

A SECURE FUTURE FOR PLATFORM WORKERS

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

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](#)

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, 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

This article is available only to our subscribers.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Start your 14 days free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Dear reader,

We have been keeping you up-to-date with information on the developments in India and the world that have a bearing on our health and wellbeing, our lives and livelihoods, during these difficult times. To enable wide dissemination of news that is in public interest, we have increased the number of articles that can be read free, and extended free trial periods. However, we have a request for those who can afford to subscribe: please do. As we fight disinformation and misinformation, and keep apace with the happenings, we need to commit greater resources to news gathering operations. We promise to deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Dear subscriber,

Thank you!

Your support for our journalism is invaluable. It's a support for truth and fairness in journalism. It has helped us keep apace with events and happenings.

The Hindu has always stood for journalism that is in the public interest. At this difficult time, it becomes even more important that we have access to information that has a bearing on our health and well-being, our lives, and livelihoods. As a subscriber, you are not only a beneficiary of our work but also its enabler.

We also reiterate here the promise that our team of reporters, copy editors, fact-checkers, designers, and photographers will deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Suresh Nambath

Please enter a valid email address.

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

like NRC

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com