

Shaping platform policy and worker rights –
An introduction to global best practices

Introduction to the Platform Economy

Facilitator's Notes

Time needed: 1 hour

Aim

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the key features of platform work
- Explain the positive and negative impacts of the platform economy on workers
- Identify the regulatory gaps in the platform economy.

Before delivering the training read the Trainer Resource Sheet for further details. It provides an overview of the key terms and ideas that should be discussed during this session and provides the grounding to answer participant questions with confidence.

Activity Instructions



[Learn]



10 minutes

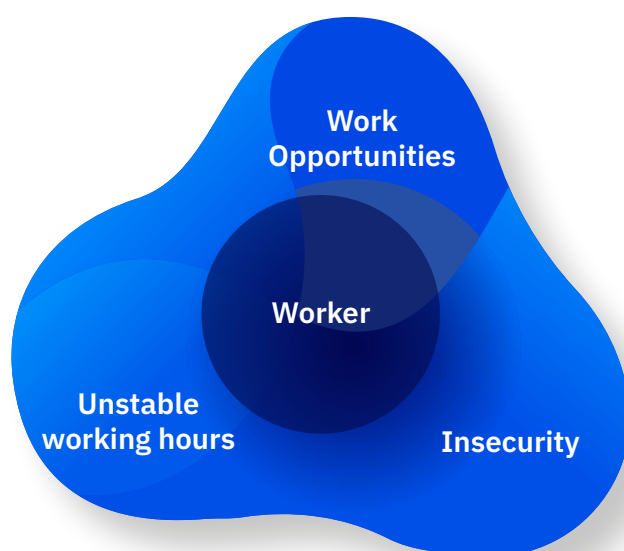
1. Welcome participants, introduce the learning aims and distribute the Handout Sheet ( Slide 2)
2. Present slides on the key characteristics of platform work ( Slides 3-5).
Highlight the following key points:
 - In standard employment workers **work a predetermined number of hours over the working week and typically have access to social protection and training opportunities.**
 - But the growth of other forms of work like platform work is shaping global labour markets and **increasing insecurity and precarity at work for many workers.**
 - Key features of platform work include **short-term working arrangements based on matching customers and workers, non-standard work outside the formal employment relationship, and mediation of work through a digital platform.**



[Engage – Mapping Exercise]

 35 minutes

3. Divide the participants into small groups and give each group a flipchart and marker pens ( **Slide 6**).
4. Ask each group to think about a platform worker that they know. This could be a platform worker in the ride-hailing sector, or in another sector of the platform economy. Facilitators should ask one or two groups to specifically focus on a woman platform worker.
5. Ask each group to develop a short description of the platform worker including their age, gender, work sector and occupation. Ask the groups to write the information on a coloured card and to stick this to the centre of the flipchart.
6. Once the groups have completed this task, ask each group to draw a mind-map of the main impacts (both positive and negative) that they think working in the platform economy has on this worker on the flipchart around the coloured cards (see example) ( **Slide 7**).



7. Ask each group to discuss the following questions ( **Slide 8**):
 - a. What benefits or opportunities does the platform economy provide for this worker?
 - b. How do the different features of platform work negatively impact this worker? Consider:
 - i. Working conditions
 - ii. Pay
 - iii. Data and Algorithms
 - iv. Social protection
 - v. Safety at Work
 - vi. Organisation and representation
 - vii. Legal status
 - c. What specific impacts do these features also have on women, migrants or other marginalised groups?



[Summarise]



5 minutes

8. Ask each group to present the main points from their discussion.
9. Once each group has presented, Summarise the main points and highlight any gaps that have been missed (📄 **Slides 8 - 9**). Relate the participants proposals to the following key messages:
- Work in your country is being transformed by the rise of the platform economy, creating **flexible working opportunities and lowering entry barriers to the labour market**.
 - **Digital platform work (cloudwork)** offers access to the planetary labour market – meaning job opportunities are no longer restricted by geographical location and that workers can be connected to clients across the globe
 - These features make it **attractive for vulnerable groups such as women and migrants** who might be restricted from accessing the traditional labour market due to care responsibilities, societal norms and standards, lack of papers or recognition of qualifications.
 - But platform workers also face **weak labour rights and protections and are exposed to income shortages and instability and insecurity**.
 - **Women and migrant platform workers** often face multiple forms of exposure to instability and insecurity.
 - Platform workers have **short-term and insecure working arrangements with limited access to social protection, training opportunities and without employment contracts**.
 - Platform workers are mainly **classified as independent contractors**, despite **reliance on platforms for their livelihood and facing control and supervision in their work**.



[Learn – Fair Work Principles]



10 minutes

10. With the platform economy outpacing current regulatory frameworks there is a need to define decent and fair working conditions for this sector. The **Fair Work Principles** can be used as a guideline for the key areas of fair working conditions that platform workers should expect. (📄 **Slide 10**).

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Introduction to the Platform Economy

Trainer Resource Sheet

Please read this sheet before conducting the training. It provides both general information introducing trainers to the topic and also more specific details that can be used in guiding the activities.

Key Definitions

- **Digital labour platforms** – software and technology that are used to run business operations. They are often described as ‘gig work’, on-demand platforms, or more generally as digital labour platforms, where the main unit of transaction is “labour”. The relationship between the worker and the customer/client is digitally mediated. This process collects data, which is used to feed algorithms to determine everything from job allocation to payment amount.
- **Standard employment** - full time, continuous and involving a direct relationship between and employee and employer. Workers have rights and protections such as predetermined hours, access to social protection, training opportunities, contractual relationships with one employer at a time and the right to join unions and collectively bargain.
- **Non-standard employment** - workers have no guarantee of working hours, work times are not necessarily stipulated, limited/no access to social protection, may engage multiple contracting parties at once and mostly do not have the right to collectively bargain.

This can include:

- **Temporary Employment** – work for a predefined period, undertaken on a fixed-term, project, or task-based contract, sometimes for an extremely short period of time.
- **Standard self-employment** – an individual working on their own account, either with one or several partners or in a co-operative. Self-employed determine their own working times and determine their pay rates. Self-employed workers depend on profits derived from the goods and services they produce and provide. It might include employers, own-account workers, members of producers’ cooperatives, unpaid family workers.
- **Dependent self-employment** – workers are classified as ‘self-employed’ despite being dependent on and controlled by a single client.
- **Part-time work** – less than 30 hours per week, including ‘on-call’ work.
- **Agency work** – employment agencies act as intermediaries, employing workers and outsourcing their services to companies needing temporary staff.
- **Informal work** – work not covered by formal arrangements such as employment, taxation, social protection.

Activity Instructions



[Learn]

- In **standard employment** workers have rights and protections - access to social protection, training opportunities, contractual relationships with one employer at a time, and the right to join unions and bargain collectively.
 - Globally, **non-standard forms of employment** like platform work, are becoming increasingly common, enabled by changes and gaps in labour market regulation, technological developments and macro-economic factors. This has lowered barriers to labour markets whilst also contributing to poor working conditions and insecurity.
- The main features of platform work include:**
- Short-term working arrangements
 - Engagement in multiple relations facilitated by a central employer or 'application'
 - Limited access to social protection and training and upskilling opportunities
 - Gigs/tasks are mediated by the platform which connects workers with clients
 - An 'on call' or 'on demand' model where workers are given jobs when available
 - Payment by each completed job (piece rate)
 - Work transactions mediated by an algorithm: this includes task distribution, bonus payment and/or disciplinary measures (algorithmic management)
 - Workers are often classified as providers/partners/freelancers indicating a sense of independence
 - Cloudwork is not dependent on the location and is conducted purely online often involving client and provider relationships across borders.



[Engage – Mapping Exercise]

Dependent on your audience, the group may be very knowledgeable about platform work or know very little about the characteristics of platform work. Below is a list of potential challenges that might be identified and can be used to lead the summarizing discussion.

Key benefits that might be identified include:

- **Flexibility and autonomy** to choose when and how much to work allowing workers to set their own schedule
- **New income sources** either has an additional source of income 'side hustle' or as new job opportunity
- **Digital platform work (cloudwork)** offers access to the planetary labour market – meaning job opportunities are no longer restricted by geographical location and that workers can be connected to clients across the globe

- **Lowered entry barriers** with many platforms offering quick registration processes and the ability to work from home creating an easy entrance to the labour market
- These features make it **attractive for vulnerable groups such as women and migrants** who might be restricted from accessing the traditional labour market due to care responsibilities, societal norms and standards, lack of papers or recognition of qualifications.

Key challenges that might be identified include:

- **Lack of access to trade union rights, health and safety protections, and minimum wage rights**, due to workers being classified as self-employed or independent contractors
- **Livelihood insecurity and low earnings** due to short-term working arrangements, **lack of wage guarantees, and exclusion from minimum (or living) wage protections**

- The minimum wage is the amount per hour that workers legally have to be paid
 - The living wage is the amount that workers need to meet their basic costs of living.
 - **Lack of control over work** due to algorithmic management. Platforms rely on algorithms to manage work, which are used to determine wages and work performance expectations and can nudge workers to behave in certain ways (algorithmic nudging)
 - Algorithmic management may extend into issues of access to accounts and discipline
 - **No mechanisms to challenge unfair disciplinary or dismissal decisions**
 - **Weak or non-existent processes to enable consultation around disciplinary or dismissal decisions**
 - **Platforms and algorithms can worsen structural discrimination** which reinforces customer bias to choose certain workers, or penalizing platform workers who have to interrupt their work due to caring responsibilities, for example
 - **Occupational safety and health hazards** due to low standards and weak regulation, with women facing particular gendered risks
 - **Lack of investment in training opportunities** leaving workers unable to progress in their career
 - As **platform workers are not represented by unions and often lack collective power** they have challenges in organizing and formal representation at both firm and policy level.
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Gender

Platform work is often designed in a way that is primarily responsive to the needs and experiences of male workers. This normative design often results in the platform failing to recognise women's needs such as longer breaks (for children or personal hygiene), barriers in accessing digital technology and violence and discrimination threats at work. Platforms which do recognise gender difference have implemented **inclusive design features**.

Women's access to the platform economy is shaped by their often-unequal position in society. They might face unequal access to platform work due to a lack of access to and ownership of key resources needed to participate, a disproportionate burden of care and domestic work, as well as having fewer opportunities to develop their skills.



Fairwork Project

Fairwork is a research project that aims to set and measure fair standards for the future of work. Part of the Fairwork project focuses on rating working conditions in the platform economy. This is conducted through the **five given principles**.

Fairwork has developed principles for both location based and online based platform work. These **five principles** are applicable to all types of work, regardless of whether workers are classified as employees or independent contractors, and regardless of where and how they work:



Principle 1: Fair Pay

Workers, irrespective of their employment classification, should earn a decent income in their home jurisdiction after taking account of work-related costs and active hours worked. They should be paid on time, and for all work completed.



Principle 2: Fair Conditions

Platforms should have policies in place to protect workers from foundational risks arising from the processes of work, and should take proactive measures to protect and promote the health and safety of workers.



Principle 3: Fair Contracts

Terms and conditions should be transparent, concise, and always accessible to workers. The party contracting with the worker must be subject to local law and must be identified in the contract. Workers are notified of proposed changes in a reasonable timeframe before changes come into effect. The contract is free of clauses which unreasonably exclude liability on the part of the platform, and which prevent workers from seeking redress for grievances. Contracts should be consistent with the terms of workers' engagement on the platform.



Principle 4: Fair Management

There should be a documented due process for decisions affecting workers. Workers must have the ability to appeal decisions affecting them, such as disciplinary actions and deactivation, and be informed of the reasons behind those decisions. The use of algorithms is transparent and results in equitable outcomes for workers. There should be an identifiable and documented policy that ensures equity in the way workers are managed on a platform (for example, in the hiring, disciplining, or firing of workers).



Principle 5: Fair Representation

Platforms should provide a documented process through which worker voice can be expressed. Irrespective of their employment classification, workers have the right to organise in collective bodies, and platforms should be prepared to cooperate and negotiate with them.

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