

DIGITAL ECONOMY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN

Presentation made at the 'Towards an empowerment score card for women in e-commerce' UNCTAD e-commerce week, Geneva, April 4th, 2019

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Outline of the Presentation

- How widespread is the digital economy among women?
- What are the basic characteristics of these workers?
- What motivates them to undertake work on digital economy?
- What are the opportunities and challenges for women engaged in digital economy?

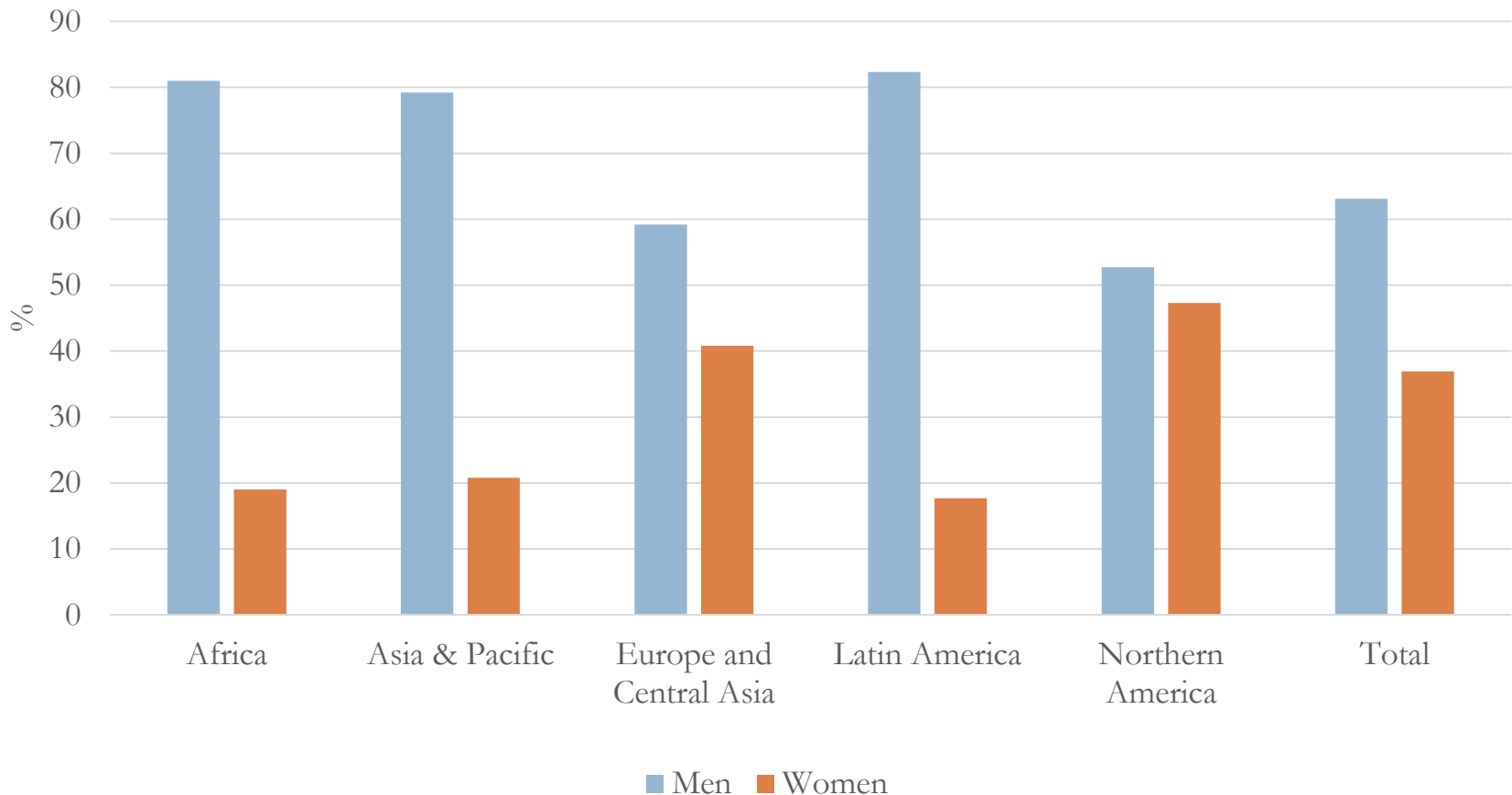
- Survey of crowdworkers on open worker platforms (2017)
 - Amazon Mechanical Turk, CrowdFlower, Clickworker, Microworkers, Prolific (2350)
- Study of workers in Ukraine

How widespread is the digital economy among women? (75 countries)

Overall:

Men 63%

Women 37%

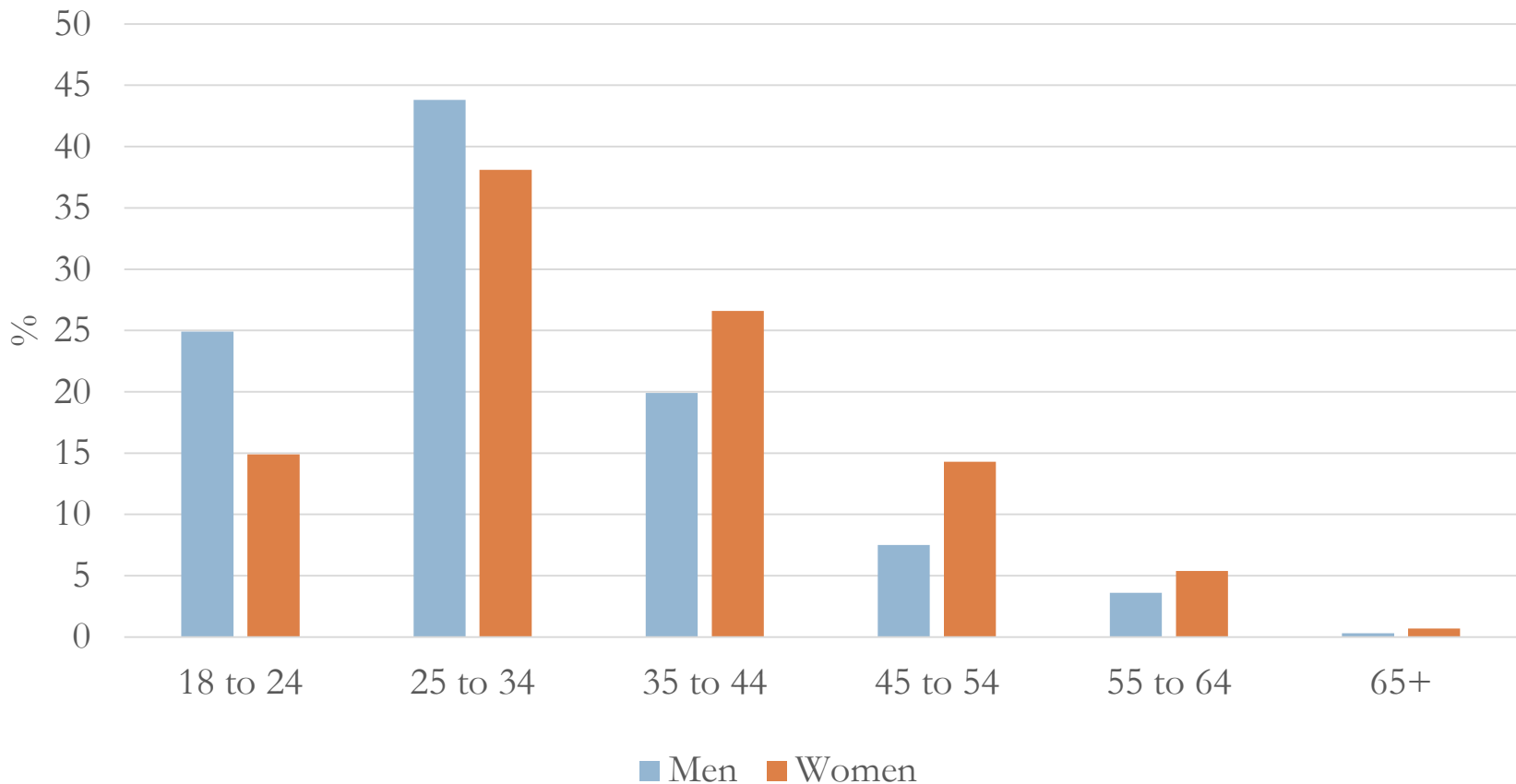


Characteristics: Age distribution, by gender

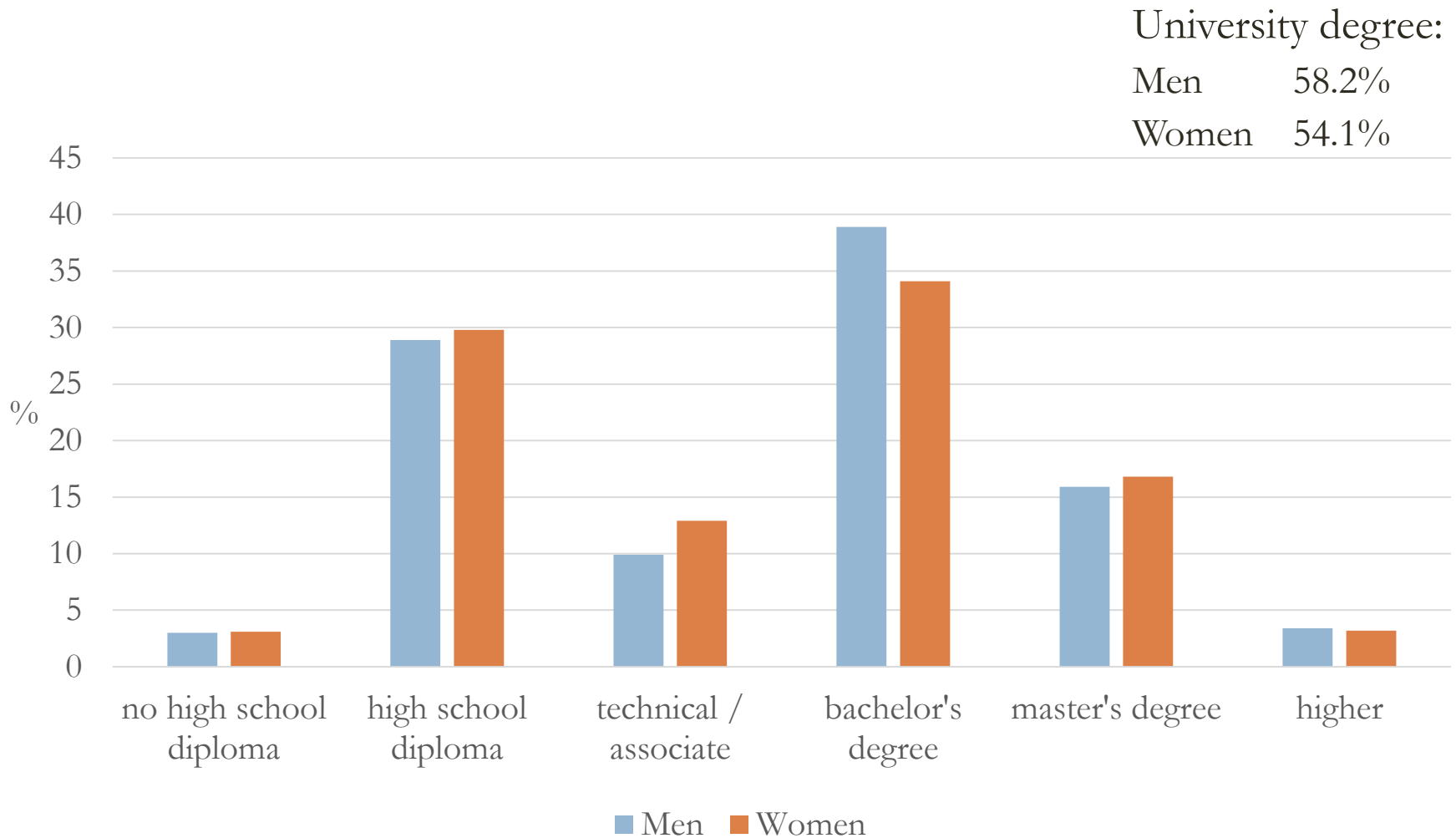
Average age:

Men 31.9

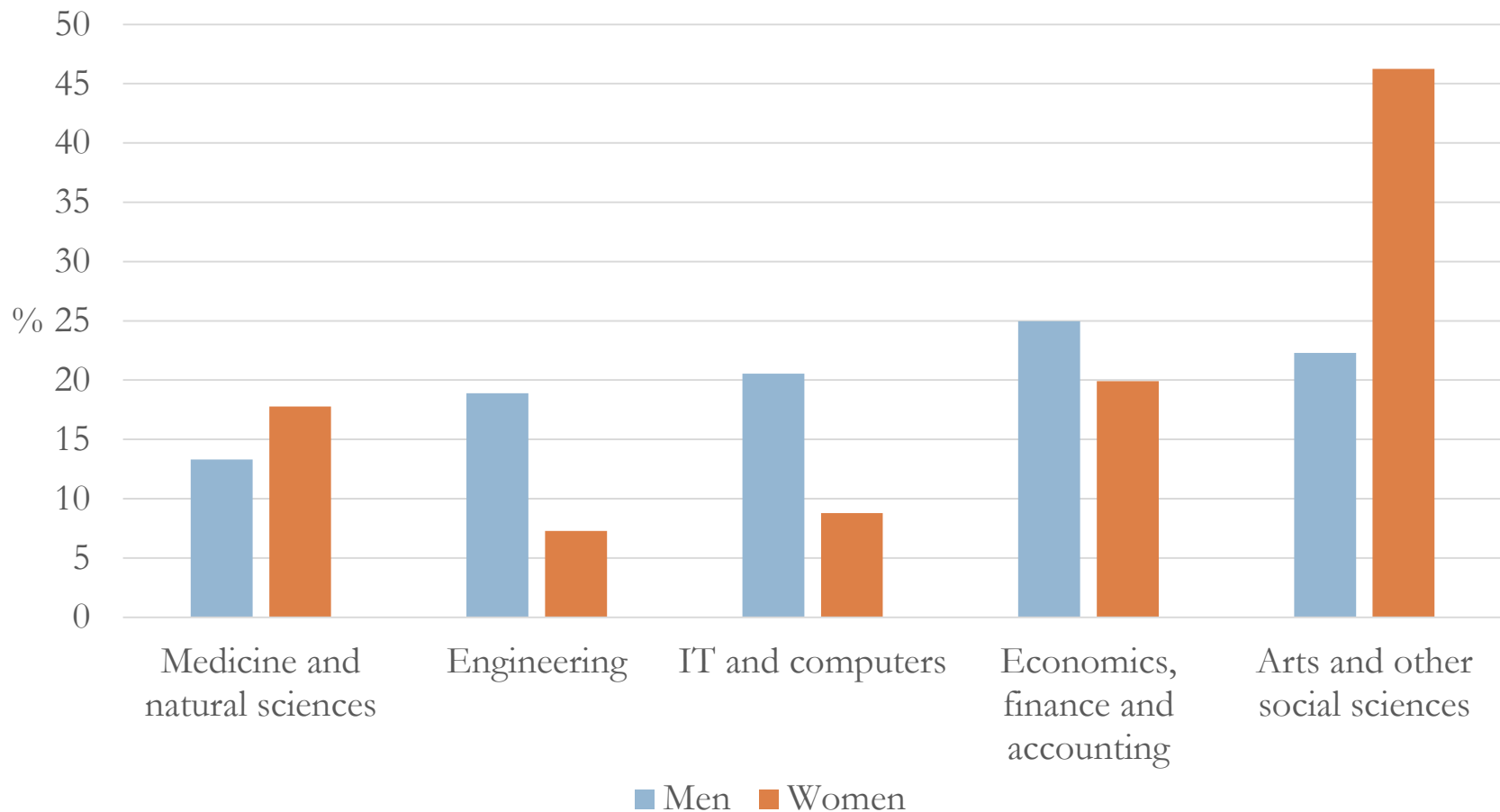
Women 35.5



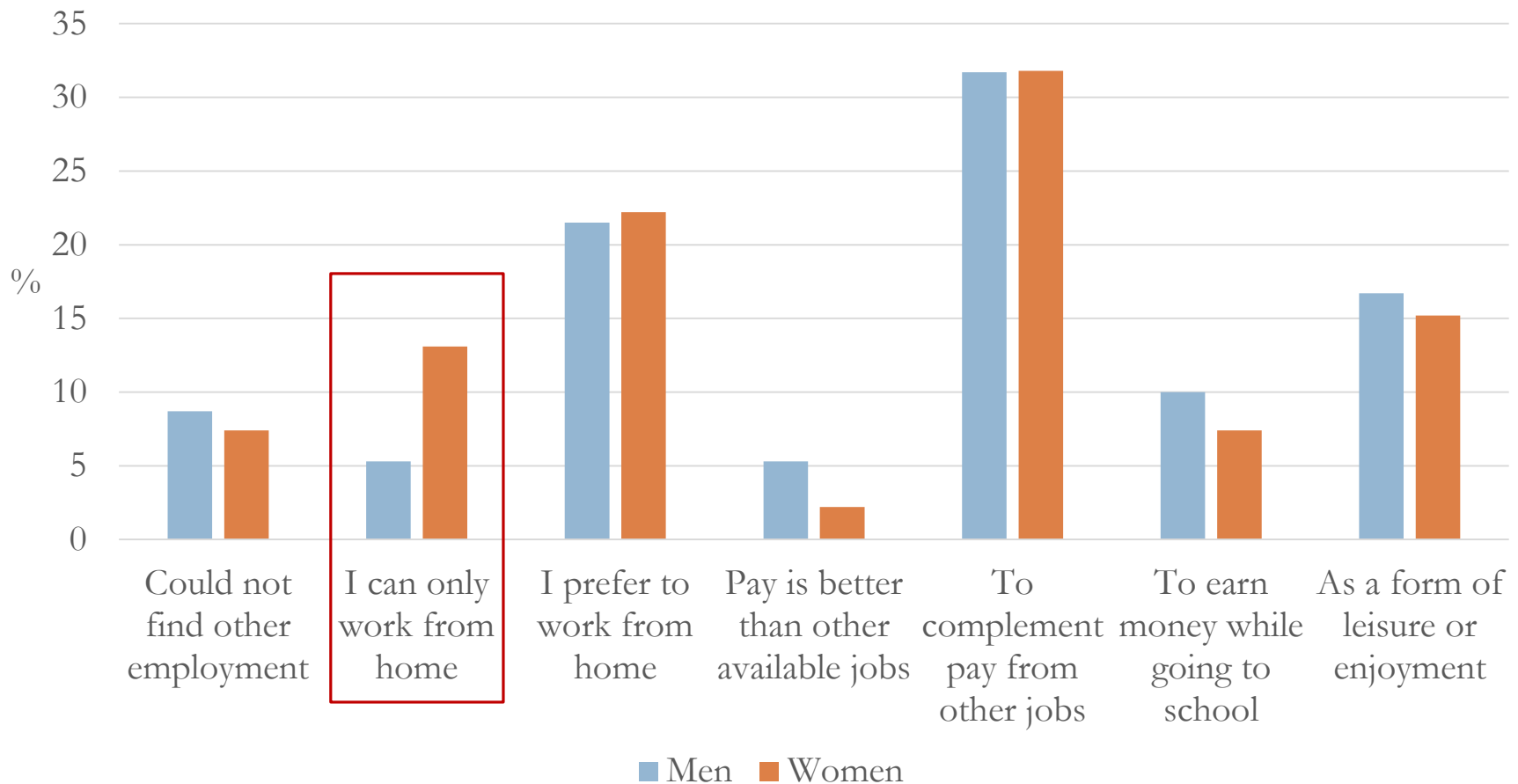
Characteristics: Education level, by gender



Characteristics: Field of study for university graduates, by gender



What motivates women to undertake work on digital platforms?



Work from home – preference or reinforcing gender roles?

“I can only work from home because my husband is the whole day away at work and I have to take care of my children and home” (Respondent on CrowdFlower, Italy)

“I have some chronic health conditions that prevent me from being able to work regular consecutive hours outside of my home. Additionally, I am a stay at home parent with two children.” (Respondent on Microworkers, USA)

“I am a house wife and lot of works to be done inside home like cooking, maintaining children. During leisure time I want to do some work with earnings.” (Respondent on AMT, India)

“Because nowadays, I'm a homemaker, and with two little children, I have only a few hours, not always the same, to do some kind of work, and only Crowd Work let me work when I want.” (Respondent on Clickworker, Spain)

- New forms of employment enabled by digital technology reinforces women’s role in social reproduction in new ways, and also alienates workers from social relations

Digital work provides an opportunity for those with health problems

		Total	Men	Women
Health status:	Fair	15.8	14.1	18.6
	Poor / Very Poor	3.2	2.2	4.8
Health problems:				
Current physical / mental health condition		19.2	15.1	26.2
Affect type of paid work one might do		54.0	54.3	53.8
Reduce ability to carry out day-to-day activities	Yes, a lot	18.3	17.5	19.0
	Yes, a little	56.6	56.5	63.9

Challenges for workers

- Low pay, pay differentials and lack of social security benefits
- Asocial working hours and work-life balance (care work unequally shared)
 - High intensity and insufficient work
- Limited career path (depending on the tasks)
- Lack of voice and representation

These challenges arise due to:

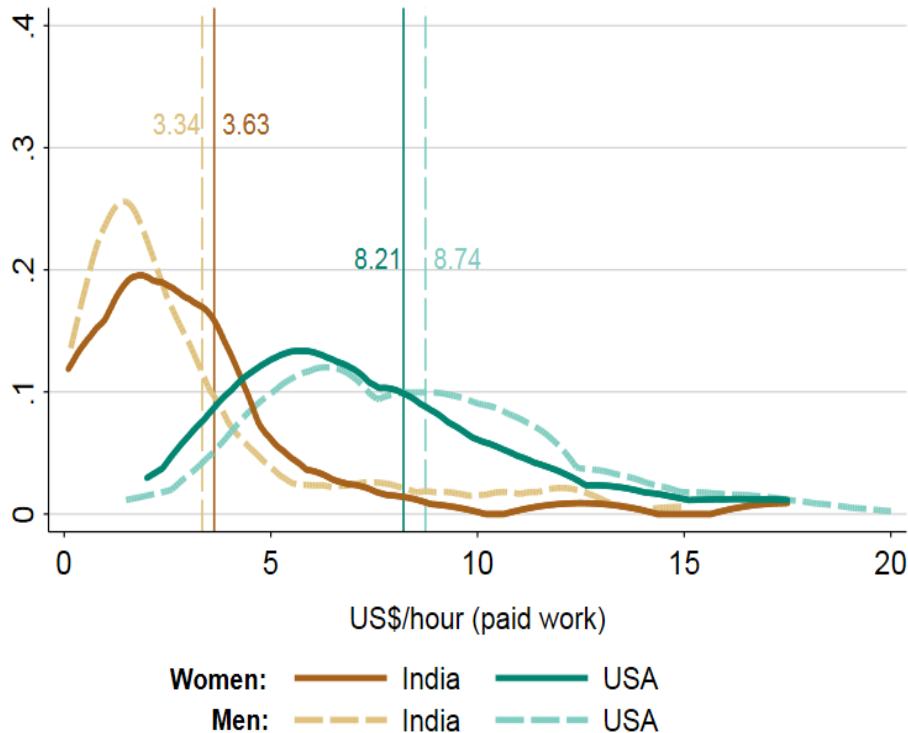
- Lack of clear employment relationship
- Regulatory issues (platform in one country, client in another and workers globally dispersed) - which laws are applicable (national or client country's law or transnational agreements (if any))

Low pay, pay differentials by gender and region

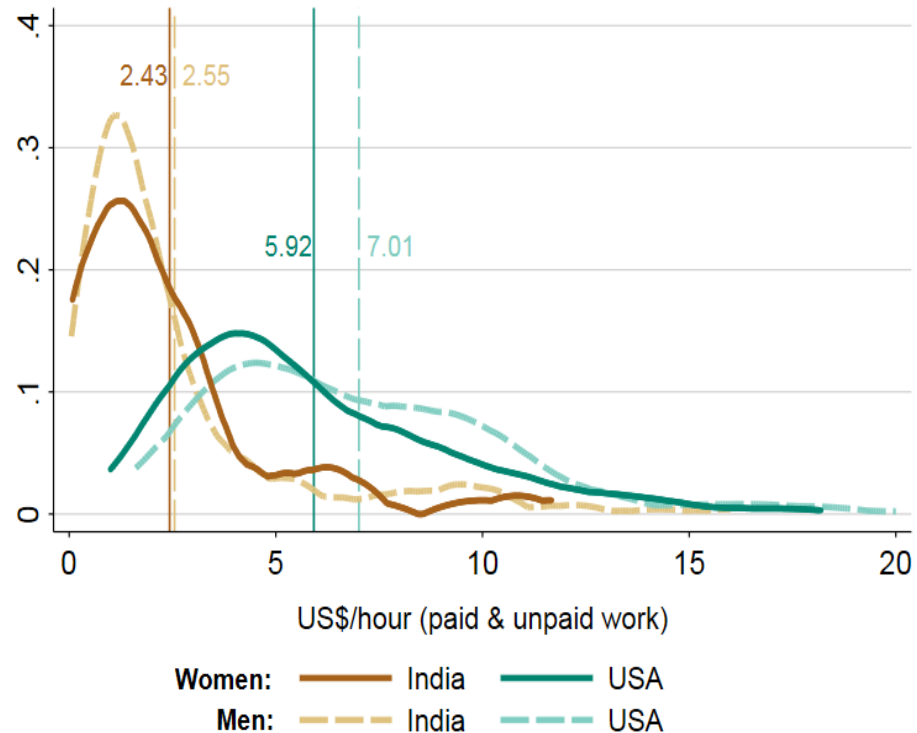
- Gender pay gap between 18 (AMT) and 38 per cent (CrowdFlower) in 2015 accounting for unpaid work
 - Controlling for individual characteristics, the gender pay gap is statistically significant only for American workers on AMT, and reduces from 18 to 11 per cent (Adams and Berg, 2017)
- An ILO 2018 study shows gender pay gap between 5 and 18 per cent depending on the platform (AMT, CrowdFlower and Prolific) in 2017 accounting for unpaid work
- Women had a higher average pay than men on Microworkers and an almost equal pay rate on Clickworker accounting for unpaid work.
 - This was largely because women were more highly qualified than men, and were doing tasks which were better paid in some regions
- A study in Ukraine shows that women earned 45 per cent less than men, and this gap was higher than in offline economy (Aleksynska, Bastrakova and Kharchenko, 2018)
 - Gap largely explained by strong occupational gender segregation, which is also dependent on whether they cater to the local market or international markets

Distribution of hourly pay, Amazon Mechanical Turk, by country and gender

Hourly paid work (US\$)



Hourly paid and unpaid work (US\$)



Note: Data trimmed at 1 and 99 per cent. Dashed vertical lines represent mean. Source: ILO Survey of crowd workers 2017.

An overarching feature: Algorithmic management

“You cannot spend time exchanging e-mail. The time you spent looking at the e-mail costs more than what you paid them. This has to function on autopilot as an algorithmic system....and integrated with your business processes”

- Large-scale requester on AMT platform (personal communication with L. Irani, cited in Irani (2015), p. 228)

Flexibility and easy accessibility of work

- Continuous search for tasks due to irregularity of work
 - In a typical week, women spend 22.4 hours doing crowdwork, of which 16.3 hours were paid work and 6.4 hours were unpaid work
- Women spend more time doing crowdwork during the day than men
- About 46% of women work for 6 or 7 days a week, which is lower than among men
- About 13% of women work for more than 2 hours in the night for more than 15 days per month
- Limited in their flexibility, as they need to adapt to the temporal distribution of jobs and affects their work-life balance

Source of work for women with young children (0-5 years)

Share of workers with young children (0-5 yrs)



- About 40% of these women do crowdwork for 6 or 7 days a week
- Working during night time (10pm to 5am): 36%
- Working during evening (6pm to 10pm): 65%
- About 14% of these women work for more than 2 hours in the night for more than 15 days per month

Steps towards decent work on online digital platforms

- Need to embrace innovation and technology, **equally important** that there is a **structural balance** in the architecture of the platforms
- Platforms are self-regulated and there is a need for exchange between governments, unions and employers
- 18 Criteria for Fairer Microwork Platforms (employment status, pay, collective bargaining, rejection clauses, etc.) – FairCrowdwork.org – IGMetall in 2015

“This is obviously a way of working that will likely explode in the future. If some sort of fairness were present in early stages it would prove beneficial to long term prospects.”

—AMT worker



International
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Digital labour platforms and the future of work

Towards decent work in the online world



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Access the report at:

www.ilo.org/crowdwork