



## GIG ECONOMY AROUND THE WORLD

RESHAPING WORK ONWARD  
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## INTRODUCTION

How does the experience of platform workers compare among workers in Argentina, the Netherlands and India? How many gig workers rely on multiple applications to generate full-time income? What is the median monthly wage on different platforms and across countries?

In the “[Gig Economy Around the World](#)”, a [Reshaping Work Onward](#) conference which brought 150+ leading academics, policymakers and advocates from a dozen countries, including India, South Africa, the Netherlands, Spain, and Argentina, these challenges were discussed and debated.

This report provides a synthesis of those discussions as well as preliminary findings of the [Platform Workers: Decent Rights & Pay project](#), led by [WageIndicator Foundation](#) and funded by [Instituut GAK](#).

For a detailed view of 1) Data from the surveys, 2) labour laws and basic rights for gig workers comparisons, and 3) social innovations on digital labour platforms [visit this dedicated page](#).

## DECENT RIGHTS AND PAY

One of the major criticisms attached to platform work at the moment is inadequate social protection and earnings. While this issue can be addressed from many different angles, what precedes it is adequate insight into workers’ true working conditions. In this regard we have three challenges.

The primary challenge according to experts lies in the information asymmetries. While platform owners are aware of who the workers are, how long they work through their platforms, and how much they earn, this information is not available to workers or policy makers. Thus, there is a role here for governments to acquire that data for evidence-based policy making, argues Janine Berg of International Labour Organisation (ILO). The example of New York City illustrates how this could work in practice. The New York City Transport and Limousine Commission required platforms to turn in the data and with that they were able to set minimum wages for contract workers. Should other cities follow this suit, we would be able to assess much more clearly whether the minimum wages are needed in the first place, and what they need to be to provide a decent living for platform workers and other independent contractors.

The second challenge relates to adequate social protections for platform workers. In this regard, it is important to first reflect on what we as a society want, and which basic protections we believe workers need to have, points Janine Berg of ILO. If we look at it from this perspective, then it becomes less important what employment status is, but whether platform workers are actually entitled to benefits that we all deem important.



The final challenge relates to the fact that we are often unaware of workers' true working conditions. Those who are the most vulnerable are often not in a position to ask for help or are unaware of the rights they should be entitled to.

The WageIndicator survey results, which mainly surveyed workers of on-location platforms (e.g. food delivery, ride-hailing), showed that the reality around the world is rather grim. Platform workers are struggling to make ends meet and often lack basic social protections such as pension, insurance and sick pay. If we draw from insights from India, we are talking about 3 million people that face these struggles, points Rupa Korde, Assistant Professor of Economics at Flame University in India.

We also see some country-level differences. One divide is the divide in work time. In the global South, most people work full time, while in the North they work mainly part time, which reflects on their job satisfaction. For instance, the Netherlands is a “happy country” - people work occasionally, part time, and they are happy with their pay. In Spain, platform workers work also predominantly part time but they are unsatisfied with the number of working hours they are able to get, as well as the compensation they receive. In India, on the other hand, many are working full time but are not satisfied with their pay. How can we make sense of this data, asks Jan Drahokoupil, Senior Researcher at the European Trade Institute (ETUI) in Brussels?

As he points out, ETUI's research finds that many workers would actually prefer to have fixed working hours, providing more predictability. This would allow them to plan their time better as well as their income prospects. As he argues, this can be explained by the degree of economic dependence on the platform. If workers are economically dependent on the platform, they will want to work full time. This explains why in the Netherlands, platform work is occasional work, used to complement existing income. Because the dependence is weak and workers don't depend economically on the platform to make ends meet, we see them being happier.

In conclusion, there needs to be greater transparency of platforms towards their workers as well as towards the society at large. The demographic data collected by the platforms along with workers' names and ratings can introduce discrimination based on class, gender as well as cast, points out Rupa Korde of Flame University in India. Thus, we need informative statistics in order to adequately evaluate the extent of the problem. This will also allow governments to step in in a time of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In India in particular many delivery riders were out of work due to the alarming pandemic situation in the country. In such cases the government needs to be aware of the problem in order to provide stronger social security support as well as compliance.

### Possible Policy Solutions

- Regulations in regards to data sharing by platforms for evidence-based policy making.
- Ensuring basic social protections that allow for decent living.



## GIG WORK ACROSS CONTINENTS

The gig economy is not so much an economic revolution as a new battlefield on which historic tensions between workers and employers play out. It is here to stay.

Historically, when due to the introduction of new technologies there is an imbalance of power, usually in favour of employers, the responses to rebalance the situation have come from: a) collective organization of workers, b) labour regulations to set the rules of the game for workers and employers, and c) the development of safety net mechanisms adapted to the new scenario. This time, with the introduction of gig platforms as intermediaries and organizers of the labour market, we can expect the same pattern.

Many experts voiced the need to collectively organize platform workers. Trade unions are seen as relevant but neither the only nor the more important mechanism nowadays. Self-organized groups per platform type are emerging everywhere. In countries like Spain and the Netherlands, bridges among traditional trade unions and new forms of representation have been created, but that's not the case in most of the countries.

Updating labour laws and safety net mechanisms, that in many cases were created pre-internet era, seem to be an urgent need for all countries and participants. The imbalance between traditional workers and workers in diverse forms of employment is apparent. Spain seems to be the country where self-employed people have better protections, as a result of a fixed minimum monthly contribution to social security. The current judicialization of the conflicts is far from being the best way to proceed. The demand is that the update of the law is forward thinking and flexible to accommodate current and near future labour scenarios equally protecting all workers. A perspective including portable benefits could be a scenario to explore.

A good number of people seem to prefer these new ways of working but at the same time they demand more and better protections. A fair combination of freedom, flexibility and security is the target to aim for. Platforms and governments can do more, as seen in many countries during the Covid-19 period.

### Possible Policy Recommendations

- For better and more informed debates, that can lead to smarter regulations, more data needs to be collected. The focus should be on workers in diverse forms of employment in general not only on platform workers.
- Migrants and women collectives, and their specific challenges, must be included for a complete picture of the gig workers.
- Regulators need to take in account cross-sectorial differences. Trying to address this reality as a homogeneous phenomenon can pose serious challenges.



- As labour debates tend to be at a national level, cross-country comparison and best practices exchanges provide a lot of new insights. This has been one of the more relevant contributions from these debates.
- It is critical to include workers and workers' associations directly in the debates.
- Policy makers might consider minimum wage standards or similar regulation that may protect workers' lives and livelihoods.

## INSIGHTS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

### Argentina

The breakout room hosted academics (Elina Beatriz Escudero, UBA), labour law specialists (Juan Manuel Ottaviano) and a platform worker (Maximiliano Martínez, Glovo worker).

#### Key considerations:

- Shortage of official statistics about platform work in Argentina. Just a few studies with different scopes and definitions.
- Lack of effective regulation despite numerous debates in the Parliament.
- Not all platforms are equal and that should be part of the debate.
- No visible platform cooperative or socially-oriented platforms are present in Argentina.

### India

The breakout room hosted Zothan Mawii (Research Fellow at Tandem Research), Ms. Salonie Muralidhara Hiriyyur (Senior Coordinator at SEWA Cooperative Federation) and Bhaskar Pant (Partner at Policy Monks).

#### Key considerations:

- The recently updated Code on Social Security in India seems insufficient to address gig workers' needs. There is a need for an ethical model of platform work to be lobbied for.
- There is a lack of information around the gendered impact of the gig economy, both from research and general media. Gig work is often presented as "*fit for women*" because its flexibility allows them to take care of family duties.
- The space and time fragmentation of gig work is a problem to collect and organize workers. Worker hubs could be useful to gig workers.
- There is a lack of debate in respect of worker's data rights. Workers data "unions" could be an interesting way forward.

### The Netherlands



The breakout room hosted trade union representative Amrit Sewgobind (FNV), modern workers' advocate Roos Wouters (Founder of De Werkvereniging) and labour law expert Rachel Rietveld (University of Amsterdam).

#### Key considerations:

- In the Netherlands the employment of many gig workers is not regulated through the Dutch labour law. They are not entitled to social security.
- There is limited real autonomy for gig workers (meal delivery, ride-hailing). They don't have the right to set the prices and have to follow the platform's mandates to a large extent.
- There are numerous court cases (trade unions vs. platforms) with still no clear or agreed outcome.
- Linking social security to the worker's personal track record could facilitate the autonomous role of gig workers better.

### South Africa

The breakout room hosted Dr. Salome Teuteberg from the Labour Research Service (LRS), trade unionist, social activist and Chairperson of the Housing Assembly Kashiefa Achmat, and Uber Eats delivery rider Jacques Ntambwe.

#### Key considerations:

- There is a need to learn from direct first-hand experiences of platform workers. This allows for richer discussions on the working conditions of platform workers.
- How effective are trade unions when it comes to platform workers? There are different approaches for trade unions when working with platform workers but it is still unclear what might be the best approach.
- There are lessons to be learned from grassroots community organisations, where people are drawn together around a common issue.
- In South Africa, there are also "secondary" employers - people who buy cars and rent them to Uber drivers, who must pay them back each week. This is something to be taken into consideration.

### Spain

The breakout room hosted Carlos del Barrio, The Secretary for Sector Policies and Sustainability at CCOO Catalunya, Louise Marlière, a community manager of Malt, and Hector Merino, AsoRiders, a leader of a collective of couriers

#### Key considerations:

- Platform work debate needs to consider the heterogeneity of platforms and workers.



- Common challenges among all platform workers types include: significant income fluctuations, barriers to rent an apartment or get a credit line, lower pension at retirement age.
- Self-employment regulation in Spain needs to be updated to: a) link the monthly contribution to the actual monthly income, and b) equally protect all types of workers.
- Platforms provide an opportunity for inclusion in the labour market (flexible and low entry barriers). Not to be confused with the people who use platforms out of necessity and lack alternatives.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM PROJECT RESULTS

Carrying out large scale global research is not a simple task at all. The benefit of this effort is that, contrary to most labour research that tends to focus on local issues, a global perspective allowed WageIndicator Foundation to identify: global shared challenges and opportunities, as well as a reasonable number of inspiring practices (platforms, agreements, regulation, etc.) to be replicated elsewhere.

### Gig workforce experiences

From the preliminary survey data results it is clear that **platform workers feel overqualified (60%+)** across all countries and sectors. Current gig work is too focused on low-skilled jobs. There is an opportunity for better jobs for the highly skilled gig workforce.

Despite not being a habit, **having a contract and being part of the gig workforce is possible**. In the Netherlands almost 50% of surveyed platform workers reported having a contract with the platform.

Platform workers from South Africa and India tend to work mostly full time and are highly dependent on platforms for income compared to other countries. On the contrary, in the Netherlands less than 15% report being full time. That correlates with the di/satisfaction with payment. **The more dependency, the less satisfaction.**

**Most gig workers are not aware of their rights.** This calls for a need to educate workers about their rights and benefits.

### Inspiring practices

From the comparison of regulations, **the Spanish labour law seems to provide a best-practice example** when it comes to provisions governing self-employed. Basic workers' rights such as maternity leave and unemployment are available. This safety net is provided in



exchange for a monthly contribution from the self-employed workers (minimum of 283,3€/month) that is far higher than in any other country. This works well for full time workers but provides unfavourable scenario for part time workers that still need to pay 283,3€/month.

**A growing number of platform workers' collectives and groups**, mostly couriers and ride-hailing drivers, showcase how gig workers can collectively defend their rights. More and more of these new collectives are building bridges with traditional trade unions that have better leverage and years of experience. Regulators need to recognise these emerging trends as part of the institutionalization of platform work and workers.

A inspiring example of collective agreement is the one signed in Denmark by 3F (trade union) and Hilfr (Danish cleaning platform). Under this agreement a Hilfr worker has the option to be employed by Hilfr after completing the equivalent of three weeks of full-time jobs. Similar agreements took place in Norway and the UK.

Another relevant innovation is **when workers control the code** (i.e. the emergence of worker-owned apps or platform coops). CoopCycle in France developed a common software for several courier service coops to be used. It also coordinates advocacy efforts on behalf of workers.

Last but not the least, there are socially oriented platforms. The French microworkers platform IsaHit employs women in lower income countries. Beyond microwork and income opportunities the platform also helps women to study and/or develop their own business.

A longer and regularly updated list of Smart Social Platform Innovations can be [found here](#).

### Platform work is a moving target

We also have to acknowledge that platform work is constantly changing. Regulators around the world are racing to find workable solutions and businesses are adapting accordingly.

It is a relatively uncharted area and unexpected breakthroughs have happened. For example, platforms such as Cabify, Uber or JustEat in Spain are engaging with third parties (specialized temp agencies or franchise firms) to source their workers. In this scenario platform workers become employees of this third party. This is a model that lawmakers in California have been observing with interest.

We have also learned how important it is to keep an eye beyond the obvious regions (Europe, USA) to spot new trends and regulatory innovations.



### *About Reshaping Work*

Reshaping Work is a Foundation headquartered in Amsterdam, which took off in 2016 in order to bring different stakeholders together to jointly discuss the future of work and find ways to shape it.

Reshaping Work conferences discuss the most prominent issues in regards to the platform economy, and digital innovations more broadly. These intimate events gather 200-250 people for continental-level conferences, while the regional-level events are confined to 100-150 experts on the topic, who have interest or stakes in a particular geographic region.

Reshaping Work Onward is an edition of independently organized events held in a virtual or hybrid setting, providing the opportunity for people to engage in a discussion on timely topics with various experts in the fields of platform economy, artificial intelligence, and future of work more generally.

### *About WageIndicator Foundation*

WageIndicator is about transparency in the labour market. It is about assisting workers/employers to make informed decisions on a daily basis based on facts, like wages, living wages, minimum wages, and labour law regulations. WageIndicator Foundation started in 2001 in the Netherlands. Now there are websites and operations in 140 countries.

In 2019 WageIndicator had 40 million visitors, of which approximately 60% used mobile devices to access country-specific websites. 430.000 visitors completed salary surveys. The WageIndicator target group includes workers, job seekers, and small employers plus social partners, governments, OECD, ILO, and the academic community.

### *Author Biographies*

**Jovana Karanovic** is a PhD Researcher at the KIN Center for Digital Innovation (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and Founder of Reshaping Work. Her research is concerned with new organizational forms in the platform economy, platform strategies and digital innovations more broadly.

**Paulien Osse** is the director of WageIndicator, a worldwide organisation which provides accurate information related to wage and labour regulations. Starting her career as a journalist in Economics, Paulien Osse and her team have led a movement to encourage global labour market transparency and understanding.

**Albert Cañigueral** is a Ouishare Connector from Barcelona. He is specialized in the impact of digital platforms on the labour market. He is part of the WageIndicator research team and a co-organizer of Regional Reshaping Work Barcelona 2019. Albert recently published “El trabajo ya no es lo que era” book (October 2020).