneber and Laumer, 2023).

This perspective also broadens how solidarity can be approached in digitally mediated workplaces. Research on platform work shows that solidarity may emerge through mutual assistance, information sharing, and collective coping even under conditions of algorithmic control and individualized work (Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020; Schaupp, 2022; Cini, 2022). Yet these forms of solidarity develop within socio-technical systems through which work is allocated, evaluated, and controlled, and technological mediation does not eliminate organizational responsibility for their consequences (Collins and Atkinson, 2023). This shifts attention from treating technology as an autonomous source of inequality toward examining how solidarity and inclusion are negotiated within human–technology relations.

Migrant Masculinities in Turkey

The relationship between migration and masculinity has received increasing scholarly attention in Turkey, particularly following the arrival of large refugee and migrant populations from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries over the last decade. Research demonstrates that

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migrant and refugee men frequently encounter labour market exclusion, discrimination, legal precarity, and social marginalization while simultaneously facing strong expectations associated with breadwinning, authority, and family provision (Yaylacı and Çarpar, 2019; Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylacı, 2021).

Critical masculinity scholarship in Turkey emphasizes that there is no singular form of masculinity. Rather, masculinities are shaped through hierarchical and relational processes influenced by class, ethnicity, migration status, religion, and other social divisions (Özbay, 2013). Migration frequently disrupts established masculine identities by undermining men's social status, authority, and ability to fulfil socially valued masculine roles (Bozok, 2019).

Research with Afghan migrant youth further highlights the importance of solidarity networks in shaping migrant masculinities. Bozok and Bozok (2018) demonstrate that informal social networks provide employment opportunities, protection, and emotional support while simultaneously producing forms of masculinity grounded in vulnerability, dependence, and resilience. Similarly, Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylacı (2021) show that many refugee men engage in remasculinization strategies aimed at restoring dignity, authority, and self-worth under conditions of displacement and uncertainty.

Recent scholarship has also situated migrant masculinities within Turkey's increasingly polarized political climate. Öcal *et al.* (2024) demonstrate that refugee men are frequently represented through contradictory narratives that portray them simultaneously as dangerous and dependent, threatening and weak. Such representations contribute to anti-migrant sentiment while shaping broader understandings of citizenship, belonging, and legitimacy.

Taken together, this literature demonstrates that migrant masculinities in Turkey are produced at the intersection of migration, labour precarity, nationalism, social exclusion, and changing gender relations. However, despite these important contributions, existing studies have rarely examined how migrant masculinities are negotiated within algorithmically managed labour markets. Research on migrant masculinities has primarily focused on displacement, exclusion, and challenges to breadwinner identities, whereas platform labour scholarship has concentrated on surveillance, labour control, and economic precarity. Consequently, limited attention has been paid to how algorithmically mediated workplace arrangements intersect with migration-related inequalities in shaping recognition, dignity, and access to opportunities, or to how responsibility for such outcomes is negotiated when decisions appear to be made by technological systems. By bringing together scholarship on platform labour, migrant masculinities, intersectionality, and EDI, the present study addresses this gap by examining how human–technology interrelations shape migrant men's experiences of inclusion and exclusion and how these processes intersect with masculine recognition, responsibility, belonging, and everyday solidarity within Turkey's platform economy.

Methods of Analysis

This study used a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of male migrant workers in Turkey's food-delivery sector. Qualitative methods effectively capture personal narratives and social interactions, making them suitable for examining how platform work shapes labour conditions, inclusion and exclusion, and masculinity (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Using semi-structured interviews, a flexible tool for gathering in-depth insights (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), the research examined how migrant workers perceived their roles, navigated algorithmically mediated platform practices such as task assignment and performance evaluation, and experienced these processes in relation to migration, masculinity, and workplace inclusion.

The interview questions focused on workers' interactions with algorithmic management systems, experiences of inclusion and exclusion, migration, and the gendered dynamics of platform work. For instance, participants were asked about their typical workday, challenges

faced as migrant workers, and whether platform practices felt supportive or exclusionary. Questions also explored how traditional expectations of masculinity influenced their experiences and how they coped with the physical and emotional demands of the job, encouraging them to share specific incidents that illustrate these dynamics. Using the Critical Incident Technique (Butterfield *et al.,* 2005), participants were encouraged to recall specific experiences that revealed challenges, successes, or key interactions, effectively uncovering moments that shape their perceptions and behaviours.

Data were collected in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2025 through 27 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with male migrant food-delivery workers. Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Initial access to the field was established in person through contact with a migrant food-delivery courier, after which participants introduced or recommended other migrant couriers within their networks. Recruitment remained guided by the study criteria: participants were male international migrants with at least six months of experience in food-delivery platform work, while variation was sought in age, national background, migration background, and platform tenure. This combination of purposive selection and participant referrals facilitated access to a population for whom trust and willingness to participate were important considerations (Patton, 2014). Interviews lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and were conducted and audio-recorded by the author with participants' consent. Interviews were conducted primarily in Turkish. Participants varied in their level of Turkish proficiency; where communication difficulties arose, English was used alongside Turkish with participants who were comfortable communicating in English, and digital translation tools were occasionally used during the interview to clarify words or expressions in participants' preferred languages. These tools were used only to facilitate communication during the interviews rather than to translate interview transcripts or quotations.

The sample size was guided by the principle of information power, whereby the specificity of the research aim and the depth of participants' narratives supported analytical richness rather than statistical representativeness (Malterud *et al.,* 2016). Sampling was concluded once thematic saturation was reached, as no substantially new patterns emerged across interviews (Guest *et al.,* 2006). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 48 years and had between 8 and 48 months of experience in food-delivery platform work. They came from eight countries, Iran, Syria, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and varied in family status and educational background. The demographic details of the participants are presented in Table 1. Pseudonyms are used throughout the manuscript to protect participants' identities while providing a more person-centred presentation of their experiences.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts to identify patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2022). While the coding process was inductive in identifying patterns across participants' narratives, it was theoretically sensitized by intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity frameworks. These perspectives guided attention to how migration status, racialization, gender expectations, and algorithmic governance intersected in shaping workers' experiences. Rather than imposing predefined categories, these frameworks functioned as analytical lenses informing interpretation of emerging themes.

The analysis focused on institutional structures, such as workers' perceptions of platform norms, gender role expectations, and policies affecting their rights, as well as intersectional dynamics, examining how migration status and masculinity influence labour experiences and resilience. The analysis employed the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 2017), with a systematic and thematic coding approach. Coding proceeded through multiple stages. First, transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data and generate initial

codes. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and refined through constant comparison across interviews. For example, participants' recurring accounts of differential waiting times, task allocation, customer ratings, and access to priority opportunities were initially coded separately and subsequently compared across interviews. Through this process, these accounts were grouped into broader patterns concerning perceived platform-driven inequities and algorithmically mediated inclusion and exclusion. Analytical memos were used to document coding decisions and reflexive considerations, including how linguistic differences and the relational conditions under which particular accounts were produced might have shaped participants' disclosures and their subsequent interpretation. Analytical rigour was further supported through iterative movement between data and theory, systematic memo writing, and critical reflection on positionality throughout the analytic process, while the analytical steps are reported explicitly to make the progression from coding to interpretation transparent (Kerr, 2022; Pratt *et al.,* 2020; Sandberg, 2005). Given participants' varying levels of Turkish proficiency, linguistic differences were treated as part of the interpretive context of the interviews, and particular care was taken not to infer meaning beyond what participants could communicate with sufficient clarity.

The interviews were conducted by the author, a female researcher interviewing male migrant workers, which created a particular insider–outsider dynamic during fieldwork. Differences in gender, language, and social position shaped both access to participants and the development of trust. Recruitment was not straightforward, and not all workers approached were willing to participate. Discussing potentially sensitive experiences concerning migration, platform work, employment insecurity, and masculinity therefore required considerable rapport-building. Trust was reciprocal rather than one-directional: while participants needed reassurance concerning the researcher's identity, the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and anonymity, the researcher also had to negotiate her own sense of safety when approaching unfamiliar male participants. Initial relationships were therefore developed with older or more established workers with whom sufficient trust could be established, and introductions from these participants subsequently facilitated access to younger workers. Before interviews, participants were given information about the study, ethical approval, confidentiality, and anonymity and were provided with opportunities to ask questions before deciding whether to participate. These relational dynamics were considered during data collection and interpretation rather than treating the researcher as a neutral presence in the research process (Mahadevan, 2011; Collins and McNulty, 2020).

Additionally, ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Istanbul University. All participants gave informed consent, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the study.

Findings and Discussion

This study examines how male migrant workers experience platform labour in Turkey, using an intersectional and masculinity-focused lens. Based on 27 interviews, three themes emerge: structural inequalities shaped by algorithmic systems and customer bias; the negotiation of masculinity within precarious work; and barriers to integration and everyday coping strategies. These findings reveal how labour precarity, migration, and masculinity intersect in the platform economy. The three themes were developed through iterative comparison across interviews and interpreted through the lenses of intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity, enabling analysis of structural, symbolic, and relational dimensions of platform precarity. The full set of themes and their corresponding subthemes are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

INSERT FIGURE1 HERE

Theme 1: Platform-Driven Inequities

This theme addresses how migrant male workers experienced inequalities in relation to algorithmically mediated task allocation, customer-facing evaluations, and access to platform opportunities within Turkey's food-delivery gig economy. Although platform systems were often presented or perceived as neutral and merit-based, participants described recurring patterns of unequal treatment whose sources were difficult for them to identify or contest. Importantly, these accounts do not imply that technological systems independently produced exclusion. Rather, they reveal how workers encountered inequality through socio-technical arrangements in which platform systems, organizational decisions, and human inputs such as customer evaluations became intertwined. The subthemes below examine how these arrangements shaped participants' experiences of access to work, evaluation, and opportunity.

Algorithmic Discrimination

Participants frequently reported that work assignments on the platform were far from equitable or transparent. Many expressed the belief that the algorithm favored local workers, systematically disadvantaging migrants in subtle ways. For instance, 33-year-old Hassan described his daily experience of waiting far longer than his Turkish colleague, despite starting at the same time and location: *"I wait for an hour sometimes. But my Turkish friend, we start together, and he gets an order within five minutes. Same location, same time. The app just likes him better."*

This sense of being deprioritized by the system was echoed by Samir who reflected on patterns he observed in online forums and among coworkers: *"They say it's random, but it never feels random. We talk in the group chat. Foreigners are always the ones who get less."* He added that when he worked in wealthier districts on the European side of Istanbul, his earnings were consistently lower than those of his local peers.

Some workers even engaged in informal testing to confirm their suspicions. Rashad recounted how he used two phones to compare assignment rates and found a consistent bias in favor of Turkish workers: *"Even when I'm available, the system ignores me. I tested with another phone. They sent jobs to the local guy first, every time."* Haider reflected, "*It never explains, it just decides…you feel powerless but you still obey*."

Taken together, these accounts show how participants experienced task allocation as both consequential and opaque. Their accounts do not establish that the allocation algorithm itself was programmed to discriminate between migrant and local workers; rather, they demonstrate how apparently neutral allocation processes were perceived as producing unequal access to work while making the source of those inequalities difficult to identify or contest. In this sense, algorithmically mediated allocation shaped not only access to orders but also access to economic opportunity, visibility, and recognition (Urinboyev and Eraliev, 2022). The opacity described by participants is particularly important from a socio-technical perspective because allocation criteria and their implementation cannot be separated entirely from the organizational arrangements within which technological systems are designed and governed. When workers experience consequential decisions as something that "the system" simply decides, responsibility for those outcomes may become difficult to locate and challenge.

Bias in Performance and Customer Feedback

Beyond task allocation, workers are also evaluated through customer feedback systems that are equally prone to bias. Participants repeatedly emphasized that their ratings were influenced less by service quality and more by visible markers of their foreignness, such as accent, appearance, or limited language proficiency. Omar shared his frustration after receiving a low rating despite completing his delivery without issues: "*I delivered on time, smiled, said everything right. But*

the customer gave 3 stars. My friend told me: 'It's because you look foreign.' What can I do? I can't change my face."

This sense of being judged based on appearance rather than performance was echoed in more disturbing ways by others. Imran recalled an incident where a customer refused to open the door and later reported him as "scary," despite his professional appearance: "*She called support and said I was scary. I was wearing the uniform! Just because I have a beard and darker skin?"* For many, even minor language mistakes had a disproportionate impact on their ratings. As Kerim noted, "*When I don't speak Turkish fluently, they talk bad or give low scores. I know they wouldn't do that to a local guy."*

These accounts show how participants perceived customer evaluations as extending social judgments concerning accent, appearance, and language into platform-based assessments of their performance. Importantly, customer ratings illustrate especially clearly why platform-based exclusion cannot be attributed either to technology or to human actors alone. Customer evaluations constitute human inputs but once incorporated into platform evaluation systems they can acquire organizational consequences for how workers understand their standing, visibility, and access to opportunities. From an EDI perspective, this creates a distributed problem of responsibility: discriminatory judgments may originate in customer interactions, while platform organizations determine how such evaluations are incorporated into performance systems and what possibilities workers have to question or contest them.

Barriers to Upward Mobility

Many participants also reported that beyond the daily struggle to secure tasks and maintain ratings, there existed invisible ceilings that hindered their chances of moving upward within the platform hierarchy. Farid described his confusion and disappointment when he was passed over for access to more profitable delivery zones: "*They say if you do well, you get priority zones. I never got that, even when I had top ratings. But my Turkish coworker got it easily. They know who to pick.*"

Bonus systems were also described as arbitrary and inconsistently enforced. Nabil shared how he was denied a long-promised bonus: "*I worked nonstop for months. No days off. But when bonuses came, they told me 'you missed one metric.' Always some excuse."* Similarly, Batyr described how he was discouraged from applying for a supervisor role: "*I applied, they said only locals. They don't say it directly, but we understand. We're good to deliver, not to lead*."

Taken together, these perceived inequities constitute the broader institutional context within which migrant men interpreted their roles and identities. From an EDI perspective, the accounts concerning priority zones, bonuses, supervisory opportunities, ratings, and task allocation indicate that inclusion involves not only access to work but also access to visibility, recognition, and organizational participation. These outcomes were experienced through socio-technical arrangements in which platform metrics and allocation systems interacted with customer judgments and organizational rules. Consequently, technological mediation does not remove the question of organizational accountability for how such systems are designed, implemented, and contested.

Existing research has documented how platform labour reproduces precarity through surveillance, rating systems, and asymmetric power relations (Van Doorn, 2017; Vallas and Schor, 2020), while studies of migrant men in Turkey emphasize labour-market exclusion, discrimination, legal uncertainty, and status loss (Bozok, 2019; Yaylacı and Çarpar, 2019). The present findings bring these literatures together by showing how participants encountered migration-related inequalities through socio-technical workplace arrangements involving task allocation, customer evaluations, performance metrics, and organizational rules. The contribution is therefore not simply that exclusion has become "algorithmic," but that

technological mediation can make the human and organizational responsibility underlying consequential workplace processes less visible. For EDI scholarship, this suggests that rankings, waiting times, ratings, prioritization, and opportunities for progression should be treated not merely as technical features of platform management but as potential sites of inclusion, exclusion, and organizational accountability. The following theme shifts from these structural conditions to how migrant men negotiated masculinity and recognition within them.

Theme 2: Masculinity and Role Expectations

This theme explores how platform work intersects with cultural constructions of masculinity, particularly the expectation for migrant men to assume the role of economic providers. While food-delivery work is often associated with masculine qualities such as physical endurance, mobility, and risk, participants described a tension between these expectations and the precarious, surveilled, and often degrading realities of platform labour. For many, the work was not only a source of income but also a means of sustaining masculine recognition under difficult conditions. The findings further show how these existing gendered expectations became intertwined with the socio-technical arrangements discussed in Theme 1, particularly platform-generated measures of performance, customer evaluations, and access to work.

Alignment with the Breadwinner Role

For many participants, taking on platform work was not simply a practical decision, but a culturally meaningful act rooted in the desire to fulfill gendered responsibilities. Several men spoke of feeling obligated to support their families financially, often across borders.

Khaled explained, "*My family is still in Aleppo. I send money every month. That's why I don't rest. I have to be a man. That means providing.*" His statement illustrates how labour and masculinity were closely intertwined. Similarly, Adil shared, "*If I don't earn, I feel weak. I feel like I failed. Back home, the man works. That's how it is. If I can't do that here, then what am I?*" These sentiments echo broader cultural expectations around male identity as bound to the capacity to provide, expectations that persisted even under exploitative working conditions.

Even younger participants expressed a strong sense of gendered duty. Bekzod noted, "*My father is old, I send him money. In our culture, the son must help. I'm not doing this job because I love it. I do it because I'm the man of the house now.*"

These accounts highlight how workers frame platform work as a strategy to reclaim or sustain masculine identity during migration, despite its precarious nature. This finding is consistent with research showing that migration can unsettle established masculine positions through changes in occupational status, economic security, and the capacity to fulfil breadwinner expectations (Donaldson and Howson, 2009; Bozok, 2019; Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylacı, 2021). At the same time, participants' accounts show that such expectations did not disappear following migration. Breadwinning, endurance, responsibility, and the ability to provide remained important sources of masculine recognition. Platform work therefore occupied a contradictory position: it provided an accessible means through which participants could continue to fulfil provider responsibilities, while the insecurity and unequal access to work described in Theme 1 made their capacity to do so uncertain.

Precarity Undermining Masculine Identity

At the same time, participants acknowledged the deep contradictions between the breadwinner ideal and the economic instability of gig work. Several spoke of feeling ashamed or emasculated when they failed to meet familial or personal expectations.

Reza reflected painfully: "*Some months I can't send money. I lie to my family. I say I had expenses. But really, I just didn't earn enough. That's hard. It hurts my pride."* Serdar admitted feeling "less of a man" during slow weeks: "*When there's no work, I stay home. I feel useless.*

My friends ask if I'm lazy, but it's not that. It's just the app gives no jobs." His comment illustrates how even externally invisible algorithmic decisions can have deep psychological effects tied to masculinity.

Moreover, some described internalizing public perceptions of delivery work as low-status or humiliating. Karim noted, "*Back home I was a teacher. Here I carry food. I wear a helmet, people look at me like I'm stupid. It's not what a man should be*."

These experiences illustrate the emotional cost of attempting to sustain masculine recognition within precarious employment, complementing research on gig work that has highlighted insecurity, instability, and emotional strain (Dinh and Tienari, 2022). Because work remained closely tied to breadwinning and family provision, limited or unpredictable access to income affected not only participants' economic security but also their sense of masculine competence and self-worth. Similar patterns of endurance, silence, and emotional strain have been documented among migrant men navigating displacement and family responsibilities (Martínez-Joya, 2025), while research in other low-wage migrant contexts has likewise connected difficulties in fulfilling dominant masculine expectations with experiences of diminished status and psychological strain (Yoon and Udor, 2025).

This finding also challenges simplified understandings of masculinity as a uniformly privileged social position. While participants were positioned as men within broader gender relations, their ability to fulfil socially valued masculine expectations was constrained by migration-related disadvantage, insecure employment, language barriers, and limited access to economic and organizational resources. From an intersectional perspective, masculine position therefore cannot be understood independently of migration status, ethnicity, labour-market position, and the socio-technical conditions through which access to platform work is organized.

Platforms Redefining Masculinity

Interestingly, several participants noted that while delivery work aligns with traditional masculine traits, physical strength, endurance, mobility, the nature of the job actually undermines these associations. The work was not only physically demanding but tightly controlled by algorithms, reducing workers to what one participant called "machines on wheels."

Omar observed, "*They say we're strong, fast. But we're also watched all day. There's no freedom. You stop for five minutes, and you lose points*." His comment reflects how performance is measured not by courage or autonomy but by compliance and speed, reframing masculinity through algorithmic discipline. Faisal added, "*This is man's work, but it doesn't feel like it. You carry food, get insulted, get paid little. It's not respect. It's survival.*"

These dynamics are particularly significant in the Turkish context, where breadwinner expectations and conservative family norms continue to shape dominant understandings of masculinity. Migrant men may consequently occupy a contradictory position: they are expected to demonstrate provision, responsibility, and resilience while simultaneously encountering migration-related exclusion and contested forms of social legitimacy (Çetin *et al.,* 2017; Özbay and Soybakış, 2020; Mahadevan *et al.,* 2023; Moghadam, 2024). Within such contested discursive environments, migrant men may also be positioned in contradictory ways, as threats, dependents, or unsuccessful breadwinners, while continuing to face expectations of masculine responsibility and resilience (Kelkar, 2022; Öcal *et al.,* 2024). Rather than representing stable identities transferred unchanged from countries of origin, the findings therefore show migrant masculinities as relational and continuously negotiated through precarious work, migration-related exclusion, and changing forms of social and technological evaluation.

Participants often likened the algorithm to an invisible supervisor whose decisions are final and unaccountable. Over time, such algorithmic and customer-driven feedback loops foster a

form of behavioural conformity that becomes deeply internalized. Several participants described obsessively checking their dashboards, apologizing to the system for penalties, and modifying their behaviours to avoid algorithmic punishment. As Serdar put it, "*When it says 'low performance,' I feel ashamed, like I disappointed someone real*."

Participants' accounts suggest that continuous monitoring and performance metrics became intertwined with how some workers evaluated themselves as men. Speed, completion rates, customer ratings, and other indicators were not experienced merely as measures of work performance; for participants already negotiating expectations of breadwinning, reliability, and masculine competence, these metrics could also acquire meanings associated with personal worth. As Omar explained, "*The app tells you who you are: if you're late, you're lazy; if you cancel, you're unreliable.*" Faisal similarly reflected, "*You start to think like the app...you measure yourself by numbers.*"

These accounts illustrate what this study describes as "metrics-driven masculinity": the process through which existing expectations of masculine competence, responsibility, endurance, and breadwinning become intertwined with platform-generated indicators of performance. The term does not suggest that technology independently produces a new form of masculinity. Rather, ratings, customer evaluations, speed, and productivity acquire gendered significance through their interaction with pre-existing masculine expectations, organizational practices, customer judgments, and workers' own interpretations of success and failure. Metrics-driven masculinity is therefore treated here as an empirical manifestation of broader human–technology relations rather than as an autonomous form of masculinity generated by the platform itself.

Taken together, these findings highlight the contradictory position occupied by migrant men within platform work. Participants remained subject to strong expectations concerning breadwinning, endurance, responsibility, and emotional control, while their ability to fulfil these expectations was constrained by migration-related disadvantage, insecure employment, language barriers, customer judgments, and algorithmically mediated forms of evaluation. Workplace inequality therefore emerged through the interaction of gender, migration status, ethnicity, labour precarity, and socio-technical forms of governance rather than through any single dimension alone. The findings consequently retain masculinity as an important analytical dimension while locating it within the broader human–technology relations through which recognition, opportunity, and exclusion were experienced.

Theme 3: Integration Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

This theme explores how migrant delivery workers navigated overlapping forms of exclusion while developing collective and individual strategies of adaptation. Their accounts show how exclusion was experienced across customer interactions, workplace relations, and algorithmically mediated platform processes, while also demonstrating how informal networks and tactical uses of platform flexibility allowed them to endure precarity and regain limited control over their working lives. These responses are particularly important for understanding solidarity because they show how workers created mutual support within, and partly in response to, socio-technical arrangements that they perceived as offering limited protection, voice, or opportunities for contestation.

Informal Solidarity Networks

Against this backdrop of isolation, workers built small yet resilient communities. WhatsApp and Telegram groups served as vital spaces for coordination and emotional support. Karim called them "*our digital cafés…we complain, share routes, warn each other about police or bad customers."* Through these informal networks, riders collectively addressed everyday

problems, borrowing each other's bikes after breakdowns and, in some cases, exchanging accounts when one was suspended.

These everyday acts of cooperation fostered a fragile but meaningful sense of belonging and provided a counterweight to the isolation experienced by many participants. As Farid explained, "*When nobody protects us, we protect each other."* His statement captures the horizontal character of these practices: in the absence of support that workers considered sufficient, participants relied on one another for information, practical assistance, and emotional support.

These practices are consistent with research showing that platform workers can develop forms of mutual assistance, information sharing, and collective coping despite the individualized and algorithmically managed organization of platform work (Boyacı, 2020; Çağatay *et al.,* 2023; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020; Schaupp, 2022; Cini, 2022). Rather than treating these practices as evidence of a new form of solidarity, the findings show how existing forms of worker solidarity acquire particular significance in platform settings where workers have limited formal opportunities for voice, representation, and support. For participants in this study, informal networks provided everyday forms of recognition, belonging, and practical assistance alongside their role in navigating platform control.

Rather than representing only overt forms of resistance, these practices illustrate everyday solidarity through which migrant workers generated recognition, belonging, and mutual support. They can therefore be understood as providing informal experiences of inclusion and reciprocity where participants perceived formal organizational support to be limited.

At the same time, workers' capacity to support one another should not be understood as a substitute for organizational responsibility. Farid's statement, "*When nobody protects us, we protect each other*" is revealing precisely because it links horizontal solidarity to a perceived absence of protection. The mutual support developed by workers responded to conditions partly structured through task-allocation systems, ratings, performance measures, platform rules, and limited possibilities for contesting decisions.

Strategic Use of Platform Flexibility

While platform rhetoric emphasizes freedom and flexibility, workers described using these features strategically to manage insecurity. Many switched between delivery platforms to stabilize their income or adjusted working hours according to weather conditions, traffic patterns, and household needs. Aziz described this constant calibration: "*I plan my day like a trader…if it rains, I go early; if it's slow, I log off and save energy."* Flexibility thus became less a straightforward benefit provided by the platform than a worker-developed strategy for reducing vulnerability. Yet this autonomy remained precarious: changes in platform rules or performance requirements could disrupt workers' planning, demonstrating that their control over working time remained conditional.

These practices demonstrate that workers were not passive recipients of algorithmic control. Rather, they exercised limited agency by adapting their working patterns within the constraints established by platform systems. At the same time, such adaptation did not remove the structural asymmetry identified in Theme 1, because workers' room for manoeuvre remained dependent on platform rules that they had limited capacity to influence or contest.

Adaptive Strategies and Micro-Resilience

Beyond collective solidarity, participants displayed forms of micro-resilience through small adjustments that helped them maintain a degree of control and dignity. Some learned to anticipate what they understood as the algorithm's rhythms, timing log-ins in an attempt to secure better order flow; others described bending platform rules, including sharing accounts among friends following deactivation. As Youssef noted, "*We play by the rules, but we also*

learn how to stay alive inside them." Through endurance, improvisation, and quiet cooperation, migrant couriers carved out limited spaces of agency within working arrangements that they otherwise experienced as highly constraining.

Taken together, these findings show that migrant workers responded to platform precarity through a combination of mutual support, strategic adaptation, and limited forms of everyday agency. Existing research has demonstrated that platform workers can develop solidarity and collective practices despite individualized and algorithmically managed working conditions (Yu *et al.,* 2022; Cini, 2022). The findings extend this discussion more modestly by showing how solidarity among migrant platform workers develops within socio-technical conditions that workers have limited capacity to influence. Horizontal mutual support can generate recognition, belonging, and practical assistance, while leaving the structural conditions that make such support necessary largely unchanged.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to EDI and platform-work scholarship by showing how inclusion and exclusion in algorithmically managed work are produced through human–technology interrelations rather than by technological systems or human actors alone. The findings demonstrate how consequential workplace outcomes emerge through the interaction of platform infrastructures, organizational rules, customer judgments, and workers' social positions. This perspective foregrounds responsibility as a central EDI concern: when unequal outcomes are experienced as decisions made by "the system," the human and organizational responsibility embedded in the design, implementation, and governance of these systems may become obscured.

Within this broader contribution, the study also shows how platform-generated measures of performance become intertwined with migrant men's existing expectations of breadwinning, responsibility, endurance, and masculine competence. This study describes this empirical process as "metrics-driven masculinity." Rather than proposing technology as an autonomous producer of a new masculinity, the concept captures how ratings, customer evaluations, speed, visibility, and productivity acquire gendered meanings through their interaction with pre-existing masculine expectations, organizational practices, and workers' interpretations of success and failure.

Finally, the study contributes to discussions of solidarity by showing how informal mutual support among migrant workers coexists with socio-technical arrangements that shape inclusion and exclusion. Informal networks can provide recognition, belonging, information, and practical assistance, but they should not be treated as substitutes for organizational responsibility. The findings therefore extend existing understandings of solidarity by highlighting how horizontal worker support coexists with the broader workplace conditions that make such support necessary.

The findings also have important practical implications for platform organizations, EDI practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors. For platform companies, regular reviews of task-allocation systems, customer ratings, waiting-time patterns, performance metrics, bonus criteria, and access to priority or supervisory opportunities may help identify whether apparently neutral systems generate systematically different outcomes for migrant workers. Importantly, responsibility for such outcomes should not be displaced onto "the algorithm." Platform organizations remain responsible for how algorithmic systems are designed, configured, implemented, monitored, and revised, as well as for how customer evaluations and other human inputs are incorporated into consequential workplace decisions.

Platform companies should therefore complement transparency with meaningful opportunities for worker voice and contestation. Multilingual communication channels, translation-supported grievance procedures, accessible explanations of consequential decisions,

and mechanisms through which workers can question ratings, task allocation, penalties, or performance evaluations may strengthen participation and procedural fairness. Research on algorithmic management similarly emphasizes the importance of transparency, human review, worker involvement, and mechanisms for contesting algorithmically mediated decisions (Veale *et al.,* 2023), while recent evidence highlights worker participation and transparency as important safeguards in algorithmically managed work (Bowdler *et al.,* 2025).

For EDI practitioners, the findings highlight the importance of migrant-sensitive and intersectional inclusion frameworks that recognize how migration status, ethnicity, language, gender expectations, customer interactions, and algorithmic evaluation may combine to shape access to work, recognition, and progression. This also means treating rankings, ratings, waiting times, and prioritization criteria as potential EDI issues rather than as purely technical features of platform management.

For policymakers, stronger labour protections, anti-discrimination oversight, requirements for algorithmic transparency, meaningful human review, and procedures through which workers can challenge consequential platform decisions may help reduce cumulative forms of exclusion. Regulatory scholarship has likewise emphasized the need for stronger ex ante and ex post transparency and accountable review of algorithmically mediated workplace decisions (Veale *et al.,* 2023).

Finally, civil society organizations may continue to strengthen peer-support initiatives, mentoring programmes, worker networks, and community-based forms of assistance that reduce isolation and support belonging. However, such horizontal solidarity should complement rather than replace organizational and regulatory responsibility for fair and contestable workplace systems. Research on platform worker mobilization similarly shows that supportive communities and collective solidarities can help workers respond to algorithmic control, while remaining shaped by broader structural conditions (Cini, 2022).

Conclusion

This study contributes to debates on masculinity, migration, platform work, and EDI by showing how male migrant workers in Turkey experience inclusion, exclusion, and recognition through socio-technical arrangements. Task allocation, customer evaluations, ratings, performance metrics, and access to opportunities are experienced not as products of technology alone, but as outcomes shaped through the interaction of technological systems, organizational rules, customer judgments, and workers' social positions.

Within these arrangements, migrant men negotiated tensions between expectations of breadwinning, responsibility, and masculine competence and migration-related disadvantage, language barriers, insecure employment, customer bias, and limited opportunities for recognition. Platform-generated metrics also became meaningful to some participants as measures of competence, reliability, and masculine worth. This study describes this process as 'metrics-driven masculinity,' illustrating how existing masculine expectations become intertwined with ratings, evaluations, visibility, speed, and productivity.

Migrant workers also responded to exclusion through informal solidarity, strategic adaptation, and everyday mutual support, which provided recognition, belonging, information, and practical assistance. However, these practices did not remove the structural inequalities that made such support necessary, and horizontal solidarity should therefore not substitute for organizational responsibility.

More broadly, the study identifies responsibility as a central EDI issue in algorithmically managed work. When consequential workplace outcomes appear to be decisions made by "the system," responsibility for inclusion and exclusion may become obscured. Solidarity and inclusion therefore require attention not only to relations among workers but also to the

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responsibilities of platform organizations and other human actors for the socio-technical systems through which work is allocated, evaluated, and governed.

Future research should examine how different platform regimes, organizational arrangements, and migration contexts shape human–technology relations, migrant masculinities, responsibility, and solidarity across Global South and Global North settings.

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Pseudonym	Age	Courier Work Experience (Months)	Country of Origin	Family Status	Education Level
Amir	42	15	Iran	Married with children	Primary
Omar	35	27	Syria	Married with children	High School
Aziz	34	30	Uzbekistan	Single	Secondary
Murat	25	16	Turkmenistan	Living with family	High School
Khaled	36	31	Syria	Married with children	High School
Samir	38	27	Syria	Married with children	High School
Serdar	41	23	Turkmenistan	Married with children	High School
Elvin	39	34	Azerbaijan	Married with children	Primary
Imran	48	48	Pakistan	Married with children	High School
Nabil	27	45	Syria	Living with family	Secondary
Reza	27	16	Iran	Married with children	Primary
Hassan	33	24	Syria	Living with family	University
Faisal	40	39	Pakistan	Married with children	Primary
Farid	26	28	Iran	Living with family	Secondary
Youssef	39	36	Syria	Married with children	High School
Adil	22	8	Pakistan	Living with family	Primary
Kerim	24	33	Turkmenistan	Single	Secondary
Ahmad	47	13	Afghanistan	Married with children	High School
Rashad	35	29	Azerbaijan	Married with children	Secondary
Karim	40	32	Syria	Married with children	University
Batyr	30	37	Turkmenistan	Single	Secondary
Tariq	46	21	Pakistan	Living with family	High School
Rami	30	27	Syria	Married with children	University
Basel	28	23	Syria	Living with family	Secondary
Ali	43	17	Iraq	Married with children	High School
Haider	39	35	Iraq	Married with children	Secondary
Bekzod	22	30	Uzbekistan	Single	Primary

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Table 1. Participant Demographics

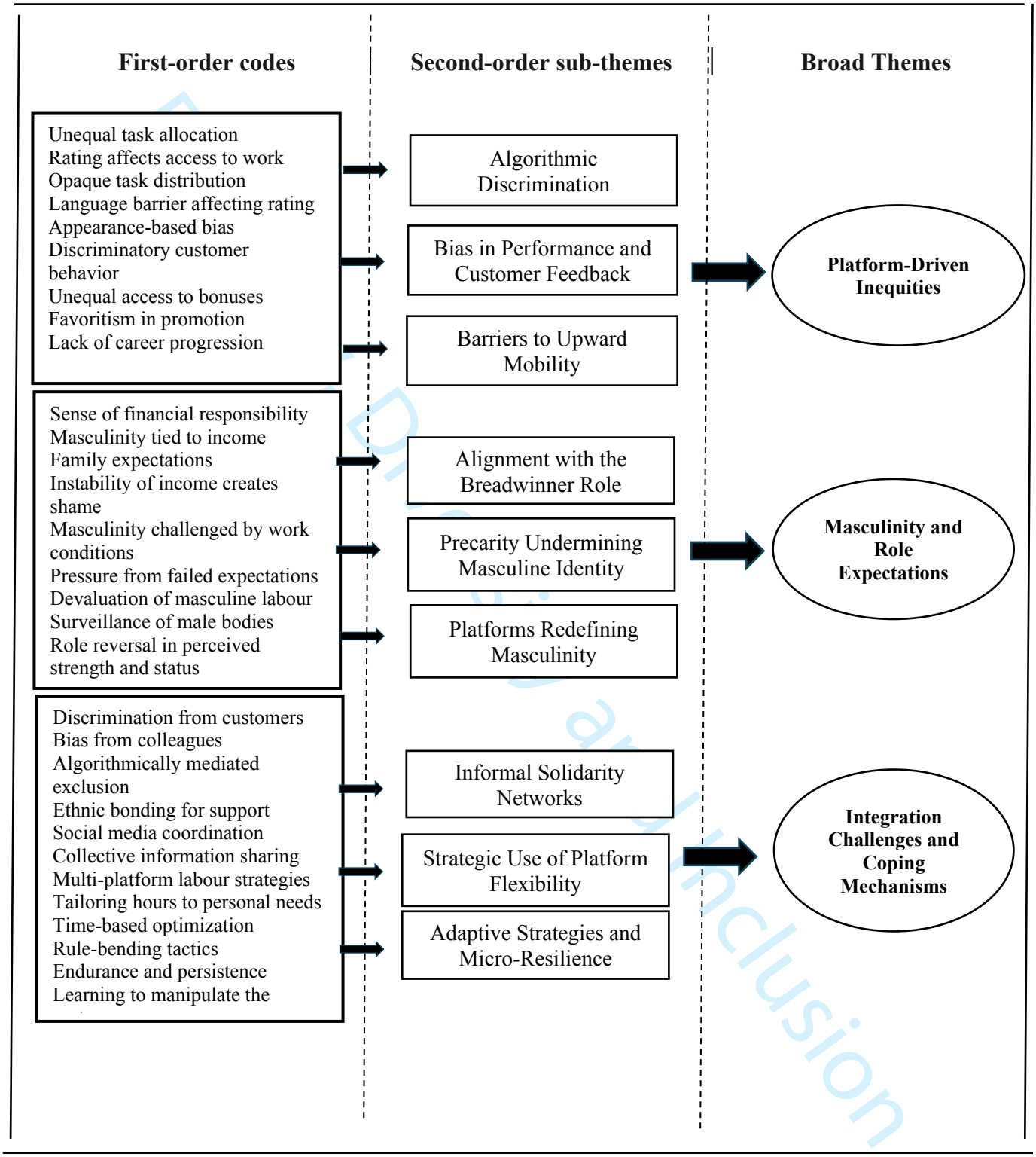


Figure 1. Thematic Map of Migrant Men's Experiences

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For Peer Review Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Between precarity and pride: negotiating masculinity and migration in Turkey's platform economy

Abstract

Purpose - This study examines how human–technology interrelations in platform work shape male migrant workers' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Turkey, and how these experiences intersect with masculinity, responsibility, and everyday solidarity under precarious conditions.

Design/methodology/approach - The study draws on 27 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with male migrant food-delivery workers in Istanbul. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. The data were analysed thematically using intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity as interpretive frameworks.

Findings - Inclusion and exclusion were shaped through socio-technical arrangements combining algorithmically mediated task allocation, customer evaluations, performance metrics, organizational rules, and migration-related inequalities. Migrant men also negotiated tensions between breadwinner expectations and precarious work, while platform metrics acquired gendered meanings linked to competence, responsibility, and masculine worth. Informal solidarity provided recognition, belonging, and practical support but did not replace organizational responsibility.

Originality - The study contributes to EDI scholarship by showing how inclusion and exclusion in platform work emerge through human–technology interrelations and by highlighting responsibility for outcomes attributed to "the system." It also identifies "metrics-driven masculinity" as an empirical process and extends solidarity research by showing how worker mutual support coexists with socio-technical arrangements that shape inclusion and exclusion.

Practical implications - Platform organizations and EDI practitioners should treat task allocation, ratings, performance metrics, prioritization, and contestability as potential EDI concerns.

Research limitations/implications – Gendered and linguistic dynamics may have shaped interview interactions and interpretation.

Keywords: Migration, Masculinity, Platform Labour, Algorithmic Management, Solidarity, Inclusion

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Food delivery platforms have become a major component of the global gig economy, relying on algorithmic systems to allocate tasks, monitor performance, and evaluate workers. While these platforms promise flexibility and autonomy, they frequently operate beyond traditional labour protections, generating new forms of precarity and inequality (Dieuaide and Azaïs, 2020). Migrant workers are often concentrated in delivery and logistics occupations due to the sector's low barriers to entry and limited qualification requirements (Milkman *et al.,* 2021). As managerial functions such as task allocation, performance evaluation, and prioritization become increasingly mediated through algorithmic systems, questions of inclusion and exclusion also become questions of how responsibility is distributed between technological systems and the human actors who design, implement, and rely on them.

Turkey provides an important context for examining these dynamics as a major refugee-hosting country with substantial migrant and refugee populations from Syria and other countries (Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylacı, 2021; Yükseker *et al.,* 2024). Despite their growing participation in the labour market, migrant workers frequently face legal uncertainty, discrimination,

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language barriers, restricted access to formal employment, and widespread informalization (Yaylacı and Çarpar, 2019). These constraints channel many migrant men into precarious sectors characterized by unstable incomes, limited labour protections, and few opportunities for upward mobility.

In this context, these structural inequalities not only generate economic exclusion but also shape gendered experiences of work. While platform labour enables migrant men to contribute to household livelihoods, its instability often undermines breadwinner expectations and generates emotional strain, status loss, and insecurity (Churchill *et al.,* 2019; Dinh and Tienari, 2022; Zhou, 2024; Wang and Choi, 2025). Migration and platform labour therefore intersect in ways that make masculinity an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a stable source of privilege. Migrant men may also be positioned within anti-migrant discourses as threats to social order or failed breadwinners lacking social legitimacy (Kelkar, 2024; Öcal *et al.,* 2024; Rygiel *et al.,* 2016; Çetin *et al.,* 2017).

Although platform management is often presented as neutral and meritocratic, growing evidence suggests that algorithmically mediated workplace processes may reproduce inequalities associated with migration status, language, national background, and social position (Ray, 2019; Van Doorn, 2017). Consequently, migrant workers may experience exclusion, restricted opportunities, and intensified forms of digital surveillance despite the apparent neutrality of platform technologies. Yet such outcomes should not be understood as produced by technology independently of human action. Platform systems operate through an interrelation of human, organizational, and technological components rather than through algorithms in isolation (Benlian *et al.,* 2022; Floros, 2024). Customer evaluations and other human inputs may also interact with algorithmically mediated processes of evaluation, ranking, and allocation. This human–technology interrelation raises an important EDI question concerning responsibility: when apparently technical systems produce unequal outcomes, responsibility for inclusion and exclusion may become obscured or displaced onto "the system" itself.

In Turkey, migrant men occupy a paradoxical position in which masculine expectations intersect with legal precarity, labour-market exclusion, and social marginalization, highlighting the importance of intersectional approaches to inequality and inclusion (Nkomo *et al.,* 2019; Amis et *al., 2018;* Benschop, 2021; Primecz and Mahadevan, 2025). What remains less understood, however, is how such inequalities are produced through the interrelation of human actors and platform technologies, and how responsibility for exclusion is negotiated when consequential decisions appear to be made by "the system." While existing research shows that solidarity and collective coping can provide workers with resources for navigating precarity and sustaining belonging and agency (Boyacı, 2020; Çağatay *et al.,* 2023; Plotnikof *et al.,* 2022), less attention has been paid to how solidarity relates to the socio-technical arrangements through which inclusion and exclusion are produced. This is particularly relevant to EDI because it directs attention beyond interpersonal support among workers toward responsibility for these arrangements and their consequences.

Against this backdrop, this study draws on 27 semi-structured interviews with male migrant food-delivery workers in Turkey to examine how human–technology interrelations within platform work shape migrant men's experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and how these experiences intersect with the negotiation of masculinity, responsibility, and everyday solidarity.

By bringing together scholarship on migration, masculinities, platform labour, and workplace inclusion, this study contributes to EDI scholarship by showing how inclusion and exclusion in platform work are produced through human–technology interrelations rather than by either human actors or technological systems alone. The findings demonstrate how apparently technical processes, including task allocation, ratings, customer evaluations, and

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performance metrics, interact with migration status, national background, language, and gendered expectations to shape workers' access to opportunities and recognition. In doing so, the study draws attention to the question of responsibility when unequal outcomes are attributed to opaque platform systems, highlighting the need to understand algorithmic governance as a socio-technical rather than purely technological process. Within these relations, the study also shows how platform-generated performance measures become intertwined with existing expectations of breadwinning, responsibility, and masculine worth. Finally, the study extends existing discussions of solidarity by showing how workers' mutual support coexists with socio-technical arrangements through which inclusion and exclusion are produced.

Theoretical Framework

The Gig Economy

The gig economy has transformed global labour markets by offering flexible, app-mediated work through platforms such as Uber and Deliveroo. While promising autonomy and low entry barriers, this model often bypasses conventional labour protections, leading to algorithmic surveillance, unstable earnings, and heightened precarity (Vallas and Schor, 2020). Research highlights the sector's reliance on marginalized groups, particularly migrants and racialized minorities, who are overrepresented in physically demanding and public-facing jobs such as food delivery (Van Doorn, 2017). However, research has predominantly examined labour control and precarity, leaving the implications of platform work for identity and social recognition, particularly among migrant men, relatively underexplored.

Importantly, algorithmic management should not be understood as operating independently of human and organizational decision-making. Although platforms automate functions such as task allocation, performance monitoring, and evaluation, their criteria, data, and implementation remain shaped by organizational choices and human inputs. Algorithmic management is therefore better understood as a socio-technical arrangement through which technological and human forms of control become intertwined (Benlian *et al.,* 2022).

Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define hegemonic masculinity as a context-specific ideal that legitimizes male dominance over both women and non-hegemonic masculinities. Rather than being fixed or universally attainable, this ideal is dynamic, exclusive, and sustained through cultural, institutional, and social structures.

This framework is particularly useful for examining how migrant men experience and perform masculinity within platform economies. Even under conditions of displacement and precarity, men continue to face expectations associated with breadwinning, authority, and family provision. When access to stable employment is restricted, participation in informal or gig labour may undermine men's ability to perform these socially valued roles, producing both material and symbolic forms of loss (Donaldson, 1993; Donaldson and Howson, 2009). Migration, therefore, frequently requires men to reconstruct their gender identities within contexts characterized by diminished social status, labour market exclusion, and institutional marginalization (Montes, 2013; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2020).

Masculinity in these contexts functions not only as a social position but also as an ongoing social accomplishment (Bird, 1996). Access to masculine recognition is uneven, as classed, racialized, and institutional hierarchies shape which masculinities are socially valued (Sang and Calvard, 2019). Migrant men may therefore experience structural disadvantage while remaining subject to dominant expectations of provision, authority, and self-reliance (Hearn, 2004). Migrant masculinities thus emerge as relational and context-dependent, shifting between dominant and subordinate positions across institutional settings (Sabur, 2024; Leszczyńska *et al.,* 2024; Hopkins and Giazitzoglu, 2024).

Intersectionality and Inclusion in Platform Economies

The intersectionality framework, first introduced by Crenshaw (1991), provides critical insight into how overlapping social categories, such as gender, race, migration status, and class, interact to produce compounded disadvantage and reinforce systemic inequalities. In the context of Turkey's gig economy, this approach is especially valuable for examining how migrant men are positioned within multiple systems of exclusion operating simultaneously through labour markets, migration regimes, and platform economies.

From an EDI perspective, workplace inclusion involves more than formal access to employment; it also concerns recognition, belonging, participation, and organizational voice (Nkomo *et al.,* 2019). Recent EDI scholarship emphasizes that workplace inequalities emerge through intersecting systems of power rather than isolated categories of difference and calls for greater attention to diverse institutional and socio-political contexts, including those found in emerging economies (Amis *et al.,* 2018; Benschop, 2021; Mahadevan *et al.,* 2023; Primecz and Mahadevan, 2025). In this respect, the experiences of migrant men in platform economies offer a particularly revealing lens through which to examine how masculinity, migration status, and labour precarity intersect.

Although platforms promise flexibility and meritocracy, migrant workers may encounter opaque evaluation systems and inequalities embedded within platform ecosystems that reproduce existing social hierarchies while appearing technologically neutral (Wood *et al.,* 2019; Cameron and Rahman, 2022; Keller *et al.,* 2022). Recent research on algorithmic fairness similarly challenges assumptions of neutrality, demonstrating how automated systems may reproduce existing biases while obscuring accountability (Katta *et al.,* 2024). Platform algorithms therefore function not only as technical tools but also as organizational mechanisms that shape inclusion, exclusion, visibility, and access to opportunities.

Understanding these processes as socio-technical also raises questions of responsibility (Jarrahi *et al.,* 2021). Rankings, task allocations, customer ratings, waiting times, and performance evaluations may appear to workers as automated outcomes, yet they emerge through systems whose criteria are designed, configured, and implemented within organizational arrangements and may incorporate human inputs such as customer evaluations. When exclusionary outcomes are attributed to "the algorithm," responsibility may consequently become obscured or displaced from the human and organizational actors involved in creating and governing these systems (Besio *et al.,* 2024). From an EDI perspective, this makes accountability for algorithmically mediated decisions an important dimension of inclusion: technological mediation does not remove organizational responsibility for the unequal consequences of workplace systems (Horneber and Laumer, 2023).

This perspective also broadens how solidarity can be approached in digitally mediated workplaces. Research on platform work shows that solidarity may emerge through mutual assistance, information sharing, and collective coping even under conditions of algorithmic control and individualized work (Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020; Schaupp, 2022; Cini, 2022). Yet these forms of solidarity develop within socio-technical systems through which work is allocated, evaluated, and controlled, and technological mediation does not eliminate organizational responsibility for their consequences (Collins and Atkinson, 2023). This shifts attention from treating technology as an autonomous source of inequality toward examining how solidarity and inclusion are negotiated within human–technology relations.

Migrant Masculinities in Turkey

The relationship between migration and masculinity has received increasing scholarly attention in Turkey, particularly following the arrival of large refugee and migrant populations from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries over the last decade. Research demonstrates that

migrant and refugee men frequently encounter labour market exclusion, discrimination, legal precarity, and social marginalization while simultaneously facing strong expectations associated with breadwinning, authority, and family provision (Yaylacı and Çarpar, 2019; Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylacı, 2021).

Critical masculinity scholarship in Turkey emphasizes that there is no singular form of masculinity. Rather, masculinities are shaped through hierarchical and relational processes influenced by class, ethnicity, migration status, religion, and other social divisions (Özbay, 2013). Migration frequently disrupts established masculine identities by undermining men's social status, authority, and ability to fulfil socially valued masculine roles (Bozok, 2019).

Research with Afghan migrant youth further highlights the importance of solidarity networks in shaping migrant masculinities. Bozok and Bozok (2018) demonstrate that informal social networks provide employment opportunities, protection, and emotional support while simultaneously producing forms of masculinity grounded in vulnerability, dependence, and resilience. Similarly, Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylacı (2021) show that many refugee men engage in remasculinization strategies aimed at restoring dignity, authority, and self-worth under conditions of displacement and uncertainty.

Recent scholarship has also situated migrant masculinities within Turkey's increasingly polarized political climate. Öcal *et al.* (2024) demonstrate that refugee men are frequently represented through contradictory narratives that portray them simultaneously as dangerous and dependent, threatening and weak. Such representations contribute to anti-migrant sentiment while shaping broader understandings of citizenship, belonging, and legitimacy.

Taken together, this literature demonstrates that migrant masculinities in Turkey are produced at the intersection of migration, labour precarity, nationalism, social exclusion, and changing gender relations. However, despite these important contributions, existing studies have rarely examined how migrant masculinities are negotiated within algorithmically managed labour markets. Research on migrant masculinities has primarily focused on displacement, exclusion, and challenges to breadwinner identities, whereas platform labour scholarship has concentrated on surveillance, labour control, and economic precarity. Consequently, limited attention has been paid to how algorithmically mediated workplace arrangements intersect with migration-related inequalities in shaping recognition, dignity, and access to opportunities, or to how responsibility for such outcomes is negotiated when decisions appear to be made by technological systems. By bringing together scholarship on platform labour, migrant masculinities, intersectionality, and EDI, the present study addresses this gap by examining how human–technology interrelations shape migrant men's experiences of inclusion and exclusion and how these processes intersect with masculine recognition, responsibility, belonging, and everyday solidarity within Turkey's platform economy.

Methods of Analysis

This study used a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of male migrant workers in Turkey's food-delivery sector. Qualitative methods effectively capture personal narratives and social interactions, making them suitable for examining how platform work shapes labour conditions, inclusion and exclusion, and masculinity (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Using semi-structured interviews, a flexible tool for gathering in-depth insights (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), the research examined how migrant workers perceived their roles, navigated algorithmically mediated platform practices such as task assignment and performance evaluation, and experienced these processes in relation to migration, masculinity, and workplace inclusion.

The interview questions focused on workers' interactions with algorithmic management systems, experiences of inclusion and exclusion, migration, and the gendered dynamics of platform work. For instance, participants were asked about their typical workday, challenges

faced as migrant workers, and whether platform practices felt supportive or exclusionary. Questions also explored how traditional expectations of masculinity influenced their experiences and how they coped with the physical and emotional demands of the job, encouraging them to share specific incidents that illustrate these dynamics. Using the Critical Incident Technique (Butterfield *et al.,* 2005), participants were encouraged to recall specific experiences that revealed challenges, successes, or key interactions, effectively uncovering moments that shape their perceptions and behaviours.

Data were collected in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2025 through 27 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with male migrant food-delivery workers. Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Initial access to the field was established in person through contact with a migrant food-delivery courier, after which participants introduced or recommended other migrant couriers within their networks. Recruitment remained guided by the study criteria: participants were male international migrants with at least six months of experience in food-delivery platform work, while variation was sought in age, national background, migration background, and platform tenure. This combination of purposive selection and participant referrals facilitated access to a population for whom trust and willingness to participate were important considerations (Patton, 2014). Interviews lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and were conducted and audio-recorded by the author with participants' consent. Interviews were conducted primarily in Turkish. Participants varied in their level of Turkish proficiency; where communication difficulties arose, English was used alongside Turkish with participants who were comfortable communicating in English, and digital translation tools were occasionally used during the interview to clarify words or expressions in participants' preferred languages. These tools were used only to facilitate communication during the interviews rather than to translate interview transcripts or quotations.

The sample size was guided by the principle of information power, whereby the specificity of the research aim and the depth of participants' narratives supported analytical richness rather than statistical representativeness (Malterud *et al.,* 2016). Sampling was concluded once thematic saturation was reached, as no substantially new patterns emerged across interviews (Guest *et al.,* 2006). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 48 years and had between 8 and 48 months of experience in food-delivery platform work. They came from eight countries, Iran, Syria, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and varied in family status and educational background. The demographic details of the participants are presented in Table 1. Pseudonyms are used throughout the manuscript to protect participants' identities while providing a more person-centred presentation of their experiences.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts to identify patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2022). While the coding process was inductive in identifying patterns across participants' narratives, it was theoretically sensitized by intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity frameworks. These perspectives guided attention to how migration status, racialization, gender expectations, and algorithmic governance intersected in shaping workers' experiences. Rather than imposing predefined categories, these frameworks functioned as analytical lenses informing interpretation of emerging themes.

The analysis focused on institutional structures, such as workers' perceptions of platform norms, gender role expectations, and policies affecting their rights, as well as intersectional dynamics, examining how migration status and masculinity influence labour experiences and resilience. The analysis employed the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 2017), with a systematic and thematic coding approach. Coding proceeded through multiple stages. First, transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data and generate initial

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codes. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and refined through constant comparison across interviews. For example, participants' recurring accounts of differential waiting times, task allocation, customer ratings, and access to priority opportunities were initially coded separately and subsequently compared across interviews. Through this process, these accounts were grouped into broader patterns concerning perceived platform-driven inequities and algorithmically mediated inclusion and exclusion. Analytical memos were used to document coding decisions and reflexive considerations, including how linguistic differences and the relational conditions under which particular accounts were produced might have shaped participants' disclosures and their subsequent interpretation. Analytical rigour was further supported through iterative movement between data and theory, systematic memo writing, and critical reflection on positionality throughout the analytic process, while the analytical steps are reported explicitly to make the progression from coding to interpretation transparent (Kerr, 2022; Pratt *et al.,* 2020; Sandberg, 2005). Given participants' varying levels of Turkish proficiency, linguistic differences were treated as part of the interpretive context of the interviews, and particular care was taken not to infer meaning beyond what participants could communicate with sufficient clarity.

The interviews were conducted by the author, a female researcher interviewing male migrant workers, which created a particular insider–outsider dynamic during fieldwork. Differences in gender, language, and social position shaped both access to participants and the development of trust. Recruitment was not straightforward, and not all workers approached were willing to participate. Discussing potentially sensitive experiences concerning migration, platform work, employment insecurity, and masculinity therefore required considerable rapport-building. Trust was reciprocal rather than one-directional: while participants needed reassurance concerning the researcher's identity, the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and anonymity, the researcher also had to negotiate her own sense of safety when approaching unfamiliar male participants. Initial relationships were therefore developed with older or more established workers with whom sufficient trust could be established, and introductions from these participants subsequently facilitated access to younger workers. Before interviews, participants were given information about the study, ethical approval, confidentiality, and anonymity and were provided with opportunities to ask questions before deciding whether to participate. These relational dynamics were considered during data collection and interpretation rather than treating the researcher as a neutral presence in the research process (Mahadevan, 2011; Collins and McNulty, 2020).

Additionally, ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Istanbul University. All participants gave informed consent, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the study.

Findings and Discussion

This study examines how male migrant workers experience platform labour in Turkey, using an intersectional and masculinity-focused lens. Based on 27 interviews, three themes emerge: structural inequalities shaped by algorithmic systems and customer bias; the negotiation of masculinity within precarious work; and barriers to integration and everyday coping strategies. These findings reveal how labour precarity, migration, and masculinity intersect in the platform economy. The three themes were developed through iterative comparison across interviews and interpreted through the lenses of intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity, enabling analysis of structural, symbolic, and relational dimensions of platform precarity. The full set of themes and their corresponding subthemes are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

INSERT FIGURE1 HERE

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Theme 1: Platform-Driven Inequities

This theme addresses how migrant male workers experienced inequalities in relation to algorithmically mediated task allocation, customer-facing evaluations, and access to platform opportunities within Turkey's food-delivery gig economy. Although platform systems were often presented or perceived as neutral and merit-based, participants described recurring patterns of unequal treatment whose sources were difficult for them to identify or contest. Importantly, these accounts do not imply that technological systems independently produced exclusion. Rather, they reveal how workers encountered inequality through socio-technical arrangements in which platform systems, organizational decisions, and human inputs such as customer evaluations became intertwined. The subthemes below examine how these arrangements shaped participants' experiences of access to work, evaluation, and opportunity.

Algorithmic Discrimination

Participants frequently reported that work assignments on the platform were far from equitable or transparent. Many expressed the belief that the algorithm favored local workers, systematically disadvantaging migrants in subtle ways. For instance, 33-year-old Hassan described his daily experience of waiting far longer than his Turkish colleague, despite starting at the same time and location: *"I wait for an hour sometimes. But my Turkish friend, we start together, and he gets an order within five minutes. Same location, same time. The app just likes him better."*

This sense of being deprioritized by the system was echoed by Samir who reflected on patterns he observed in online forums and among coworkers: *"They say it's random, but it never feels random. We talk in the group chat. Foreigners are always the ones who get less."* He added that when he worked in wealthier districts on the European side of Istanbul, his earnings were consistently lower than those of his local peers.

Some workers even engaged in informal testing to confirm their suspicions. Rashad recounted how he used two phones to compare assignment rates and found a consistent bias in favor of Turkish workers: *"Even when I'm available, the system ignores me. I tested with another phone. They sent jobs to the local guy first, every time."* Haider reflected, "*It never explains, it just decides…you feel powerless but you still obey*."

Taken together, these accounts show how participants experienced task allocation as both consequential and opaque. Their accounts do not establish that the allocation algorithm itself was programmed to discriminate between migrant and local workers; rather, they demonstrate how apparently neutral allocation processes were perceived as producing unequal access to work while making the source of those inequalities difficult to identify or contest. In this sense, algorithmically mediated allocation shaped not only access to orders but also access to economic opportunity, visibility, and recognition (Urinboyev and Eraliev, 2022). The opacity described by participants is particularly important from a socio-technical perspective because allocation criteria and their implementation cannot be separated entirely from the organizational arrangements within which technological systems are designed and governed. When workers experience consequential decisions as something that "the system" simply decides, responsibility for those outcomes may become difficult to locate and challenge.

Bias in Performance and Customer Feedback

Beyond task allocation, workers are also evaluated through customer feedback systems that are equally prone to bias. Participants repeatedly emphasized that their ratings were influenced less by service quality and more by visible markers of their foreignness, such as accent, appearance, or limited language proficiency. Omar shared his frustration after receiving a low rating despite completing his delivery without issues: "*I delivered on time, smiled, said everything right. But*

the customer gave 3 stars. My friend told me: 'It's because you look foreign.' What can I do? I can't change my face."

This sense of being judged based on appearance rather than performance was echoed in more disturbing ways by others. Imran recalled an incident where a customer refused to open the door and later reported him as "scary," despite his professional appearance: "*She called support and said I was scary. I was wearing the uniform! Just because I have a beard and darker skin?"* For many, even minor language mistakes had a disproportionate impact on their ratings. As Kerim noted, "*When I don't speak Turkish fluently, they talk bad or give low scores. I know they wouldn't do that to a local guy."*

These accounts show how participants perceived customer evaluations as extending social judgments concerning accent, appearance, and language into platform-based assessments of their performance. Importantly, customer ratings illustrate especially clearly why platform-based exclusion cannot be attributed either to technology or to human actors alone. Customer evaluations constitute human inputs but once incorporated into platform evaluation systems they can acquire organizational consequences for how workers understand their standing, visibility, and access to opportunities. From an EDI perspective, this creates a distributed problem of responsibility: discriminatory judgments may originate in customer interactions, while platform organizations determine how such evaluations are incorporated into performance systems and what possibilities workers have to question or contest them.

Barriers to Upward Mobility

Many participants also reported that beyond the daily struggle to secure tasks and maintain ratings, there existed invisible ceilings that hindered their chances of moving upward within the platform hierarchy. Farid described his confusion and disappointment when he was passed over for access to more profitable delivery zones: "*They say if you do well, you get priority zones. I never got that, even when I had top ratings. But my Turkish coworker got it easily. They know who to pick.*"

Bonus systems were also described as arbitrary and inconsistently enforced. Nabil shared how he was denied a long-promised bonus: "*I worked nonstop for months. No days off. But when bonuses came, they told me 'you missed one metric.' Always some excuse."* Similarly, Batyr described how he was discouraged from applying for a supervisor role: "*I applied, they said only locals. They don't say it directly, but we understand. We're good to deliver, not to lead*."

Taken together, these perceived inequities constitute the broader institutional context within which migrant men interpreted their roles and identities. From an EDI perspective, the accounts concerning priority zones, bonuses, supervisory opportunities, ratings, and task allocation indicate that inclusion involves not only access to work but also access to visibility, recognition, and organizational participation. These outcomes were experienced through socio-technical arrangements in which platform metrics and allocation systems interacted with customer judgments and organizational rules. Consequently, technological mediation does not remove the question of organizational accountability for how such systems are designed, implemented, and contested.

Existing research has documented how platform labour reproduces precarity through surveillance, rating systems, and asymmetric power relations (Van Doorn, 2017; Vallas and Schor, 2020), while studies of migrant men in Turkey emphasize labour-market exclusion, discrimination, legal uncertainty, and status loss (Bozok, 2019; Yaylacı and Çarpar, 2019). The present findings bring these literatures together by showing how participants encountered migration-related inequalities through socio-technical workplace arrangements involving task allocation, customer evaluations, performance metrics, and organizational rules. The contribution is therefore not simply that exclusion has become "algorithmic," but that

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technological mediation can make the human and organizational responsibility underlying consequential workplace processes less visible. For EDI scholarship, this suggests that rankings, waiting times, ratings, prioritization, and opportunities for progression should be treated not merely as technical features of platform management but as potential sites of inclusion, exclusion, and organizational accountability. The following theme shifts from these structural conditions to how migrant men negotiated masculinity and recognition within them.

Theme 2: Masculinity and Role Expectations

This theme explores how platform work intersects with cultural constructions of masculinity, particularly the expectation for migrant men to assume the role of economic providers. While food-delivery work is often associated with masculine qualities such as physical endurance, mobility, and risk, participants described a tension between these expectations and the precarious, surveilled, and often degrading realities of platform labour. For many, the work was not only a source of income but also a means of sustaining masculine recognition under difficult conditions. The findings further show how these existing gendered expectations became intertwined with the socio-technical arrangements discussed in Theme 1, particularly platform-generated measures of performance, customer evaluations, and access to work.

Alignment with the Breadwinner Role

For many participants, taking on platform work was not simply a practical decision, but a culturally meaningful act rooted in the desire to fulfill gendered responsibilities. Several men spoke of feeling obligated to support their families financially, often across borders.

Khaled explained, "*My family is still in Aleppo. I send money every month. That's why I don't rest. I have to be a man. That means providing.*" His statement illustrates how labour and masculinity were closely intertwined. Similarly, Adil shared, "*If I don't earn, I feel weak. I feel like I failed. Back home, the man works. That's how it is. If I can't do that here, then what am I?*" These sentiments echo broader cultural expectations around male identity as bound to the capacity to provide, expectations that persisted even under exploitative working conditions.

Even younger participants expressed a strong sense of gendered duty. Bekzod noted, "*My father is old, I send him money. In our culture, the son must help. I'm not doing this job because I love it. I do it because I'm the man of the house now.*"

These accounts highlight how workers frame platform work as a strategy to reclaim or sustain masculine identity during migration, despite its precarious nature. This finding is consistent with research showing that migration can unsettle established masculine positions through changes in occupational status, economic security, and the capacity to fulfil breadwinner expectations (Donaldson and Howson, 2009; Bozok, 2019; Çarpar and Göktuna Yaylacı, 2021). At the same time, participants' accounts show that such expectations did not disappear following migration. Breadwinning, endurance, responsibility, and the ability to provide remained important sources of masculine recognition. Platform work therefore occupied a contradictory position: it provided an accessible means through which participants could continue to fulfil provider responsibilities, while the insecurity and unequal access to work described in Theme 1 made their capacity to do so uncertain.

Precarity Undermining Masculine Identity

At the same time, participants acknowledged the deep contradictions between the breadwinner ideal and the economic instability of gig work. Several spoke of feeling ashamed or emasculated when they failed to meet familial or personal expectations.

Reza reflected painfully: "*Some months I can't send money. I lie to my family. I say I had expenses. But really, I just didn't earn enough. That's hard. It hurts my pride."* Serdar admitted feeling "less of a man" during slow weeks: "*When there's no work, I stay home. I feel useless.*

My friends ask if I'm lazy, but it's not that. It's just the app gives no jobs." His comment illustrates how even externally invisible algorithmic decisions can have deep psychological effects tied to masculinity.

Moreover, some described internalizing public perceptions of delivery work as low-status or humiliating. Karim noted, "*Back home I was a teacher. Here I carry food. I wear a helmet, people look at me like I'm stupid. It's not what a man should be*."

These experiences illustrate the emotional cost of attempting to sustain masculine recognition within precarious employment, complementing research on gig work that has highlighted insecurity, instability, and emotional strain (Dinh and Tienari, 2022). Because work remained closely tied to breadwinning and family provision, limited or unpredictable access to income affected not only participants' economic security but also their sense of masculine competence and self-worth. Similar patterns of endurance, silence, and emotional strain have been documented among migrant men navigating displacement and family responsibilities (Martínez-Joya, 2025), while research in other low-wage migrant contexts has likewise connected difficulties in fulfilling dominant masculine expectations with experiences of diminished status and psychological strain (Yoon and Udor, 2025).

This finding also challenges simplified understandings of masculinity as a uniformly privileged social position. While participants were positioned as men within broader gender relations, their ability to fulfil socially valued masculine expectations was constrained by migration-related disadvantage, insecure employment, language barriers, and limited access to economic and organizational resources. From an intersectional perspective, masculine position therefore cannot be understood independently of migration status, ethnicity, labour-market position, and the socio-technical conditions through which access to platform work is organized.

Platforms Redefining Masculinity

Interestingly, several participants noted that while delivery work aligns with traditional masculine traits, physical strength, endurance, mobility, the nature of the job actually undermines these associations. The work was not only physically demanding but tightly controlled by algorithms, reducing workers to what one participant called "machines on wheels."

Omar observed, "*They say we're strong, fast. But we're also watched all day. There's no freedom. You stop for five minutes, and you lose points*." His comment reflects how performance is measured not by courage or autonomy but by compliance and speed, reframing masculinity through algorithmic discipline. Faisal added, "*This is man's work, but it doesn't feel like it. You carry food, get insulted, get paid little. It's not respect. It's survival.*"

These dynamics are particularly significant in the Turkish context, where breadwinner expectations and conservative family norms continue to shape dominant understandings of masculinity. Migrant men may consequently occupy a contradictory position: they are expected to demonstrate provision, responsibility, and resilience while simultaneously encountering migration-related exclusion and contested forms of social legitimacy (Çetin *et al.,* 2017; Özbay and Soybakış, 2020; Mahadevan *et al.,* 2023; Moghadam, 2024). Within such contested discursive environments, migrant men may also be positioned in contradictory ways, as threats, dependents, or unsuccessful breadwinners, while continuing to face expectations of masculine responsibility and resilience (Kelkar, 2022; Öcal *et al.,* 2024). Rather than representing stable identities transferred unchanged from countries of origin, the findings therefore show migrant masculinities as relational and continuously negotiated through precarious work, migration-related exclusion, and changing forms of social and technological evaluation.

Participants often likened the algorithm to an invisible supervisor whose decisions are final and unaccountable. Over time, such algorithmic and customer-driven feedback loops foster a

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form of behavioural conformity that becomes deeply internalized. Several participants described obsessively checking their dashboards, apologizing to the system for penalties, and modifying their behaviours to avoid algorithmic punishment. As Serdar put it, "*When it says 'low performance,' I feel ashamed, like I disappointed someone real*."

Participants' accounts suggest that continuous monitoring and performance metrics became intertwined with how some workers evaluated themselves as men. Speed, completion rates, customer ratings, and other indicators were not experienced merely as measures of work performance; for participants already negotiating expectations of breadwinning, reliability, and masculine competence, these metrics could also acquire meanings associated with personal worth. As Omar explained, "*The app tells you who you are: if you're late, you're lazy; if you cancel, you're unreliable.*" Faisal similarly reflected, "*You start to think like the app...you measure yourself by numbers.*"

These accounts illustrate what this study describes as "metrics-driven masculinity": the process through which existing expectations of masculine competence, responsibility, endurance, and breadwinning become intertwined with platform-generated indicators of performance. The term does not suggest that technology independently produces a new form of masculinity. Rather, ratings, customer evaluations, speed, and productivity acquire gendered significance through their interaction with pre-existing masculine expectations, organizational practices, customer judgments, and workers' own interpretations of success and failure. Metrics-driven masculinity is therefore treated here as an empirical manifestation of broader human–technology relations rather than as an autonomous form of masculinity generated by the platform itself.

Taken together, these findings highlight the contradictory position occupied by migrant men within platform work. Participants remained subject to strong expectations concerning breadwinning, endurance, responsibility, and emotional control, while their ability to fulfil these expectations was constrained by migration-related disadvantage, insecure employment, language barriers, customer judgments, and algorithmically mediated forms of evaluation. Workplace inequality therefore emerged through the interaction of gender, migration status, ethnicity, labour precarity, and socio-technical forms of governance rather than through any single dimension alone. The findings consequently retain masculinity as an important analytical dimension while locating it within the broader human–technology relations through which recognition, opportunity, and exclusion were experienced.

Theme 3: Integration Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

This theme explores how migrant delivery workers navigated overlapping forms of exclusion while developing collective and individual strategies of adaptation. Their accounts show how exclusion was experienced across customer interactions, workplace relations, and algorithmically mediated platform processes, while also demonstrating how informal networks and tactical uses of platform flexibility allowed them to endure precarity and regain limited control over their working lives. These responses are particularly important for understanding solidarity because they show how workers created mutual support within, and partly in response to, socio-technical arrangements that they perceived as offering limited protection, voice, or opportunities for contestation.

Informal Solidarity Networks

Against this backdrop of isolation, workers built small yet resilient communities. WhatsApp and Telegram groups served as vital spaces for coordination and emotional support. Karim called them "*our digital cafés…we complain, share routes, warn each other about police or bad customers."* Through these informal networks, riders collectively addressed everyday

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problems, borrowing each other's bikes after breakdowns and, in some cases, exchanging accounts when one was suspended.

These everyday acts of cooperation fostered a fragile but meaningful sense of belonging and provided a counterweight to the isolation experienced by many participants. As Farid explained, "*When nobody protects us, we protect each other."* His statement captures the horizontal character of these practices: in the absence of support that workers considered sufficient, participants relied on one another for information, practical assistance, and emotional support.

These practices are consistent with research showing that platform workers can develop forms of mutual assistance, information sharing, and collective coping despite the individualized and algorithmically managed organization of platform work (Boyacı, 2020; Çağatay *et al.,* 2023; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020; Schaupp, 2022; Cini, 2022). Rather than treating these practices as evidence of a new form of solidarity, the findings show how existing forms of worker solidarity acquire particular significance in platform settings where workers have limited formal opportunities for voice, representation, and support. For participants in this study, informal networks provided everyday forms of recognition, belonging, and practical assistance alongside their role in navigating platform control.

Rather than representing only overt forms of resistance, these practices illustrate everyday solidarity through which migrant workers generated recognition, belonging, and mutual support. They can therefore be understood as providing informal experiences of inclusion and reciprocity where participants perceived formal organizational support to be limited.

At the same time, workers' capacity to support one another should not be understood as a substitute for organizational responsibility. Farid's statement, "*When nobody protects us, we protect each other*" is revealing precisely because it links horizontal solidarity to a perceived absence of protection. The mutual support developed by workers responded to conditions partly structured through task-allocation systems, ratings, performance measures, platform rules, and limited possibilities for contesting decisions.

Strategic Use of Platform Flexibility

While platform rhetoric emphasizes freedom and flexibility, workers described using these features strategically to manage insecurity. Many switched between delivery platforms to stabilize their income or adjusted working hours according to weather conditions, traffic patterns, and household needs. Aziz described this constant calibration: "*I plan my day like a trader…if it rains, I go early; if it's slow, I log off and save energy."* Flexibility thus became less a straightforward benefit provided by the platform than a worker-developed strategy for reducing vulnerability. Yet this autonomy remained precarious: changes in platform rules or performance requirements could disrupt workers' planning, demonstrating that their control over working time remained conditional.

These practices demonstrate that workers were not passive recipients of algorithmic control. Rather, they exercised limited agency by adapting their working patterns within the constraints established by platform systems. At the same time, such adaptation did not remove the structural asymmetry identified in Theme 1, because workers' room for manoeuvre remained dependent on platform rules that they had limited capacity to influence or contest.

Adaptive Strategies and Micro-Resilience

Beyond collective solidarity, participants displayed forms of micro-resilience through small adjustments that helped them maintain a degree of control and dignity. Some learned to anticipate what they understood as the algorithm's rhythms, timing log-ins in an attempt to secure better order flow; others described bending platform rules, including sharing accounts among friends following deactivation. As Youssef noted, "*We play by the rules, but we also*

learn how to stay alive inside them." Through endurance, improvisation, and quiet cooperation, migrant couriers carved out limited spaces of agency within working arrangements that they otherwise experienced as highly constraining.

Taken together, these findings show that migrant workers responded to platform precarity through a combination of mutual support, strategic adaptation, and limited forms of everyday agency. Existing research has demonstrated that platform workers can develop solidarity and collective practices despite individualized and algorithmically managed working conditions (Yu *et al.,* 2022; Cini, 2022). The findings extend this discussion more modestly by showing how solidarity among migrant platform workers develops within socio-technical conditions that workers have limited capacity to influence. Horizontal mutual support can generate recognition, belonging, and practical assistance, while leaving the structural conditions that make such support necessary largely unchanged.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to EDI and platform-work scholarship by showing how inclusion and exclusion in algorithmically managed work are produced through human–technology interrelations rather than by technological systems or human actors alone. The findings demonstrate how consequential workplace outcomes emerge through the interaction of platform infrastructures, organizational rules, customer judgments, and workers' social positions. This perspective foregrounds responsibility as a central EDI concern: when unequal outcomes are experienced as decisions made by "the system," the human and organizational responsibility embedded in the design, implementation, and governance of these systems may become obscured.

Within this broader contribution, the study also shows how platform-generated measures of performance become intertwined with migrant men's existing expectations of breadwinning, responsibility, endurance, and masculine competence. This study describes this empirical process as "metrics-driven masculinity." Rather than proposing technology as an autonomous producer of a new masculinity, the concept captures how ratings, customer evaluations, speed, visibility, and productivity acquire gendered meanings through their interaction with pre-existing masculine expectations, organizational practices, and workers' interpretations of success and failure.

Finally, the study contributes to discussions of solidarity by showing how informal mutual support among migrant workers coexists with socio-technical arrangements that shape inclusion and exclusion. Informal networks can provide recognition, belonging, information, and practical assistance, but they should not be treated as substitutes for organizational responsibility. The findings therefore extend existing understandings of solidarity by highlighting how horizontal worker support coexists with the broader workplace conditions that make such support necessary.

The findings also have important practical implications for platform organizations, EDI practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors. For platform companies, regular reviews of task-allocation systems, customer ratings, waiting-time patterns, performance metrics, bonus criteria, and access to priority or supervisory opportunities may help identify whether apparently neutral systems generate systematically different outcomes for migrant workers. Importantly, responsibility for such outcomes should not be displaced onto "the algorithm." Platform organizations remain responsible for how algorithmic systems are designed, configured, implemented, monitored, and revised, as well as for how customer evaluations and other human inputs are incorporated into consequential workplace decisions.

Platform companies should therefore complement transparency with meaningful opportunities for worker voice and contestation. Multilingual communication channels, translation-supported grievance procedures, accessible explanations of consequential decisions,

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and mechanisms through which workers can question ratings, task allocation, penalties, or performance evaluations may strengthen participation and procedural fairness. Research on algorithmic management similarly emphasizes the importance of transparency, human review, worker involvement, and mechanisms for contesting algorithmically mediated decisions (Veale *et al.,* 2023), while recent evidence highlights worker participation and transparency as important safeguards in algorithmically managed work (Bowdler *et al.,* 2025).

For EDI practitioners, the findings highlight the importance of migrant-sensitive and intersectional inclusion frameworks that recognize how migration status, ethnicity, language, gender expectations, customer interactions, and algorithmic evaluation may combine to shape access to work, recognition, and progression. This also means treating rankings, ratings, waiting times, and prioritization criteria as potential EDI issues rather than as purely technical features of platform management.

For policymakers, stronger labour protections, anti-discrimination oversight, requirements for algorithmic transparency, meaningful human review, and procedures through which workers can challenge consequential platform decisions may help reduce cumulative forms of exclusion. Regulatory scholarship has likewise emphasized the need for stronger ex ante and ex post transparency and accountable review of algorithmically mediated workplace decisions (Veale *et al.,* 2023).

Finally, civil society organizations may continue to strengthen peer-support initiatives, mentoring programmes, worker networks, and community-based forms of assistance that reduce isolation and support belonging. However, such horizontal solidarity should complement rather than replace organizational and regulatory responsibility for fair and contestable workplace systems. Research on platform worker mobilization similarly shows that supportive communities and collective solidarities can help workers respond to algorithmic control, while remaining shaped by broader structural conditions (Cini, 2022).

Conclusion

This study contributes to debates on masculinity, migration, platform work, and EDI by showing how male migrant workers in Turkey experience inclusion, exclusion, and recognition through socio-technical arrangements. Task allocation, customer evaluations, ratings, performance metrics, and access to opportunities are experienced not as products of technology alone, but as outcomes shaped through the interaction of technological systems, organizational rules, customer judgments, and workers' social positions.

Within these arrangements, migrant men negotiated tensions between expectations of breadwinning, responsibility, and masculine competence and migration-related disadvantage, language barriers, insecure employment, customer bias, and limited opportunities for recognition. Platform-generated metrics also became meaningful to some participants as measures of competence, reliability, and masculine worth. This study describes this process as 'metrics-driven masculinity,' illustrating how existing masculine expectations become intertwined with ratings, evaluations, visibility, speed, and productivity.

Migrant workers also responded to exclusion through informal solidarity, strategic adaptation, and everyday mutual support, which provided recognition, belonging, information, and practical assistance. However, these practices did not remove the structural inequalities that made such support necessary, and horizontal solidarity should therefore not substitute for organizational responsibility.

More broadly, the study identifies responsibility as a central EDI issue in algorithmically managed work. When consequential workplace outcomes appear to be decisions made by "the system," responsibility for inclusion and exclusion may become obscured. Solidarity and inclusion therefore require attention not only to relations among workers but also to the

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responsibilities of platform organizations and other human actors for the socio-technical systems through which work is allocated, evaluated, and governed.

Future research should examine how different platform regimes, organizational arrangements, and migration contexts shape human–technology relations, migrant masculinities, responsibility, and solidarity across Global South and Global North settings.

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Pseudonym	Age	Courier Work Experience (Months)	Country of Origin	Family Status	Education Level
Amir	42	15	Iran	Married with children	Primary
Omar	35	27	Syria	Married with children	High School
Aziz	34	30	Uzbekistan	Single	Secondary
Murat	25	16	Turkmenistan	Living with family	High School
Khaled	36	31	Syria	Married with children	High School
Samir	38	27	Syria	Married with children	High School
Serdar	41	23	Turkmenistan	Married with children	High School
Elvin	39	34	Azerbaijan	Married with children	Primary
Imran	48	48	Pakistan	Married with children	High School
Nabil	27	45	Syria	Living with family	Secondary
Reza	27	16	Iran	Married with children	Primary
Hassan	33	24	Syria	Living with family	University
Faisal	40	39	Pakistan	Married with children	Primary
Farid	26	28	Iran	Living with family	Secondary
Youssef	39	36	Syria	Married with children	High School
Adil	22	8	Pakistan	Living with family	Primary
Kerim	24	33	Turkmenistan	Single	Secondary
Ahmad	47	13	Afghanistan	Married with children	High School
Rashad	35	29	Azerbaijan	Married with children	Secondary
Karim	40	32	Syria	Married with children	University
Batyr	30	37	Turkmenistan	Single	Secondary
Tariq	46	21	Pakistan	Living with family	High School
Rami	30	27	Syria	Married with children	University
Basel	28	23	Syria	Living with family	Secondary
Ali	43	17	Iraq	Married with children	High School
Haider	39	35	Iraq	Married with children	Secondary
Bekzod	22	30	Uzbekistan	Single	Primary

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Table 1. Participant Demographics

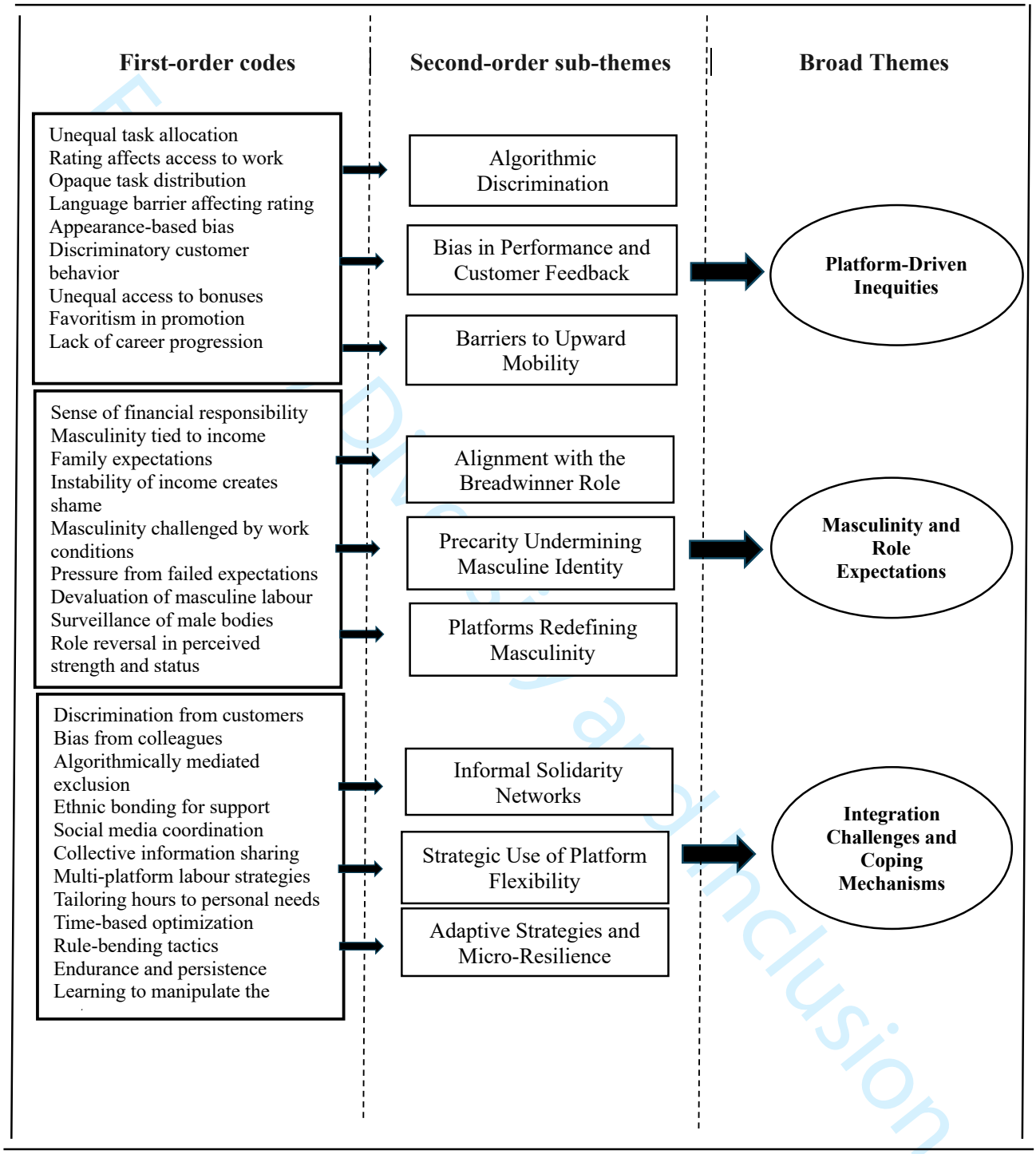


Figure 1. Thematic Map of Migrant Men's Experiences

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Pseudonym	Age	Courier Work Experience (Months)	Country of Origin	Family Status	Education Level
Amir	42	15	Iran	Married with children	Primary
Omar	35	27	Syria	Married with children	High School
Aziz	34	30	Uzbekistan	Single	Secondary
Murat	25	16	Turkmenistan	Living with family	High School
Khaled	36	31	Syria	Married with children	High School
Samir	38	27	Syria	Married with children	High School
Serdar	41	23	Turkmenistan	Married with children	High School
Elvin	39	34	Azerbaijan	Married with children	Primary
Imran	48	48	Pakistan	Married with children	High School
Nabil	27	45	Syria	Living with family	Secondary
Reza	27	16	Iran	Married with children	Primary
Hassan	33	24	Syria	Living with family	University
Faisal	40	39	Pakistan	Married with children	Primary
Farid	26	28	Iran	Living with family	Secondary
Youssef	39	36	Syria	Married with children	High School
Adil	22	8	Pakistan	Living with family	Primary
Kerim	24	33	Turkmenistan	Single	Secondary
Ahmad	47	13	Afghanistan	Married with children	High School
Rashad	35	29	Azerbaijan	Married with children	Secondary
Karim	40	32	Syria	Married with children	University
Batyr	30	37	Turkmenistan	Single	Secondary
Tariq	46	21	Pakistan	Living with family	High School
Rami	30	27	Syria	Married with children	University
Basel	28	23	Syria	Living with family	Secondary
Ali	43	17	Iraq	Married with children	High School
Haider	39	35	Iraq	Married with children	Secondary
Bekzod	22	30	Uzbekistan	Single	Primary

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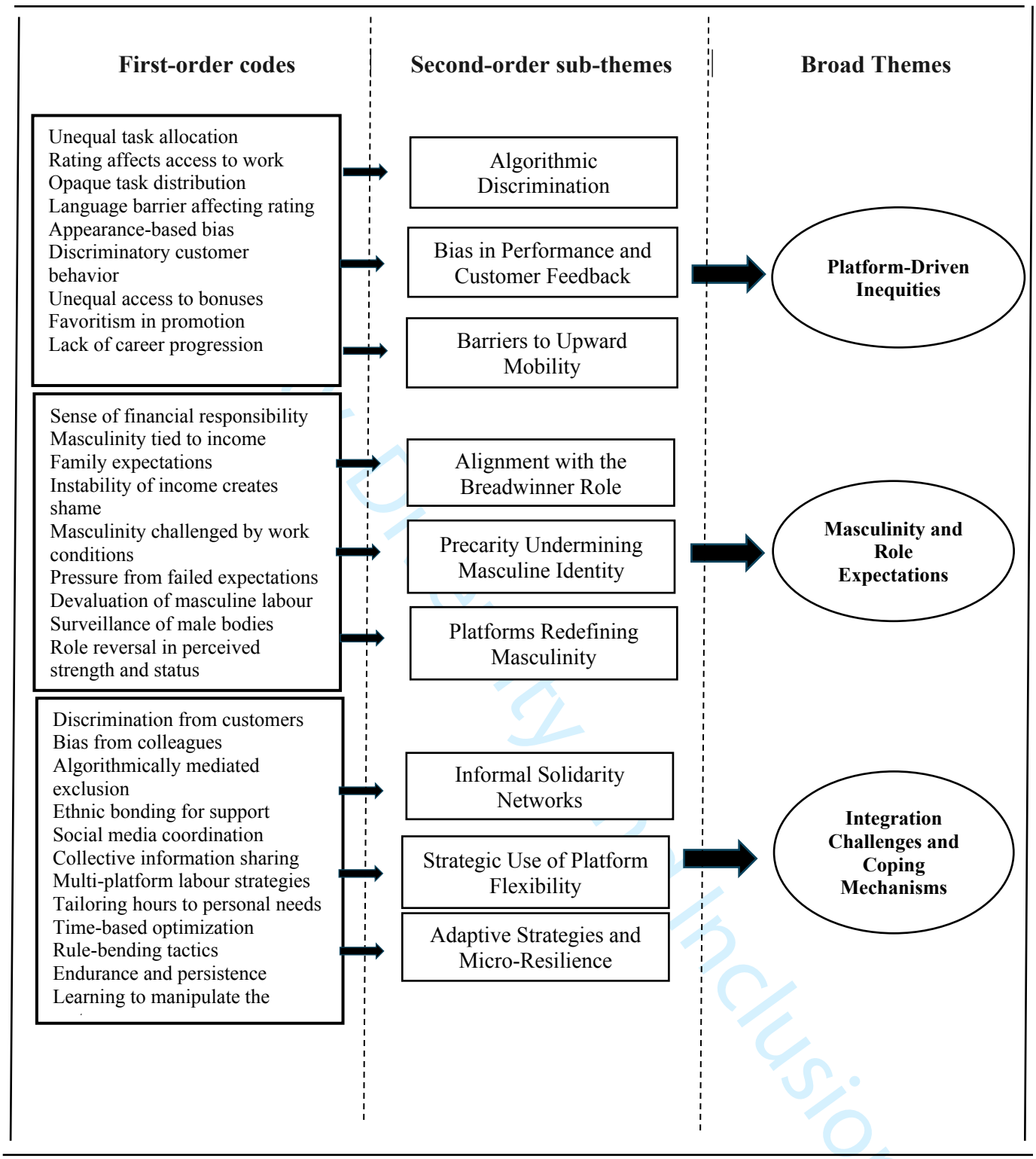


Figure 1. Thematic Map of Migrant Men's Experiences

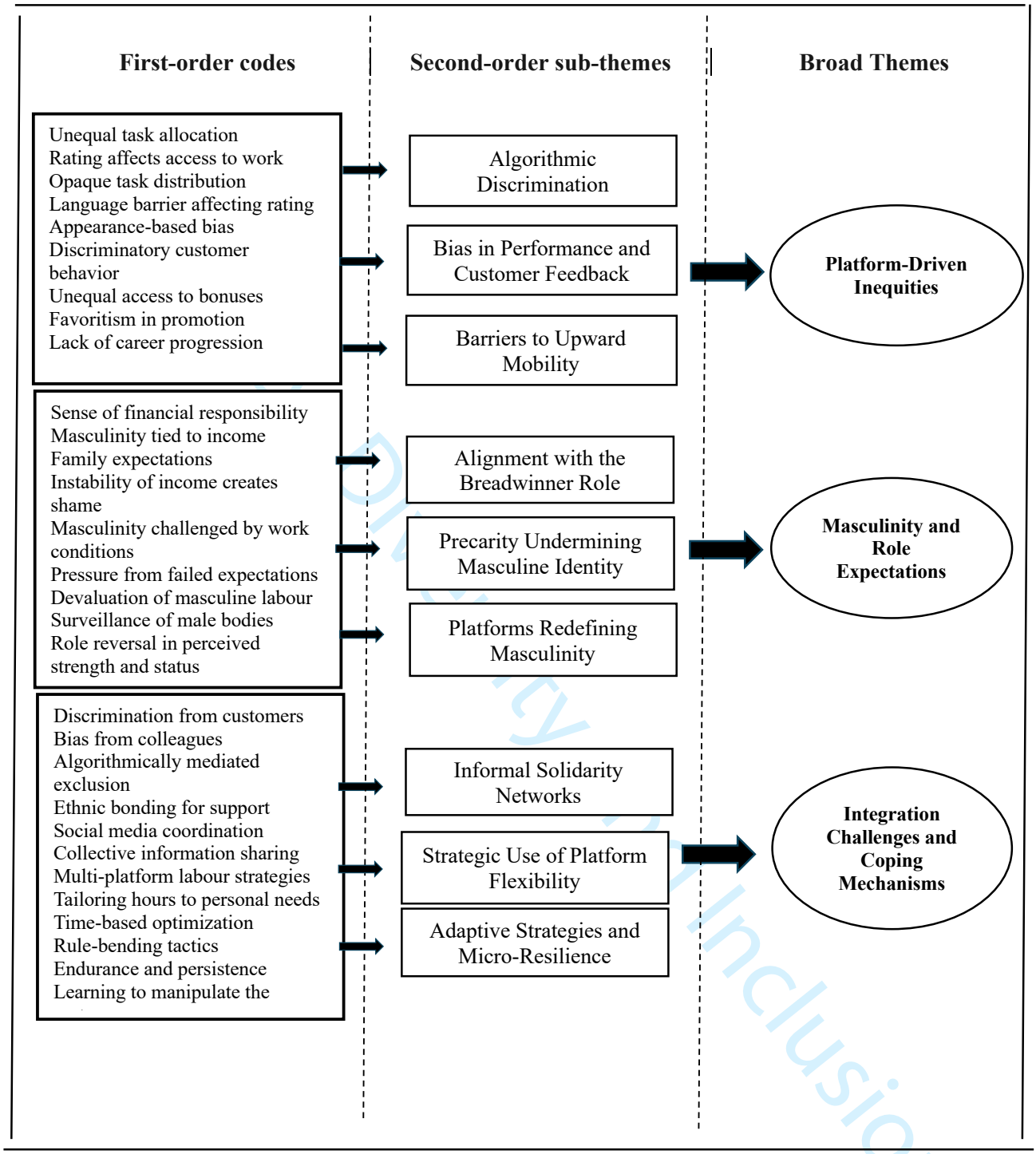


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