

Pathways to Gender Equality in the Platform Economy :

A Policy Aenda for Beijing+30 and Beyond



Policy Report
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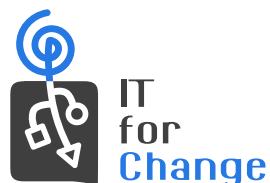
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1 | The Digital Transition and Gendered Precarity



 We Care!

The Digital Transition and Gendered Precarity

Thirty years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it is evident that the opportunities of the digital transition have not been adequately leveraged for gender equality in the world of work.¹ The early promise of flexi-work and increased labor participation for women² in the platform economy has not materialized. Instead, platformization has deepened intersectional inequalities—of gender, class, geography, and race, making women workers more “precarious, insecure and vulnerable”.³ A 2023 research by the Fairwork Project in 38 countries across five continents found that digital labor platforms make tall claims in their public relations campaigns about “inclusive, safe and fulfilling” work, but are gender-blind in their design and operations.⁴ Platform work reproduces gender-based occupational segregation, perpetuating gender pay gaps and cementing the feminization of work.^{5,6} Further, the misclassification of employment arrangements in platform work has rolled back hard-won labor rights, especially, gender-based entitlements available in standard employment relationships.^{7,8}

What confronts us in the digital economy is a whole-of-system reorganization of employment relationships, as datafication and algorithmic optimization structurally transform work relationships. Algorithmic management and control is a feature not only in emerging platform marketplaces in services work but also in traditional workplaces that are digitalizing—the factory floor, frontline service delivery in health and education, and so on.⁹ This shift calls for multi-scalar policy responses that can get our institutions ready for a feminist future of work.

1 ESCAP. (2024) Charting New Paths for Gender Equality and Empowerment: Asia-Pacific Regional Report on Beijing+30. <https://unescap.org/kp/2024/charting-new-paths-gender-equality-and-empowerment-asia-pacific-regional-report-beijing30#>.

2 We follow the views expressed by the Committee on the Convention against all Forms of Discrimination against Women in CEDAW/C/81/D/134/2018 under article 7 (3) of the Optional Protocol, concerning Communication No. 134/2018. “Women” thus includes all women, including lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women. Further, our work for gender justice addresses all forms of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristic.

3 Rani, U., Castel-Branco, R., Satija, S., & Nayar, M. (2022). Women, work, and the digital economy. *Gender & Development*, 30(3), 421–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2022.2151729>

4 Fairwork. (2023). Gender and Platform Work: Beyond Techno-Solutionism. <https://fair.work/en/fw/publications/gender-and-platform-work-beyond-techno-solutionism/>.

5 Ibid., 14–15.

6 Working Group on Feminist Principles for Digital Justice. (2023). Towards a Feminist Digital Justice Vision: Issue Mapping of Critical Considerations, co-convened by IT for Change and DAWN. <https://feministdigitaljustice.net/background-paper/>

7 De Stefano, V., & Aloisi, A. (2018). Fundamental labour rights, platform work and Human-Rights protection of Non-Standard workers. *Research Handbook on Labour, Business and Human Rights Law*, 359–79. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3125866>

8 Fairwork.(2023) Gender and Platform Work: Beyond Techno-Solutionism, 32. <https://fair.work/en/fw/publications/gender-and-platform-work-beyond-techno-solutionism/>

9 Gurumurthy, A., Chami, N. & Chatterjee, S. (2022). Workers' Data Rights in the Platformized Workplace - A New Frontier for the Labor Agenda. IT for Change <https://itforchange.net/index.php/workers%E2%80%99-data-rights-platformized-workplace-a-new-frontier-for-labor-agenda>.

To explore the building blocks of this imperative, IT for Change, DAWN, and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) convened a series of four consultations in the Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe, and Latin America in February 2025, bringing together 50+ feminist scholars, practitioners, gender equality experts, lawyers focused on labor rights and trade union representatives.

The joint reflection focused on the following aspects:

- **the unique challenges that women workers face in platform work contexts,**
- **regulatory gaps that exacerbate gender-based discrimination and exclusion in the platform economy, and**
- **core elements of effective policy design for feminist futures of work.**

The consultations were based on Chatham House rules, and anonymity has been retained regarding attribution for specific comments and reflections. This policy report synthesizes the key insights from the consultations and concludes with a set of concrete recommendations for a policy agenda on platformization and women workers' rights.



2

Women Workers' Unique Challenges in the Platform Economy



Women Workers' Unique Challenges in the Platform Economy

Though labor exploitation in platform work arrangements affects all workers, there are unique gendered dimensions that impact women workers. These are discussed below.

2.1. Invisibility of feminized platform work

It is important to start by mapping where women are located in the platform economy. The ride-hailing and food delivery sectors that tend to drive most policy responses are male-dominated, and globally, women comprise less than 10% of the workforce in these sectors.¹⁰



Platform work is not just about Uber and Deliveroo. Care and domestic work being reshaped by technology deserves attention. There's an entire world of online platform labor that often goes unnoticed. Those using platforms report worse pay and conditions compared to direct client work. Yet, this reality is rarely discussed.

Participant, Europe consultation,
6 February 2025

Differences between the Global North and the South are also pertinent here. The dismantling of the standard employment contract may be somewhat of a shock in the North, but the feminization of certain gigs in the platform economy is reflective of the gendered precarity and informality characteristic of labor markets in the South. Platform work arrangements have done little to transform women's pay, job quality, or labor rights; on the contrary, women workers report new hardships in negotiating their rights.¹¹



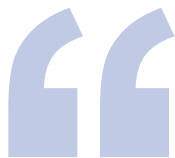
The gig economy is not a novel phenomenon in the Global South. There is a history of informality and feminization of informal employment. Gendered informality is now being updated into new forms of platform work.

Participant, Latin America consultation,
13 February 2025

10 International Labour Organization. (2021). The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work. World Employment and Social Outlook <https://www.ilo.org/publications/flagship-reports/role-digital-labour-platforms-transforming-world-work>

11 Labour platforms “create policies that require workers to commit to unprofitable or less-profitable interactions, working conditions and behaviours that may not be efficient for the individual worker (for example, if search or wait time is extensive, or if the worker is compelled to take on less profitable assignments), in order to guarantee an efficiently functioning market with assured outcomes for consumers.” See Choudary, S. (2018) The architecture of digital labour platforms: Policy recommendations on platform design for worker well-being. ILO Future of Work Series. https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/wcms_630603.pdf

Initial hopes that platforms will enable a ‘formalization of the informal’ and better the conditions of employment through work contracts, particularly in female-dominated sectors such as domestic work, have been proven wrong.¹² Instead of professionalizing work arrangements, platforms reinforce power imbalances in the employer–employee relationship. Traditional bargaining strategies available to workers in socially embedded settings do not exist in the typical isolation of platform-mediated gigs.



The expectation that itemization of tasks in home-based platform work such as cleaning and beauty services will lead to professionalization has not panned out. Customers assume that workers will go beyond their listed tasks, and when they don’t, their ratings suffer. This means workers often perform additional labor without extra pay—whether it’s cleaning ovens or redoing manicures to meet customer demands.

Participant, Asia-Pacific consultation,
5 February 2025



In the traditional domestic work sector, one would likely work with just one employer. Even if one were to be working for multiple employers, they would more or less be known people. However, women in domestic work platforms do not know anything about their employer. They have no protections at all and have to go by the whims of the employer.

Participant, Africa consultation,
5 February 2025

2.2. Gender Inequality in algorithmic work management systems

Algorithmic work management systems set unrealistic targets for workers in terms of response rate requirements and limits on cancellation, penalizing workers when they cannot meet such targets. What we see, therefore, is an ‘inflexible flexibility’, a coercive system where women platform workers are locked into short-term contracts with neither the benefits of standard employment nor the independence of some kinds of self-employment. Workers cannot determine the pace or performance of their work on their own terms. For women workers juggling their paid work with unpaid care work at the household level, this means paying a severe penalty.

¹² Hunt, A., Samman, E. (2023). (Re)Conceptualizing Gendered Structures of Informality for Domestic Workers in the Platform Economy. In: Surie, A., Huws, U. (eds) Platformization and Informality. Dynamics of Virtual Work. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-11462-5_9

They are at risk or constantly under the fear of being allocated fewer opportunities by the algorithm or even being locked out of the app. Further, in algorithm-based dynamic pricing systems that reward work during peak hours (such as surge pricing in ride-hailing apps), women workers unable to work in these time slots end up working more hours to compensate for lost earnings. This is a key concern, especially for women workers who are sole breadwinners in their households.¹³



Companies set high targets, and if workers fail to meet them and do not stay online for sufficient hours, their accounts are blocked. This loss of access means they cannot earn. Yet, they remain trapped by their financial obligations, having already taken loans to buy equipment.

Participant, Asia-Pacific consultation,
5 February 2025



Those who are more available for the platforms are those who have fewer family obligations: if you dedicate less time to it, the algorithm provides less work; so it becomes a bit of a vicious cycle.

Participant, Latin America consultation,
13 February 2025



Not only are women having to combine productive and reproductive labor in ways that men aren't, but they're actually working potentially longer hours than men in the process.

Participant, Africa consultation,
5 February 2025

Platform work arrangements not only reproduce gender income gaps,¹⁴ but also enable new forms of gender-based discrimination that dismantle existing protections. Client preferences can upend worker rights, allowing customers to access sensitive personal information in online worker profiles, otherwise protected by anti-discrimination law in standard employment.

13 From research by Jacob Omolo as cited by a participant in the consultation. Also, see Omolo, J. (2024). Digital technologies and the changing nature of work in the e-Hailing sector in Kenya. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41027-024-00532-2:1-16>.

14 Dhir, R., U. Rami, and N. Gobel. (2023). Digital labour platforms and their contribution to development outcomes. *Sustainable Development Goals*. <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/A38%20-%20Rani%20-%20Digital%20labour%20platforms%20and%20their%20contribution%20to%20development%20outcomes.pdf> Also, see Hoang, L., Blank, G., & Quan-Haase, A. (2020). The winners and the losers of the platform economy: who participates? *Information Communication & Society*, 23(5), 681–700. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2020.1720771>



Every client can access data about the worker, such as their picture, name, and even their racial profile or disability status, and choose the worker they believe is best for the job. In formal workplaces, employers have increasingly adopted recruitment procedures to eliminate discriminatory practices, such as hiding a job applicant's name or gender during recruitment. But the platform economy is undermining these efforts.

Participant, Europe consultation,
6 February 2025



There is an issue of discrimination against non-binary people on platforms. There are account blocks on apps where gender identity can only be registered as male/female and which use facial recognition for identity verification (as the presentation may not match the gender data uploaded).

Participant, Latin America consultation,
13 February 2025

2.3. The lack of gender-based entitlements in platform work contracts

The lack of social protection—particularly, gender-based guarantees like maternity leave, available in the standard employment contract—is a major gap in platform work arrangements. Traditional unions, particularly in the Global North, tend to view platform work as temporary/part-time employment. Consequently, platform work is not properly assessed for its exploitative nature, making progress on decent work standards slow.



The lack of social protections is devastating. There is no paid maternity leave, sick leave, or parental benefits. If a food delivery worker's children fall ill, she loses her income.

Participant, Asia-Pacific consultation,
5 February 2025



When women workers are classified as independent contractors, they are completely denied essential benefits like health insurance, maternity leave, and retirement savings.

Participant, Africa consultation,
5 February 2025



Many platform workers have been doing this work for over 10 years, much like fast food workers who may stay in that sector for 20 or 30 years. Often, unions don't focus on these types of jobs because they assume workers are just passing through—students or migrant workers looking to make extra income. But if platform work is here to stay and becomes a long-term employment option, we need to think strategically about how to make this work decent and offer workers opportunities for progress.

Participant, European consultation,
6 February 2025

2.4. Disregard of occupational safety and health

Platforms do very little to protect women workers' rights to occupational safety and health. Already, entry barriers for women are very high in location-based platform work, given the high degree of vulnerability women face in public spaces. Platforms evade their obligations for workplace safety by using simplistic solutions; for example, panic buttons in ride-hailing cabs and automatic lock-outs during time slots considered unsafe for women. In the case of online micro-work, prolonged exposure to harmful and violent content in data annotation and content moderation tasks for training Large Language Models (LLMs) takes a major toll on women workers' physical and mental health.¹⁵



Safety and dignity at work are significant issues, particularly the lack of public hygiene facilities in major cities for women delivery workers. Women working in private households face heightened risks of harassment, discrimination, and violence. Platforms are doing too little to improve working conditions for women.

Participant, Europe consultation,
6 February 2025



Given the high rate of femicide and violence on the streets, not many women or transgenders are working in Uber or other similar platforms. Many of them think it is too dangerous.

Participant, Latin America consultation,
13 February 2025

¹⁵ Kimeu, C. (2024). The Work Damaged Me: Ex-Facebook Moderators Describe Effect of Horrific Content." The Guardian. Also, see Gebrekidan, F.B. (2025). The harrowing, traumatizing job that left many African data workers with mental health issues and drug dependency. True Story Award. <https://truestoryaward.org/story/508>



Security features like panic buttons exist, but they are ineffective. By the time help arrives, it is often too late. The dangers we face daily are severe. Yet, the platform algorithms fail to warn us about high-risk areas. If we refuse unsafe trips, we risk deactivation.

Participant, Africa consultation,
5 February 2025



3

Gender-based Exploitation in Platform Work— Gaps in Law and Policy



Gender-based Exploitation in Platform Work – Gaps in Law and Policy

Regulatory and policy responses across the globe are unable to effectively address the challenge of gender-based exploitation in platform work. Firstly, the policy blindspot in protecting the rights of women workers in home-based service work is a problem that spills over even in the platformization of such work. In emerging crowdwork arrangements where women workers comprise a significant proportion, the application of the standard employment contract becomes difficult because of isolated work environments. A second challenge is the intensification of gender-based discrimination presented by techno-design architectures. Thirdly, holding transnational platform corporations to account for their labor rights obligations has been an uphill task, especially in the Global South.

3.1. Deficits in labor rights protection stemming from misclassification

Regulatory progress to address misclassification of employment relationships in the platform economy is slow. Firstly, in many contexts in the Global South, as was noted by a participant in the Asia-Pacific consultation, “Governments appear more open to extending social security protections, often through constitutional rights arguments [of a minimum floor for informal workers], rather than recognizing gig workers as employees”. This is because platform arrangements are seen as an extension of intermediary/sub-contracting relationships in the informal economy beyond the pale of the law. Take the examples of web-based outreach by traditional recruitment agencies for domestic workers in Bangladesh or sub-contracting or leasing by secondary contractors or owners of their taxi service to drivers on ride-hailing apps in South Africa and India. This not only lets platform companies off the hook in terms of fulfilling their obligations to their workforce but also risks the roll-back of hard-won labor guarantees as more businesses adopt platform models to evade labor regulation. Participants in the Asia-Pacific consultation highlighted how in the Philippines, traditional logistics companies are switching to platform-based models, “stripping workers of previously guaranteed benefits”.

Secondly, even in jurisdictions where legislation has sought to separate platform work arrangements into those that resemble employment and others that are closer to self-employment – such as in Chile and the EU – the law still fails to adequately account for the precarity of women workers [See Box 1].

Box 1. Gender blindspots: Reflections from the regulatory experience of Chile and the EU

In Chile, the regulatory regime for platform work distinguishes two types of platform workers: dependent digital platform workers and independent digital platform workers. The former is seen to be in an employment relationship with the company and entitled to the same protections as guaranteed by the country's labor code. The latter is seen to be in a unique form of employment and entitled to some protections concerning automated work management (such as rights to algorithmic transparency and anti-discrimination in automated decision-making) but not to the entire gamut of labor rights. The blindspot in this framework is the failure to recognize the unequal bargaining power of workers vis-à-vis the platform.

As a participant in the LATAM consultation highlighted: "To declare oneself as a dependent worker is more complex because you have to file a lawsuit against the company and you have to win it."

Women workers, already facing the double burden of work and care duties, and who are generally overlooked in collective organizing and union action, lack the resources that are necessary—time, institutional backing, and finances – to claim their employment rights through a court battle.

In the European Union, the Platform Work Directive adopts an approach where gender-based entitlements of the standard employment contract—such as maternity leave, protection against sexual harassment at the workplace, and equal pay for equal work— are tied to the establishment of an employer-employee relationship. This ignores the reality that in certain female-dominated platform work sectors such as crowdwork, traditional definitions of employee status based on 'control' / 'subordination' are difficult to prove, with the result, women workers are deemed self-employed and locked out of their rightful entitlements.

3.2. Failures in effectively regulating algorithmic work management

Policy debates tend to equate algorithmic transparency with visibility of algorithms, without thinking through questions of responsibility for design fully.



Many platforms don't even develop their own algorithms but plug in pre-built software development kits (SDKs) that were never intended for the business. This raises important questions about how algorithmic decision-making is structured what unintended consequences arise from these systems, and who is responsible.

Participant, Asia-Pacific consultation,
5 February 2025

Without mandatory obligations to ensure women workers' perspectives are taken into account in shaping algorithmic design, platform work environments are likely to perpetuate unfair and gender-exclusionary norms and practices.



In domestic work and care platforms, personal details of workers (photo, age, household chores they perform) are a critical element, and it is on this profile that workers receive ranking and feedback. Workers need a technical feature on the platform to be able to score the client and provide alerts to other workers about unacceptable behavior-harassment, racism, non-payment-from the client.

Participant, Latin America consultation,
13 February 2025

The EU Platform Work Directive acknowledges how algorithmic management could amplify gender inequalities. Yet, it fails to provide concrete guidance on gender-responsive platform design. This could include a compulsory obligation on digital labor platforms to map public restrooms and safe routes when directing couriers and food delivery riders (taking a leaf out of initiatives such as the bicycle couriers cooperative Señoritas Courier in Sao Paulo, Brazil).¹⁶ The law can also make it compulsory for platform companies to ensure that women workers' algorithmic ratings are not negatively impacted if they have to leave the platform for an extended number of days due to (unpaid) care work responsibilities. In other words, measures to provide flexibility without penalty and ensure patriarchal assumptions about the perennial availability of the worker do not guide rating-and-ranking design must be contemplated by legal and policy frameworks. A proposal in this regard is being worked out by the union, CUT, in Chile.¹⁷

16 Comments during Pathways to Gender Equality in the Platform Economy: Evolving a Policy Agenda for Beijing+30, Virtual Consultation for Latin America, February 13, 2025, organized by IT for Change, DAWN and Friedrich Ebert Foundation; Rafael, G. (2022) Worker-Owned Platforms: Cooperatives and Collectives of Platform Riders, *Matrizes* 16, no. 1 (2022): 209–33, Redalyc <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=143071289011>. Also, see Rubin, E. & Milanez, L. (2024). *Economia Solidaria Digital* https://www.gov.br/trabalho-e-emprego/pt-br/noticias-e-conteudo/2024/Agosto/mte-apoia-livro-sobre-politicas-sociais-de-economia-solidaria-digital/livro_economia_digital_solidaria_v2_comprimido.pdf

17 Ibid.

3.3. Difficulties in bringing platform behemoths to account

Transnational corporations leverage their market power to prevent regulation, scuttling implementation in contexts where such laws exist and ignoring unions with impunity. A feminist future of work cannot be achieved unless platform companies are held to account for their obligations in a new social contract commensurate with the digital economy.

As a veteran unionist reflected in our consultations, “the struggle for women workers’ rights in the platform economy cannot be divorced from the overall struggle for recognition of foundational labor guarantees in all platform work arrangements and holding transnational capital to account.” We need a multi-scalar policy response to prevent digital corporations from engaging in ‘jurisdiction-shopping’ to evade scrutiny of their business operations.



Workers are not always receiving their entitlements, and platform companies often refuse to comply. This is happening even in developed countries like France, Spain, and the UK, where resources for enforcement exist.

Participant, Europe consultation,
6 February 2025



In Cambodia, Grab has been convincing the Ministry of Labor that platform workers are self-employed, not employees, thereby avoiding any responsibility for worker protections.

Participant, Asia-Pacific consultation,
5 February 2025



4

Policy Pathways for Feminist Futures of Work in the Platform Economy



Policy Pathways for Feminist Futures of Work in the Platform Economy

Building on the inputs and reflections from the regional consultation, we conclude with reflections on potential policy pathways for feminist futures of work in the platform economy. Urgent action is needed towards standard-setting for a platform economy that is gender-intentional and aspiring to the highest standards of labor rights for women.

Governments need to implement measures in four broad areas:

- **Foundational rights and principles at work for all women platform workers**
- **Gender-responsive social protection frameworks for platform work**
- **A data rights agenda for a gender-equal world of work**
- **A well-governed digital economy**

4.1. Foundational rights and principles at work for all women platform workers

Regardless of the employment status accorded to platform workers in the law, foundational rights and principles at work must be upheld in all platform work arrangements, particularly in female-dominated platform work sectors where workers tend to be invisible and home-bound. Governments need to undertake the following measures:

Implement gender-responsive policies for feminized platform work: Standards of protection must be responsive to the needs of women workers in feminized sectors such as care work, home services, beauty services, content services, and micro-work where standard employment contracts are usually lacking.

Introduce mandatory obligations for labor rights on digital platforms: As the call for the “Five Aspects Towards an International Convention on Digital Platforms with a Gender Focus” (2023) highlights,¹⁸ all digital platforms must be obligated to comply with the following ILO Conventions in their labor practices:

- Convention 100 on equal remuneration for women and men workers
- Convention 111 on eliminating discrimination in respect of occupation and employment
- Convention 97 and 143 on equality of opportunity and treatment of migrant workers
- Convention 3 on maternity protection
- Convention 17 on compensation for work-related accidents
- Convention 18 on occupational diseases
- Convention 155 on the safety and health of workers (with a gender focus in the digital platform sector)
- Convention 190 on the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment

¹⁸ Latin American Women's App Workers Group. (2023). 5 aspects towards an international convention on digital platforms with a gender focus. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-i_uYozb8RTJWVE7n5sa7xqTke25wS2i/view

To this list, we add the following:

- Convention 181 that prohibits private employment agencies from charging fees and other costs to workers must be extended to all platform work environments. This will prevent the exploitation of women workers who are forced to pay prohibitive commissions for every transaction
- Convention 154 on collective bargaining must be applied to platform work arrangements. This will ensure that competition laws/anti-cartelization measures do not become an impediment to such processes, particularly in female-dominated platform work sectors, which have historically been unorganized
- Convention 177 on home work must be extended to online gig work¹⁹
- Convention 189 on domestic workers must be extended to platform-based domestic work arrangements

4.2. Gender-responsive social protection frameworks for platform work

Social security and social protection for women workers in the platform economy deserve immediate attention. Governments must take the following actions:

Deploy design that recognizes diverse gendered realities: The design of social security schemes needs to be inclusive and intersectional.²⁰ This principle should apply to platform workers as well.

Ensure access to the full range of social protection for platform and gig workers: States need to design and roll out schemes that ensure access to the full range of social protection for platform and gig workers: “effective access to healthcare and income security, including in case of unemployment, maternity, employment injury, sickness, old age, disability, loss of the income provider and for the maintenance of children”.²¹

Account for unpaid care work: In the context of platform workers, the vision of the ILO 5R Framework for Decent Care Work,²² particularly its pillar on reducing unpaid care work burdens, is particularly relevant. States need to adopt macroeconomic policy approaches that promote investment in social care infrastructure and alleviate women’s double burdens.

19 Moore, P. V. (2018). The threat of physical and psychosocial violence and harassment in digitalized work. Geneva: International Labour Office. <https://www.ilo.org/media/416591/download>

20 African Regional Organisation Of The International Trade Union Confederation (n.d). Protocol To The African Charter On Human And Peoples’ Rights On The Rights Of Citizens To Social Protection And Social Security.

21 ILO, ISSA and OECD. (2023). Providing adequate and sustainable social protection for workers in the gig and platform economy. Technical paper prepared for the 1st meeting of the Employment Working Group under the Indian presidency. <https://www.ilo.org/media/366091/download>

22 Addati, L., Cattaneo, U., Esquivel, V., & Valarino, I. (2018). Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/care-work-and-care-jobs-future-decent-work>

Shift the burden of mobilizing fiscal resources from workers to platform companies:

Many governments—especially in the Global South—are adopting monotax mechanisms that extend social insurance coverage to platform workers where they make a payment for taxes and social security contributions. This approach treats platform workers as self-employed, without getting into the ambiguities of employment status. Even gender-based entitlements are being brought under the umbrella of these mechanisms. In Brazil, for example, the government plans to extend the coverage of its monotax mechanism to drivers working on digital platforms, granting them access to sickness and disability benefits as well as old-age pensions and maternity benefits.²³ While such a contributory approach fills an immediate need—particularly in contexts with high levels of informality/isolation—digital platforms have a duty of care towards all their workers registered with them (and in sub-contracting relationships with them), regardless of employment status. Social security schemes for platform workers must be financed by legally mandated contributions from platform companies towards all workers.²⁴

Enforce data-related obligations on platforms: State agencies need to mandate the registration of platforms and enforce standards and procedures for data collection and data sharing by platforms about their workforce. This is the necessary first step for national agencies to have access to information about platform workers and for the effective rollout and implementation of social protection schemes.

4.3. A data rights agenda for a gender-equal world of work

In the platform economy, foundational rights at work are inextricably connected to a robust worker data rights agenda. Data rights frameworks at the national level need to be informed by a well-rounded gender perspective. In specific, governments must take the following actions.

Uphold privacy and personal data protection rights of women in all workplaces: Privacy laws must penalize gender-based targeting, harassment, and intimidation of women workers through digital surveillance techniques – such as CCTV cameras in garment factories, wearables in urban sanitation work, and apartment management/gate entry control apps. Personal data protection laws and labor laws must prohibit data processing in the workplace that enables employers to make inferences about gender identity, menstrual health, and marital and pregnancy status. Such protections should be extended to workers in non-standard employment contracts (platform and traditional gig work), going beyond regular employment.

23 Samans, R., & Frick, R.J.R.(2023). Providing Adequate and Sustainable Social Protection for Workers in the Gig and Platform Economy. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40ddg_p/documents/publication/wcms_867536.pdf

24 ILO. (2022). Decent work in the platform economy. Reference document for the Meeting of experts on decent work in the platform economy. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_855048.pdf

Guarantee the right against algorithmic discrimination in all workplaces: Regulatory frameworks must recognize the right against algorithmic discrimination as a foundational labor guarantee for equality and non-discrimination in the workplace. Digital identification mechanisms used by platforms (worker registration processes, facial recognition) should be sensitive to gender diversity. The gendered impact of indirect discrimination in workplace algorithmic decision-making (such as surge pricing algorithms in ride-hailing that end up penalizing more women than men for their inability to work peak hour slots, or recruitment algorithms that reject candidates who have taken breaks in their careers) needs to be recognized as a violation of equal treatment. Laws need to be gender-intentional, mandating transparency and accountability mechanisms at the workplace that are adequate to women's right to know in automated work management.

Promote women worker-owned platform cooperatives: Platform designs based on capitalist models are exploitative and not worker-centered. Alternative models that are rooted in collaboration and solidarity and able to cater to women workers' needs must be encouraged and incentivized through financial subsidies and technical support schemes. Women worker-run platforms such as Señoritas Courier, Brazil²⁵ (an initiative by women bicycle couriers), Alternativa Laboral Trans (a digital design and development cooperative of trans and non-binary people from Argentina)²⁶ and WeCare, South Africa (an initiative by domestic workers who are women of color)²⁷ inspired by the principles of the cooperative movement, offer concrete directions that policies should build on. Legacy laws for the cooperatives sector should be revisited so that enterprises are encouraged to adopt platform cooperative models.

4.4 A well-governed digital economy

A feminist future of work needs dedicated policy action to address macro-economic policy for gender-inequitable development.²⁸ In the Global South, in particular, governments need to undertake the following measures:

Rein in transnational digital corporations: Data and AI value chains are characterized by a maze of subcontracting arrangements. Labor departments must be trained to identify and respond to labor rights violations in feminized, informal work prevalent in outsourcing/subcontracting, for example in content moderation. In addition to upgrading labor rights laws for AI value chains, governments must revamp their competition, taxation, trade, investment, and IP frameworks to give impetus to the domestic digital economy and check the unbridled market power of transnational digital corporations.

25 Señoritas Courier. Accessed February 24, 2025. <https://senhoritasc.com.br/>.

26 ALT cooperative. Accessed February 24, 2024. <https://altcooperativa.com/>

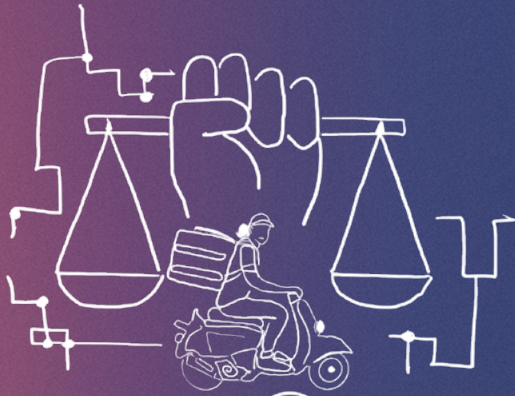
27 Russel, T., & Davids, S. (2025). We Care—A Platform Cooperative Supporting South African Domestic Workers. Platform Cooperativism Consortium. <https://platform.coop/blog/we-care-a-digital-platform-cooperative-empowering-south-african-domestic-workers/>.

28 Sen, G., & Grown, C.(1987). Development crises and alternative visions: Third world women's perspectives. Routledge.

Design digital economy roadmaps that advance women's economic participation:

National digital economy roadmaps need to consciously adopt a gender justice lens rather than focus merely on women's inclusion in the digital economy. Gendered barriers in access to connectivity and digital skills development opportunities that are impeding women's upward mobility in the platformizing labor market and effective participation in economic life need to be addressed through dedicated policy measures. As discussed, the transition to the digital welfare state needs to be backed by adequate guardrails to prevent new forms of intersectional exclusion from social security and safety nets. Constitutional guarantees for informational and communication rights become pivotal for gender-inclusive citizenship in the digital paradigm. This means all economic and social policies need to guarantee the participation of and accountability to the most marginalized women, especially in emerging areas such as data and AI governance.





Foundational rights and principles at work for all women platform workers



Gender-responsive social protection frameworks for platform work



A data rights agenda for a gender-equal world of work



A well-governed digital economy

5

An International Labor Rights Agenda for Women Workers in the Platform Economy



At the upcoming International Labour Conference in June 2025, the ILO is negotiating standards for decent work in the platform economy. It has been proposed that they take the form of a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation. For the June Conference and beyond, the following dimensions become critical for shaping an international labor rights agenda for women workers in the platform economy:

- Women workers in micro-work, often invisible in the policy process, and women in platform-based services work, most vulnerable to misclassification—need to have access to the highest standards of labor protection.
- A new international labor standard for automated work management systems on a gendered approach to privacy, personal data protection, and the elimination of algorithmic discrimination, is needed. This should be applicable to all work settings and not just to digital labor platforms.
- Technical guidance on the gender-responsive design of platform work environments and automated management systems must be developed in order to set clear guidelines for eliminating intersectional discrimination through gender-blind algorithms.

