



# DELIVERY RIDERS FIGHT DIGITAL EXPLOITATION

In Italy, food delivery riders working for Glovo (operating in Italy as Foodinho) suspected something was off. Their shifts were mysteriously cut, accounts suspended without warning, and earnings fluctuated with no explanation. The culprit, the app itself.

In an innovative investigation led by the tech-activist collective Reversing.Works, a team of engineers and researchers uncovered how Glovo's app used hidden performance scores, constant location tracking, and automated decisions to control its workforce. They then brought their evidence directly to Italy's Data Protection Authority. The result in 2024: a €5 million fine against Glovo, an order to stop location tracking, and to introduce human oversight into automated decisions, as well as provide greater transparency to workers.

## Story by reversing.works

Our investigation began with a single rider who had left the platform but wanted to expose its inner workings. We used our technical skills and tools to reveal how the app ranked and penalised workers. We found that workers were being watched even when they weren't working. Their data was being shared with third parties, and decisions about their jobs and incomes were made by machines, with no way to challenge them.

Over time we also realised the importance of partnering with grassroots worker organisations and building trust in communities often overlooked by regulators.

*"I spent a year following riders, and I even worked as one of them, collecting dozens of testimonies about what it truly means to work on the ground. They all felt constantly monitored: they received targeted promotions and were pressured to deliver as fast as possible. The analysis conducted by Reversing.Works gave scientific backing to their lived experience, helping us understand how the algorithm and the platform's data collection operate behind the curtains."* - Rosita Rijtano, investigative journalist and author of *Insubordinati*, an investigative book about riders

Some workers told us that just knowing someone is investigating these practices gives them hope. It's a signal that institutions are starting to take their treatment seriously.

## A WIN FOR THE GIG ECONOMY

This wasn't just a win for a handful of riders, but for the gig economy across Europe. The case has since been cited by trade unions, researchers, and digital rights advocates as a milestone in the fight against exploitation through digital platforms. Other organisations have already used our materials to educate policymakers, unionists, and digital rights advocates about workers' rights in the gig economy.

*"Trade unions need to take advantage of reverse engineering techniques that have shown to bring useful techno-legal evidence"* - Ponce Aida, senior researcher at ETUI, and coordinator of the report: "Exercising workers' rights in algorithmic management systems"

# THE ROLE OF DFF

DFF played a key role in supporting the project. As well as DFF funding the project, we also attended the DFF litigation retreat in Lisbon in 2023, which helped us refine our strategy and connect with others working at the intersection of technology and justice.

## LOOKING FORWARD

This case has pushed the boundaries of what “digital rights” work looks like. We were able to show that reverse engineering is not unlawful and can be a tool to uncover rights violations. But not everyone has caught up and many digital rights funders and organisations don’t see labour rights as part of their mandate. While the case has inspired new energy and promising collaboration, to make lasting change the digital rights community needs to take workers seriously, not just as users of technology, but as subjects of digital power.

We are now trying to scale our approach across Europe, thanks to additional funding from DFF and new funding from the European AI & Society Fund. We’ve developed tools that allow workers to collect data from platform apps on their own phones. Workshops are underway in multiple countries, and a public handbook is in development. The goal is to build a network of tech-savvy workers and activists who can challenge digital platform control from the ground up.

For us at Reversing.Works, this isn’t just about one company, it’s about an entire industry built on surveillance and control. We need to expose the scale of the problem and make it impossible to ignore before we can fix it.



**Reversing.Works**

**DFF** Digital Freedom Fund