

COMMENT

A secure future for platform workers



Lakshmee Sharma

NOVEMBER 02, 2020 00:15 IST
UPDATED: NOVEMBER 02, 2020 01:07 IST

SHARE ARTICLE f t r w e p PRINT A | A | A



There is a strong case to attribute a more robust responsibility to platform companies and the State

The Code on Social Security Bill, 2020, for the first time in Indian law, attempted to define 'platform work' outside of the traditional employment category. It says: "Platform work means a work arrangement outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities which may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment." While the long overdue move to recognise platform work has been made, the Code has drawn criticism from platform workers' associations for failing to delineate it from gig work and unorganised work. A categorical clarification could ensure that social security measures are provided to workers without compromising the touted qualities of platform work: flexibility and a sense of ownership.

An ongoing global conversation on platform workers' rights has been around the misclassification of platform workers as 'independent contractors'; adjudications and emerging amendments to labour laws in Ontario and California have shown a move towards granting employee status to platform workers, thus guaranteeing minimum wage and welfare benefits. This is the view propagated by international agencies in the EU, including the European Trade Union.

Comment | [The future of work](#)

Flexibility of the platform

The ostensible preference for employment status stems from the fact that while platform work promises workers flexibility and ownership over delivery of work, they are still largely dictated by mechanisms of control wired by the algorithm. This affects pricing per unit of work, allocation of work, and hours. Additionally,

Trending in Comment

- Comment** The judicial role in improving lawmaking
- Comment** The key to revitalising India's reservation system
- Comment** National Monetisation Pipeline and the infrastructure deficit
- Comment** A Taliban-led Afghanistan and the Chinese conundrum
- Comment** A prescription for Kerala: on COVID-19 response
- Comment** Social media cannot replace proper news journalism
- Comment** The Indian economy is struggling to recover
- Comment** Is monetising public assets a good idea?

Are fears over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act misplaced?

To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

G. SAMPATH



Top Picks in The Hindu today

- Singapore trials patrol robots to deter bad social behaviour
- With Omar Little, Michael K. Williams created one of the most enduring characters in
- No cashiers, please: Futuristic supermarket opens in Mideast

'Dr. Death' review: A riveting, harrowing



entry into on-demand platform work like ride sharing and food delivery are dependent on existing access to vehicular assets. The average Indian worker on a ride-sharing platform has limited access to such capital. Thus, to enter the platform economy, workers rely on intensive loan schemes, often facilitated by platform aggregator companies. This results in dependence on platform companies, driven by financial obligations, thus rendering flexibility and ownership moot in the short- to middle-term investment cycle.

However, contrasting evidence suggests that for specific categories of workers with basic access to capital, the flexibility of the platform is a significant attraction. Smallholder agrarian labour migrants with access to vehicular assets and capital hailing from peri-urban areas rely on the low barrier of entry and flexibility of platform work to accumulate wealth that they invest back into farm work.

The Code states the provision of basic welfare measures as a joint responsibility of the Central government, platform aggregators, and workers. However, it does not state which stakeholder is responsible for delivering what quantum of welfare. To mitigate operational breakdowns in providing welfare services, a tripartite effort by the State, companies, and workers to identify where workers fall on the spectrum of flexibility and dependence on platform companies is critical.

Comment | [Gig work and its skewed terms](#)

The role of platform workers amidst the pandemic has presented a strong case to attribute a more robust responsibility to platform aggregator companies and the State. As argued by Aditi Surie, platform workers were responsible for delivery of essential services during the pandemic at great personal risk to themselves. They have also been responsible for keeping platform companies afloat despite the pandemic-induced financial crisis. This has cemented their role as public infrastructures who also sustain demand-driven aggregators. The dependence of companies on platform workers merits a jointly assumed responsibility by public and private institutions to deliver welfare measures.

Also read | [The 'gig' economy is creating lakhs of jobs, but workers don't see a future](#)

A way forward for platform workers is through a socio-legal acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of work in the gig economy, and the ascription of joint accountability to the State and platform companies for the delivery of social services.

Lakshmee Sharma is Senior Research Associate, Aapti Institute

THE HINDU

Our code of editorial values

Related Articles

This article is closed for comments.
[Please Email the Editor](#)

TRENDING TODAY [AFGHANISTAN](#) [CORONAVIRUS](#) [PARALYMPIC GAMES](#) [HOUSING.COM](#)



18K | Explained | What caused the Sri Lankan economic crisis?



12K | Delhi Police arrest actor Leena Paul in ₹200 crore extortion case



9K | Undersea cables have a high risk of failure from solar storms, research says



8K | SC refuses to entertain plea for opening of Singhu border



8K | Islamic State threatens to eliminate Pugwash staff in Kabul

