Inputs to the public consultation on the draft Code on Social Security (Central) Rules, 2020

Joint submission by an alliance of labour unions and civil society organisations

The following trade unions, civil society organisations and members of academia have endorsed this submission and its proposals:

Trade unions

All India Gig Workers Union All India IT and ITeS Employees' Union All India Port & Dock Workers Federation All India Railwaymens' Federation Hind Mazdoor Sabha Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers National Federation of Indian Railwaymen National Union of Seafarers of India

Civil society organisations

Aapti Institute Gender at Work GenDev Centre for Research and Innovation LLP IT for Change Kamgar va Majur Sangh The Centre for Internet & Society Tandem Research TWN Trust Paigam Network Praxis - Institute for Participatory Practices Partners in Change Working People's Charter, India

Members of academia

Divya K., Assistant Professor, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University Dr. Rahul Sakpal, Assistant Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences Vibhuti Patel, Retired Professor of Tata Institute of Social Sciences and SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

1. Overview

A legal framework that addresses workers' rights in the digital economy from all angles is imperative to address labour concerns in the 21st century. We welcome the inclusion of platform workers and gig workers in the Code on Social Security, 2020. However, we have some concerns regarding the draft Code on Social Security (Central) Rules, 2020 (hereinafter the "Draft Rules"), vis-à-vis the implementation of platform workers' rights. In this document, we first list down our overall concerns before proceeding to a section specific critique in the format required by the consultation.

1. Failure to universalise social security for platform workers: In their current form, the Draft Rules do not provide a social security framework for platform workers founded on the cardinal principles of universal social security. A basic social protection floor for all platform workers, including benefits such as universal maternal care and accident insurance, has not been guaranteed. Instead, the Draft Rules impose an age limit for platform workers to be eligible for social security [Rule 50(2)(d)], and also confer on the government the power to prescribe additional eligibility criteria [Rule 50(2)(f)]. These provisions are likely to narrow the pool of workers who can avail the benefits under this law. Also, facilitation centres and toll-free helplines to onboard platform and gig workers into any future social security schemes have not been provided for in the Draft Rules, even though these were mentioned in the Code on Social Security, 2020.

2. Lack of clarity on aggregator contributions: The Draft Rules also indicate that aggregators will have to contribute towards any social security scheme that may be framed by the government. This is appreciated. However, further clarity on how these contributions will be assessed in the context of the reality of platform work arrangements is needed. Platform workers may work for several aggregators simultaneously, and be engaged as workers for intermittent and irregular periods of time. As it stands, the Draft Rules do not address how the minimum period of 90 days of being engaged as a platform worker is to be calculated — a mandatory eligibility criteria for registration under Rule 50(2)(d). It also does not outline how the number of days worked impacts the nature and extent of social protection that platform workers are eligible for. Additionally, under Guideline 6 of the Motor Vehicles Aggregators Guidelines, 2020 issued in November 2020, certain compliances are imposed on aggregators towards their drivers, such as health insurance and term insurance. It is unclear how obligations under the Motor Vehicles Aggregators Guidelines, 2020 will apply in consonance with aggregators' contributions under the Draft Rules on the Code on Social Security, 2020.

3. Absence of clear criteria to determine exemption of aggregators from contributions to social security: Section 114(7)(ii) of the Code on Social Security, 2020 permits the central government to use its discretionary powers to exempt aggregators from contributions to platform workers' social security. It would have been important for the Draft Rules to clearly spell out the conditions under which aggregators could be exempted to ensure that aggregators do not evade their responsibilities towards their platform workers and gig workers. This has not been done, and aggregator exemption is now possible solely at the discretion of the central government.

4. Flaws in the mechanisms outlined for constituting the National Social Security Board for Gig Workers and Platform **Workers:** There is currently no timeline for its constitution, leaving its existence to be determined as per the whims of the government. Furthermore, there is no transparency in the Draft Rules around the procedure by which the central government will

nominate platform workers' representatives to this Board. In this regard, the lack of a clearly spelt out role for trade unions and workers' associations is also a major flaw, as workers' organisations must have effective representation concerning social security schemes intended for their benefit.

5. No guarantees for workers' data rights: We are also concerned that the Draft Rules attempt to create a centralised database of platform workers and gig workers, to be enabled by the sharing of data by aggregators with the state. This data will include workers' personal data, and in the absence of personal data protection legislation, this has serious implications for workers' data rights and privacy. It is imperative that the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 be passed at the earliest to safeguard against state and/or aggregator excesses in this regard. We also recommend the inclusion of clear purpose and use limitation safeguards in these Draft Rules itself, as part of enshrining the right to privacy. Additionally, workers must have the right to edit, correct and dispute the records of aggregators, and a mechanism for such an audit must be established by the government. Workers must also have the right to retain a certified, machine-readable copy of their data.

6. Shortcomings of a centralised database: We also urge the central government to rethink the vision of a centralised database, and instead, explore the possibility of a federated architecture, with room for democratic and decentralised data management by workers themselves with involvement from state and local government agencies (building on labour welfare models). We are firmly of the view that the concentration of power and authority in the Central Government is unlikely to enable access to every last worker in a country of our complexity and size.

7. Inadequacies of the foundational legislation: We would also like to highlight how the foundational flaws of the Code on Social Security, 2020 mar the efficacy and effectiveness of the Draft Rules in being able to provide social security entitlements to platform and gig workers. Firstly, in Chapter 1, Section 2 of the Code, there is no clarification on what to do about platform

aggregators repeatedly referring to their "platform workers" as "contractors" or "agents" in their legal contracts/documents. The definitions clause assumes that "agent", "contractor" and "platform worker" are all separate and unique, unambiguous terms. It would have been important for the Draft Rules to clarify that if "agent" or "contractor" is being used to refer to a person performing platform work in any legal document or contract by an aggregator, the person should nonetheless be treated as a "platform worker". Also, the Draft Rules should have specified that all workers associated with any of the nine classes of aggregators mentioned in the Seventh Schedule of the Code on Social Security, 2020 [ride sharing, food and grocery delivery, logistics, e-marketplace, professional services provider, healthcare, travel and hospitality, content and media services, and any other goods and services provider platforms] are to be treated as platform workers. Secondly, there should be clarity on the jurisdiction, i.e. under which ministry and legislative act, will "aggregators" function and operate, especially considering that a range of sectoral legislation in addition to labour laws are implicated in aggregator governance. Thirdly, the Code on Social Security, 2020 could have specified how the agency in charge of collection and management of aggregator contributions was to have been constituted. For example, it could have been conceived as a statutory and autonomous body, along the lines of the Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) and Employee Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). But this opportunity has been missed.

2. Rule-specific inputs in prescribed format

2.1 Inputs to Rule 9

2.1.1. Inputs to Rule 9(2)(e)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(e) Central Government shall nominate five members under clause (b) of sub-section (6) of section 114 from amongst the gig workers and platform workers, on rotation basis, representing the different types of gig workers and platform workers.	To be added after Rule 9(2)(e) (i) The Central Government shall constitute the National Social Security Board for Gig Workers and Platform Workers within a period of six months from the date of notification of these Rules. (ii) The Central Government shall consult with existing unions and associations of gig workers and platform workers, and civil society organisations to inform the nomination of the five members to the National Social Security Board for Gig Workers and Platform Workers. (iii) Additionally, the process and operational details of the rotation of members shall be decided by the Central Government in consultation with unions and associations of gig workers and platform workers, and civil society organisations.

Rationale

Consulting with existing platform and gig workers' unions and associations will allow for a nuanced and informed approach on the diversity of the arrangement of work, thus creating a more representative board. A defined timeline allows for better enforcement and timely implementation of the rule.

2.2 Inputs to Rule 50

2.2.1. Inputs to Rule 50(1)(a)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(a) Every eligible unorganised worker, or any category or sub- category of unorganised worker under section 113 shall be required to be registered with Aadhaar, on self-declaration basis in the form on the portal, as specified by the Central Government.	(a) Every eligible unorganised worker, or any category or sub- category of unorganised worker under section 113 shall be required to be registered with Aadhaar, on self-declaration basis or with support from facilitation centres and toll-free helplines established by the Central Government , in the form on the portal, as specified by the Central Government.
Rationale	
Under Section 112 of the Code on Social Security, the Central Government may establish call centres, helplines or facilitation centres for the purposes of registering gig workers and platform workers, and connecting them to social security schemes. These facilities must be mandatorily provided by the Central Government, which must bear the responsibility of registering workers, updating their particulars and enrolling them in schemes. Therefore, we recommend Rule 50(1)(a) be rewritten as above.	

2.2.2. Inputs to Rule 50(1)(c)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(c) The eligible unorganised worker, or any category or sub- category of unorganised worker shall submit application form, electronically, with Aadhaar on self-declaration basis for registration to such authority on the specified portal of Central Government.	(c) The eligible unorganised worker, or any category or sub- category of unorganised worker shall submit application form, electronically, with Aadhaar on self-declaration basis or with support from facilitation centres and toll-free helplines established by the Central Government, for registration to such authority on the specified portal of Central Government.

Under Section 112 of the Code on Social Security, the Central Government may establish call centres, helplines or facilitation centres for the purposes of registering gig workers and platform workers, and connecting them to social security schemes. These facilities must be mandatorily provided by the Central Government, which must bear the responsibility of registering workers, updating their particulars and enrolling them in schemes. Therefore, we recommend Rule 50(1)(c) be rewritten as above.

2.2.3. Inputs to Rule 50(1)(k)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(k) The Directorate General of Labour Welfare, from time to time, shall de-duplicate the workers registered on the specified	To be added after Rule 50(1)(k)
portal of the Central Government, on the basis of Aadhaar and only such workers, shall be eligible to derive the benefits of the scheme(s) notified under the Code.	The Central Government must demarcate a process for grievance redressal through facilitation centres or helplines, to address: (i) wrongful deletion of beneficiaries from the database of workers; and (ii) correction or updation of personal data.

Rationale

There is evidence that de-duplication processes can delete eligible beneficiaries from databases, with no clear procedure for them to re-enroll to avail of social security benefits. We recommend that the Central Government designates a procedure to re-register and correct data after any such wrongful deletion.

2.2.4. Inputs to Rule 50(1)(l)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(l) The charges, if any, for registration or updation of particulars on the specified portal of the unorganised worker, or any category or sub-category of unorganised worker, may be borne by the Central Government or State Governments or unorganised worker, or any category or sub-category of unorganised worker, either partly or fully as may be specified by the appropriate Government.	(l) The charges, if any, for registration or updation of particulars on the specified portal of the gig worker and platform worker, may be borne by the Central Government or aggregators or gig- worker or platform worker, either partly or fully as may be specified by the Central Government.

Rationale

The working conditions of gig workers and platform workers are already poor. Their employment is precarious, with no social security cover provided either by the government or aggregators. While this legislation is a step towards acknowledging the need to extend social protection to this class of workers, they cannot be made to bear the cost of registration or updation on the platform, which would render them more economically vulnerable. This cost must be borne by the aggregators, or in the alternative, the government. For the worker, registration and updation of particulars — a necessary condition to avail social security benefits as per Rule 50(1)(g) — must be completely free of charge.

2.2.5. Inputs to Rule 50(2)(a)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(a) Every eligible gig worker or platform worker, under section 113 shall be required to be registered with Aadhaar, on self-declaration basis in the form on the portal, as specified by the Central Government.	(a) Every eligible gig worker or platform worker, under section 113 shall be required to be registered with Aadhaar, on self-declaration basis, or with support from facilitation centres and toll-free helplines established by the Central Government, in the form on the portal, as specified by the Central Government.

Under Section 112 of the Code on Social Security, the Central Government may establish call centres, helplines or facilitation centres for the purposes of registering gig workers and platform workers, and connecting them to social security schemes. These facilities must be mandatorily provided by the Central Government, which must bear the responsibility of registering workers, updating their particulars and enrolling them in schemes. Therefore, we recommend Rule 50(2)(a) be rewritten as above.

2.2.6. Inputs to Rule 50(2)(b)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(b) For identification and smooth registration of eligible gig workers and platform workers, each aggregator shall share monthly or such other periodicity in such form as specified, details of the information of their gig workers or platform	To be added after Rule 50(2)(b) The details of the information of their gig workers and platform workers shared periodically by aggregators shall be subject to the
workers electronically to generate Unique Registration Number or temporary registration number on the Portal, as specified by the Central Government. Further, on issue of such number, each	following limitations: (i) the Central Government shall collect only such details and
gig worker or platform worker shall authenticate himself through Aadhaar as per procedure specified by the Central Government.	information as may be reasonably required for welfare and social security purposes;
	(ii) the appropriate Government may make use of such details and information only for the purpose of registration of gig workers and platform workers on the portal, facilitating their access to social protection, and disbursing their social protection entitlements under any scheme that may be framed by the Central
	Government; (iii) gig workers and platform workers shall have the right to be
	informed about any personal data shared by aggregators and the right to access such data on request; and
	(iv) any details and/or information collected by the Central Government pursuant to Rule 50(2)(b) shall be governed by

Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 (N0. 373 of 2019).
Explanation: The term "personal data" used in this clause shall have the same meaning as the term defined in Section 3(28) in the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 (NO. 373 of 2019).

The right to privacy as a fundamental right in India has been affirmed by the Supreme Court in Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (2017). The court also observed that lawfulness, legitimacy, necessity and proportionality must guide the processing of personal data. Rule 50(2)(b) as it stands does not incorporate reasonable safeguards to limit the nature and extent of information collected by the state for the purposes of this database, either through the self-declaration process or from aggregators. The specific information relating to individual workers sought has not been outlined, with absolute discretion given to aggregators and the state. Aggregators simultaneously pursue a data extractivist approach towards collecting gig workers' and platform workers' data, accumulating millions of data points on worker activity. There is currently no personal data protection legislation in India and the draft Personal Data Protection Bill (2019) must be urgently enacted, as this provision seriously implicates workers' right to personal data protection and privacy.

2.2.7. Inputs to Rule 50(2)(c)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(c) Aggregator(s) shall link their database with the unique registration number issued under clause(d) of sub-rule (1) to	To be added after Rule 50(2)(c)
facilitate registration of their gig and platform workers on the portal specified by the Central Government.	Gig workers and platform workers shall have the following rights over personal data with respect to the linkage of aggregators' database with the Unique Registration Numbers of such workers:

 (i) the right to access any and all personal data relating to them in aggregators' databases; (ii) the right to have any incorrect or misleading personal data recorded therein corrected, including the accurate completion of incomplete personal data and updation of personal data; (iii) the right to be informed about the specific purposes for which their personal data in such databases is proposed to be used; (iv) the right to be notified in advance about the specific parties with whom the data will be shared and who will be able to access the data, and the right to refuse such sharing of data if not necessary for the provision of welfare and social security; and (iv) the right to the erasure of any personal data that is no longer necessary for the facilitation of registration of gig workers and platform workers.
Explanation: The term "personal data" used in this clause shall have the same meaning as the term defined in Section 3(28) in the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 (NO. 373 of 2019).

The Supreme Court has unequivocally recognised privacy as a fundamental right. The draft Personal Data Protection Bill (No. 373 of 2019) notes that data principals shall have the right to confirmation, access, rectification and erasure. However, this Bill has not been passed, leaving this provision on aggregators linking their databases, which contain workers' personal data, in the flux, ungoverned by law. In the spirit of both the proposed draft Personal Data Protection Bill and the Supreme Court's decision, we recommend the inclusion of a clause after Rule 50(2)(c), to secure workers' rights over their personal data.

2.2.8. Inputs to Rule 50(2)(d)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(d) A gig worker or platform worker, who has completed the age of sixteen years, but not attained the age of sixty years, shall be eligible for registration as mentioned in clause (a) above:	(d) A gig worker or platform worker, who has completed the age of sixteen years, but not attained the age of sixty years, shall be eligible for registration as mentioned in clause (a) above:
Provided such worker has been engaged as gig worker or platform worker, for not less than ninety days during the preceding twelve months.	Provided such worker has been engaged as gig worker or platform workers, for not less than ninety days during the preceding twelve months.

Rationale

In the platform economy, there is no formal age of retirement. Several persons past retirement in other employment may turn to gig work or platform work for post-retirement employment opportunities. Additionally, several gig workers and platform workers may continue working past the age of sixty due to economic necessity. They should not be excluded from the social security protection conferred by the Code on Social Security, 2020, these Rules, or any schemes framed by the government. Therefore, we recommend removing the upper age limit in Rule 50(2)(d).

2.2.9. Inputs to Rule 50(2)(f)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(f) In order to be eligible for any benefit under any scheme(s) framed under the Code for gig workers and platform workers,	We suggest removing this clause
the Central Government may notify specific condition(s) for eligibility, as deemed fit.	(f) In order to be eligible for any benefit under any scheme(s) framed under the Code for gig workers and platform workers, the

Central Government may notify specific condition(s) for- eligibility, as deemed fit.

The International Labour Organization has called for universal social protection to safeguard workers in the future of work, driven by technological advances and digital labour platforms. Considering the already precarious nature of platform work, benefits under the proposed scheme should cover as vast an array of workers as possible. These Rules have already prescribed an age range, as well as a minimum duration of being engaged as a platform worker. These prerequisites suffice by themselves. To allow the Central Government to notify other conditions for eligibility, at its discretion, will limit the coverage of any proposed scheme and leave several workers locked in precarious work arrangements with no access to a social protection floor.

2.2.10. Inputs to Rule 50(2)(h)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(h) The unorganised worker, gig worker, platform worker shall be required to update his particulars such, as current address, current occupation, period of engagement with the concerned platform(s) or aggregator(s), mobile number, skill, or any other particulars from time to time, on the portal specified by the	(h) Pursuant to Section 112 of the Code on Social Security, the Central Government shall undertake the responsibility of establishing toll free call centres, helplines or facilitation centres, or any combination of them, in order to ensure the following:
Central Government. In the absence of such updation, a gig worker or platform worker, may not remain eligible to avail benefit (s) of the social security scheme(s) notified under the Code.	 (i) dissemination of information on available social security schemes for unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers; (ii) facilitation of filing, processing and forwarding of application forms for registration of unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers, including the updation of their particulars on the portal; (iii) assisting of unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers to obtain registration; and (iv) facilitation of the enrolment of the registered unorganised

workers, gig workers and platform workers in the social security schemes. In addition, the Central Government shall also work with unions and workers' unions and associations to share information on schemes and increase their capacity to facilitate grievance redressal among workers.

Worker conditions in gig work and platform work is constantly undergoing shifts. Workers may be engaged with several aggregators and platforms simultaneously, frequently migrate internally and change mobile numbers and addresses, and perform tasks that require several skills. While updating records is essential, gig workers and platform workers must not be penalised for failing to do so by way of withholding the benefits of social security schemes. Furthermore, under Section 112 of the Code on Social Security, the Central Government may establish call centres, helplines or facilitation centres for the purposes of registering gig workers and platform workers, and connecting them to social security schemes. These facilities must be mandatorily provided by the Central Government, which must bear the responsibility of registering workers, updating their particulars and enrolling them in schemes. Therefore, we recommend Rule 50(2)(h) be rewritten as above.

2.2.11. Inputs to Rule 50(2)(i)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(i) The charges, if any, for registration or updation of particulars	(i) The charges, if any, for registration or updation of particulars
on the specified portal of the gig worker and platform worker,	on the specified portal of the gig worker and platform worker,
may be borne by the Central Government or aggregators or gig	may be borne by the Central Government or aggregators or gig-
worker or platform worker, either partly or fully as may be	worker or platform worker, either partly or fully as may be
specified by the Central Government.	specified by the Central Government.

The working conditions of gig workers and platform workers are already poor. Their employment is precarious, with no social security cover provided either by the government or aggregators. While this legislation is a step towards acknowledging the need to extend social protection to this class of workers, they cannot be made to bear the cost of registration or updation on the platform, which would render them more economically vulnerable. This cost must be borne by the aggregators, or in the alternative, the government. For the worker, registration and updation of particulars — a necessary condition to avail social security benefits as per Rule 50(2)(g) — must be completely free of charge.

2.3 Inputs to Rule 51

2.3.1. Inputs to Rule 51(1)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(1) The Central Government shall designate an Officer, or an agency, as the authority responsible to collect and expend the contributions from the aggregators.	(1) The Central Government shall form an agency that will consist of representatives from government, workers, and aggregators. The agency will be the authority responsible to collect and expend contributions from aggregators.
(2) Such authority may seek any information as may be required from the aggregator(s) for registration of gig workers or platform workers, formulation of suitable welfare scheme(s) under section 114 and implementation thereof.	(2) Such authority may seek only information that is strictly required from the aggregator(s) for registration of gig workers or platform workers to fulfill its duties, formulation of suitable welfare scheme(s) under section 114 and implementation thereof.

Rationale

This provision does not have any clarity on how such an agency will be formed, and its officers selected. Crucially, the agency must have employee representation, employer representation, and central and state government representatives. The current text also places no limitation on the type of data or the purpose for which the agency or officer may seek access. Considering, we are recommending Rules 51(1)(1) and 51(1)(2) be rewritten as above.

2.3.2. Inputs to Rule 51(3)

Current Text in the Draft Rules	Suggested Text
(a) Every aggregator shall assess contribution payable under sub-section 4 of section 114 in the Form-XX and pay provisional contribution as assessed in the designated account of the Social Security Fund, for the preceding year not later than 30th June, of the current year in which the contribution is payable.	To be added to Rule 51(3) Aggregators shall make publicly available, such as by displaying on their website, assessments of contributions made under section 114, to both workers and the public.
(b) Aggregator after finalization of the audited statement of the account for the previous financial year as per the relevant provisions of the Income-Tax Act,1961 or the Companies Act, 2013 or the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008, shall submit a final return in the Form-XXI, detailing the provisional payment of contribution made along with the details of outstanding contribution, if any paid by 31st October, of the current year in which the contribution is payable.	
(c) In case of excess contribution, if any paid by any aggregator, such aggregator shall claim the refund in the FormXXI of such excess amount. The authority designated by the Central Government in this regard, shall scrutinize the Form-XXI, as submitted by the aggregator and excess paid amount, if any, shall be refunded electronically in the bank account provided in Form-XXI, within a period not exceeding ninety days from the date of receipt of such claim.	

Rationale

Section 114(7)(ii) provides for aggregators to be exempt from making contributions on notification by the Central Government, subject to such conditions as may be specified in the notification. These conditions have not been specified in the rules, but deserve a

place in them to ensure that the criteria for exemption are properly defined and can be scrutinised by the public, to avoid aggregators skirting their responsibilities. Furthermore, to assess aggregators' contributions and scrutnise their accuracy, the details of the same must be made publicly available. This will also enable the public to ensure that the conditions for exemption, once prescribed, have been met by an aggregator claiming them.