Understanding and improving women's work on digital labour platforms

International Labour Organization

Development Partner

BILL & MELINDA GATES *foundation*

Countries of Implementation

India   Kenya   Nigeria   Uganda

Background

The digital economy has been expanding at a rapid pace and gaining prominence globally. Digital labour platforms are a distinct part of the digital economy and have risen five fold in the past decade globally in the taxi and delivery sector on location-based platforms, and on online labour platforms according to the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook 2021 report. These platforms are being increasingly embraced by businesses and consumers for a range of activities. These include arranging a ride, ordering food, requesting for a domestic worker, finding a freelancer for developing a website or translating documents, among others. Digital labour platforms are now a part of our everyday lives, with consumers and businesses ever more relying on them to meet their diverse needs since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising remote working arrangements. These platforms are transforming the world of work and changing work processes, consumer preferences as well as the business landscape.

Digital labour platforms are rapidly growing in developing countries and are being embraced with the hope of creating gainful employment opportunities. Developing countries have also been massively investing in building digital infrastructure as well as developing digital skills through training programs. While these platforms offer opportunities for generating incomes or flexibility to certain groups of workers, including women, persons with disabilities, young people among others, there are also challenges relating to working conditions.

Building on previous ILO research, this project focuses on select developing countries, namely India, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda to better understand the opportunities and challenges for women workers from the rise of digital labour platforms.
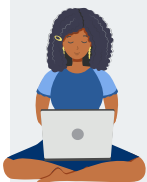
Online labour platforms: Tasks or work assignments are performed online or remotely by workers. These tasks may include translation, legal, financial and patent services, design and software development on freelance and contest-based platforms; or data analytics and artificial intelligence on competitive programming platforms; or completing short-term tasks, such as annotating images, moderating content, or transcribing a video as a crowdworker on microtask platforms, Eg. Upwork, Topcoder or AMT.

Location-based platforms: Tasks are carried out in person in specified physical locations by workers, and include taxi, delivery and home services (such as a plumber or electrician), domestic work and care provision. Eg. Uber, Glovo or SweepSouth.

Project Goals

▶ Examine the penetration of digital platforms in different sectors of the economy in the four countries and to identify the sectors in which women are participating or have the potential of participating.

▶ Explore the experiences of women workers on digital labour platforms in the four countries based on surveys and interviews, and identifying the opportunities and challenges they face in accessing and performing work in some sectors.

▶ Conduct interviews with key stakeholders including governments, trade unions, employers' organizations and platform companies, among others in the four countries to understand their perspectives regarding the rise of the platform economy and opportunities for decent work creation.

▶ Inform the key stakeholders in the four countries about the situation of women in the platform economy, and provide a way forward for leveraging digital labour platforms for promoting decent work for all.

Phases of the project implementation

Phase 1

▶ Scoping studies exploring the penetration of digital labour platforms in different sectors of the economy in each country

▶ Conducting key informant interviews

▶ Country-level inception and stakeholder consultation workshops

▶ Identifying sectors for survey and developing a research strategy

▶ Methodology and survey tools

Phase 2

▶ Data collection and analysis

▶ Conducting stakeholder interviews for mapping policy frameworks

▶ Preparation of regional and country reports

▶ Validation and dissemination workshops at the country-level

Key Knowledge Products

▶ Country-level reports with research findings and recommendations for promoting decent work opportunities for women on digital labour platforms.

▶ Policy briefs for each country of implementation.

▶ A regional report on Africa with findings from Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda.

Implementation Partners

The project is being implemented by the Research Department of the ILO in collaboration with the following country-level implementing partners:

India
The Centre for Internet & Society
Indian Institute for Human Settlements

Nigeria
Lagos Business School

Kenya
Thunderbird School of Global Management

Uganda
Makerere University