



Rover perspectives on the Platform Working Economy

About Rover

Rover provides a website and app used by animal lovers who would like to offer or find traditional neighbourhood pet care—such as pet sitting or dog walking—in their community.

People who want to take care of pets where they live use the platform to list their preferences and prices and to help manage the kind of pet care they want to provide. Meanwhile, pet parents visit our platform to find people who live nearby, ask them directly whether they are interested and available to take care of their pet, and if so, arrange and pay for the pet care.

Our company was founded in the United States in 2011. Today, we are privileged and grateful that pet lovers are using our website and app across six EU Member States, namely France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden.

Rover and the Platform Working Economy

The position of Rover in the platform industry is unique and we believe that Rover should be categorised, from a regulatory perspective, in a different way. Therefore, we at Rover have taken a keen interest in the EU's upcoming platform workers initiative.

The Rover model is a directory/booking model, which is different from the models adopted by many platforms. This model is a user-directed, community-driven experience.

For example, while many platforms quickly match service requesters with service providers or send "jobs" to service providers without allowing conversation or decision-making between the two parties before a service is scheduled, the Rover community uses our platform as a business directory and booking/communication tool: Pet parents search and find profiles (i.e., directory listings) of pet lovers who have chosen to list their profile on the platform; from there, the pet parent messages the potential pet caretaker to ask whether they are interested and available to take care of a pet. The potential pet caretaker and pet parent can then communicate with each other and decide together whether to arrange for the pet care: they can discuss and negotiate the timing, pricing, care expectations, and other considerations. This choice-oriented, flexible approach is especially important for pet care, where communication and transparent decision-making is necessary to create good experiences for pet parents, pet caregivers, and pets.

People who use Rover.com and provide pet care set the terms of their own offerings, including setting their own rates, and they are free to respond to pet parents' requests as they choose without any required "waiting times" between services or other controls. They offer pet care as little or as often as they wish. For example, from June to December 2019,



the more than 8,100 pet lovers in the EU offering pet sitting/walking chose to provide on average about 5 services for under €260 in side income. Those extra earnings matter, to individuals, families, and to local economies: during that 6-month period, people who used Rover and provided pet care collectively took home approximately €2.1 million. Along the way, about 20,500 pet parents found care for their pets, and more than 22,400 pets received the care they needed.

Unlike other platforms (such as rideshare platforms), Rover did not create a new type of work or industry or a new way of working—the type of pet sitting or dog walking that is offered by people using Rover is the same type of pet sitting and dog walking that has always been part of neighbourhood life. Rover merely seeks to support and elevate this tradition to improve pet care experiences for people and pets.

Given the existing tradition and availability of neighbourhood pet care (through acquaintances, bulletin board flyers, and other sources offering pet sitting and dog walking), Rover community members are very much *choosing* to use Rover instead of the informal economy of neighbourhood pet care. They are not dependent on a platform to provide services, but rather decide to leverage Rover.com because of advantages such as 24-7 access to Rover staff, secure payment transfer, and built-in tools to make finding and offering traditional neighbourhood pet care a better experience than it would be without the platform's accessibility, visibility, and accountability.

As part of that accountability, Rover recognizes that operating in the EU is a privilege, and we have a proven history of proactive compliance—including in fulfilment of tax responsibility—in the EU. For example, we remit VAT via MOSS on Rover's VAT-inclusive fees. Since the launch of our platform in the EU in 2018, Rover has remitted €525,000 in VAT related to our fees to EU customers. We are also aware of and plan to comply with the new EU DAC 7 platform information reporting requirements, which will provide additional transparency and accountability for neighbourhood pet care.

As a company that has designed and modified our platform to reflect the preferences and priorities of people who want to take care of pets in their community, Rover supports the European Commission's overall intention to establish a fairer platform economy for workers. At the same time, we believe that the way Rover operates is different in important ways from many other platforms. We hope to be a constructive partner with the European Union so that we can exchange views on several key platform economy questions that are important to us. We are particularly interested in issues related to platform categorisation and worker classification. You can find an outline of some of our key positions below.

Platform categorisation

The diverse nature of platforms requires bespoke regulatory frameworks which are relevant to the services being offered and the platform's model.



The level of autonomy that people possess while using a platform should be taken into consideration when categorising platforms

Rover enables users to maintain control over what services they offer, pricing for those services and personal availability (all of which they can change at any time). In direct communication with local pet parents, Rover's users decide for themselves which requests they prefer to accept and which ones to decline, arranging for services directly with the clients they accept, and much more. This direct communication enables and encourages personal relationships and repeat business between pet caretakers and pet parents, because for pets who are often viewed as members of the family, pet caretakers are not fungible.

By contrast, most other marketplace platforms (like many rideshare or delivery models) assign "jobs" to users providing services and prevent direct communication between service providers and their clients. They also control the pricing for their users' services, imposing non-negotiable rates. By contrast, marketplace platforms like Rover offer a model that enables users to set the prices they want to charge for their services and to modify them for individual clients—as truly independent contractors have always done.

As such, care should be taken to distinguish among platforms in order to address the open approach taken by platforms such as Rover and avoid subjecting these platforms to the broad legislative obligations intended to address the way that other platforms in the sector at large operate.

Worker classification

Classifying workers as independent contractors is more appropriate for some platforms than others.

Correct worker classification is of major importance in protecting the ability for Rover users to work independently and under their own conditions. The freedom and flexibility offered by our platform allows users to offer services as little or as often as they wish, without required "waiting times" between jobs or other controls.

For Rover, this autonomy is key because many individuals providing this type of neighbourhood pet care already have full-time or part-time professions, academic schedules, or family commitments. Unlike driving a car or shopping for groceries, watching a dog in your own home can be done simultaneously while performing other work or tasks.

Considering this, categorising users on a platform like Rover as independent contractors seems appropriate. Here again, we believe that it is important to recognise that there are significantly different business models and worker relationships within the platform economy. This is also something to consider in terms of portable benefits obligations for companies. The introduction of such obligations may be appropriate for some platforms, for



example in the rideshare sector, but less appropriate for platforms like Rover that offer a more flexible relationship between users.

Rover hopes that legislation can protect against the inappropriate misclassification of employees, while also protecting the freedom and flexibility of independent animal care providers who offer homebased, pet care services on an occasional basis.

Looking ahead

Rover would like to reiterate our support for the European Commission's work in establishing a fairer platform economy for workers. The European Commission's upcoming proposal on the platform economy is an important step, and Rover looks forward to contributing to discussions with all interested stakeholders on the proposal in order to develop an equitable and sustainable regulatory framework for the platform economy and its workers across the EU. Rover hopes that some of our key issues can be taken into account, considering the heterogeneity of the platform economy market, and we are at your disposal for any future discussions surrounding these issues.