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The Next Normal: The Changing Eworkplace Member Briefing



International Labour Organization



▶ Digital Platforms and the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a surge in the use of digital platforms by workers and businesses. The pandemic has dramatically hastened the long-term transition from analogue to digital, while also forcing businesses to adopt digital tools to substitute for in-person activities. Some businesses have adopted technology to help employees work from home. Others have used it to change some aspect of their customer

interactions or business operations. In Kenya, close to half of firms are increasing their use of digital platforms or using them for the first time.¹ Notably, the move to investing and using platforms is significantly greater than other changes such as “investing in software or digital equipment (13 per cent), changing their product mix (18 per cent) or increasing working from home (12 per cent).”²

▶ Types of Digital Platforms

Digital platforms are online tools that connect multiple groups of users and facilitate economic activity. They have been defined as intermediaries “that brings together groups of users to facilitate economic or social exchange.”³ Platforms facilitate economic activity in many sectors and between a range of different user groups. These platforms have played a vital role in the pandemic, connecting businesses, customers, government, and workers. They have helped many businesses and workers have some semblance of normalcy during the pandemic. In this section, we will review some key sectors in which platforms facilitate economic activity, as well as review different structures that platforms use to do this.

One of the most common and longstanding sectors for platforms is in financial technology, or fintech. Fintech platforms facilitate transactions and other financial services between individuals, businesses, banks, government and others. Perhaps the most common type of fintech platform is for payments. There are a range of different types of payment platforms. Some, such as mobile money platforms, are operated by telecommunications companies and operate outside of the formal banking system. They allow mobile users to send money directly to another mobile user. Other payments systems work through the formal banking sector. Beyond payment platforms, there are a wide range of other fintech platforms providing other financial services, from insurance to lending. Digital payments platforms play a vital role in the growth of digital platforms across sectors. They facilitate payments for e-commerce, logistics and e-government platforms and allow users of multisided digital platforms to transact electronically.

E-commerce is another common type of platform. They can either sell goods directly to customers,

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- Main emerging types of digital platforms
- Fintech platforms
 - E-commerce platforms
 - Logistics and transportation platforms
 - E-government platforms
 - Digital productivity and communication platforms

or serve as a marketplace where customers can make purchases from third-party businesses that are hosted on the platform. Some e-commerce platforms function as both, selling their own goods as well as those from third-party services. E-commerce platforms involve two distinct sets of businesses – platforms and merchants – who often have conflicting viewpoints and competing financial interests.

Logistics and transportation platforms are another common type of platforms. This group includes platforms that provide transportation services to consumers, such as Uber or EasyTaxi. It also includes logistics businesses that provide delivery services. Sometimes, these logistics services utilize the same providers as transportation services – such as MondoRide. Other logistics platforms focus exclusively on delivery of goods, including some that have providers exclusively dedicated to cargo-hauling.

Digital productivity and communication platforms are more commonly used by businesses and workers during the pandemic, often to facilitate working from home. Digital communications platforms such as Zoom and Skype have helped a wide array of businesses continue to meet during the pandemic. However, businesses



are often using broader productivity platforms that have multiple communications options embedded alongside other workplace tools. Examples of these platforms include Microsoft Teams or Slack. These digital workplace platforms are also complemented by a wide range of other productivity related platforms that allow work to continue remotely, sometimes even with gains in efficiency compared to previous working modalities.

A final type of platform is an e-government platform, which facilitates digital interactions with government. E-government platforms can be used by citizens to request public services, provide comments and pay taxes. They can also facilitate digital engagement with businesses, including a wide range of applications, reporting requirements and taxes.

Platforms operating across these and other sectors use various business models, with some operating as one-sided markets and others as

multi-sided markets. Some function as one-sided markets, for example an e-commerce business that uses its platform to sell goods directly to consumers. Others operate as multi-sided markets, which occur when “platforms enable interactions between end-users, and try to get the two (or multiple) sides ‘on board’ by appropriately charging each side. That is, platforms court each side while attempting to make, or at least not lose, money overall.”⁴ These platforms “match different groups of users and providers and enable the increase in scale and speed for traditional transactions such as selling, renting, lending, labour trade, and provision of services”.⁵ Platforms in multisided markets do not buy or sell, but simply connect those groups. Because of this structure, multi-sided platforms often have few employees, and instead work with partners to deliver goods and services. This structure, in which partners are independent contractors and not employees, is an important but highly contentious approach for many platforms.

▶ Digital Platforms during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid pandemic has played a major role in accelerating the use of digital platforms by both businesses and individuals. According to Accenture, by 2025 the “internet economy” has the potential to reach 5.2 per cent of GDP in Africa, contributing almost \$180 billion to the continent’s total GDP.⁶ The pandemic has also changed the way businesses are using digital tools, creating an “unprecedented demand for contactless services, cloud solutions and collaboration applications.”⁷ Many businesses are starting to use digital platforms for the first time. For many of them, the shift has been one of necessity. Because of pandemic-related restrictions or precautions, businesses couldn’t continue to operate in their traditional ways. By 2022, it is expected that “70 per cent of organizations worldwide will have increased their use of digital technologies.”⁸ While some businesses may return to previous ways of working after the pandemic is over, many businesses will never fully return to their pre- pandemic ways of operating.

One of the areas that has seen the most widespread growth during the pandemic is the use of fintech platforms. Even before the pandemic, some countries in Africa were already world leaders in various aspects of digital finance. Kenya is the widely known example, as

it is a world leader in the use of mobile money. The transformation to digital finance is not a new trend – it has been ongoing for some time, but the pandemic dramatically accelerated this long-running trend. Businesses have rapidly shifted to mobile payments so that they can continue operating despite lockdowns and other restrictions.



In Rwanda, the lockdown caused mobile money transfers to double in a week and increase five-fold over a six-week period

The growth in digital payments has been dramatic. Not only have these payments services attracted new users but they have also seen an increase in the volume of transactions using fintech platforms. In Kenya, for example, the value of consumer to business transactions through the country's mobile money services increased by 43% between the first and second quarters of 2020.⁹ In Rwanda, the lockdown caused mobile money transfers to double in a week and increase five-fold over a six-week period.¹⁰ In the Seychelles, mobile money is less common but the country has long had internet banking. While adoption has historically been low, Covid-19 significantly accelerated the pace of adoption.¹¹ Many countries in Africa changed regulations to encourage the use of fintech platforms during the pandemic. Ghana and Rwanda waived fees for smaller transfers and raised transaction limits, while Uganda and Kenya also removed fees for small transactions while making mobile wallet-to-bank transactions free.¹² These changes were largely driven by the desire to reduce the need to transact in public, and to reduce the use of physical cash.

A portion of the growth in fintech platform use is directly linked to the dramatic growth in e-commerce in Africa during the pandemic. One study found that the number of online consumers jumped 30 per cent during the lockdown across some of Africa's larger economies, including Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya.¹³ In South Africa, a country whose e-commerce sector has lagged behind some other African nations, 42 per cent of people said they were shopping online more than at the start of the pandemic.¹⁴ Jumia, one of the larger e-commerce platforms in Africa, reported annual active customer growth of 51 per cent.¹⁵ The growth has been especially pronounced in essentials. Jumia saw a four-fold increase in demand for groceries and other essentials in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the prior year.¹⁶ Some of this growth is driven by the inability of consumers to visit physical stores and may shift back after the pandemic, but for others the change may be permanent. In South Africa, 40 per cent of people said that they would continue to shop online, either exclusively or predominately, after the Covid-19 pandemic had passed.¹⁷ Despite the

Covid-related growth, however, a recent survey of businesses in Africa noted that the share of e-commerce revenues remains relatively small at 16 per cent.¹⁸ The e-commerce boom has driven growth in related industries. For example, e-commerce platform Herdy Fresh launched a new partnership with delivery platform Sendy to help them deliver on the e-commerce boom.¹⁹

The effect of the pandemic on logistics and transportation platforms has been mixed, with the demand for transportation of goods increasing while demand for consumer transportation decreasing. Transportation platforms such as Uber have seen significant drops in ridership, driven by lockdowns and the reduction in commuters. Some drivers are even stopping work because it is no longer economical.²⁰ However, logistics and transportation platforms that focus on delivery of goods have generally seen dramatic growth. For example, logistics provider Kobo, whose platform matches shippers and truck operators for long-haul trips, has seen the value of trips on its platform double since lockdowns started across Africa.²¹

Xente, an e-commerce and digital financial services app in Uganda, has seen strong growth during the pandemic. Business and consumer transactions have increased 10 per cent and business to business transactions by 100 per cent.

In Rwanda, the government's push to use cashless transactions led to rapid growth at Momo pay services, with user numbers increasing to 1.4 million from just 200,000 before the Covid-19 pandemic.

In South Africa, 64 per cent of consumers bought groceries online for the first time during the Covid-19 pandemic and 53 per cent made their first online pharmacy purchase.

Sources: UNCTAD, "Ugandan e-commerce platforms power recovery from Covid-19 crisis," July 28, 2020, available at: <https://unctad.org/news/ugandan-e-commerce-platforms-power-recovery-covid-19-crisis>; and Nqobile Diudla, "South African e-commerce is a Covidfired market of risk and reward," Reuters, July 15, 2020, available at: <https://www.investing.com/news/stock-market-news/south-africanecommerce-is-a-Covidfired-market-of-risk-and-reward-222729/>.



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In response to the booming demand for logistics services, a large number of new platforms have entered the sector, while some existing platforms have either started to offer delivery or partnered with delivery platforms. Get Boda, for example, refocused its service offering to expand its delivery services, bolstering its fleet of independent couriers and reducing its dependence on pick-up stations.²² In South Africa, Uber launched new services, such as the addition of medicine delivery to its existing array of delivery services.²³ In Rwanda, many new businesses popped up during the lockdown to provide food delivery, because it was the only option.

Despite the dramatic growth in demand, logistics and transportation businesses have also been affected by government restrictions on movement, because they depend on the physical movement of people for their business. For example, lockdowns had a severe effect on the international cargo operations of Jumia, while local lockdowns sometimes prevented sellers from fulfilling orders. Some of Jumia's largest warehouses in Nigeria, and South Africa were temporarily closed due to restrictions, with some of Jumia's partners having to suspend deliveries until the restrictions were lifted.²⁴

In some countries, e-government has grown significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many countries have made efforts to introduce new services online. For example, Kenya introduced digital marriage registrations in July 2020, allowing couples to apply for the certificate and pay the fee through Kenya's eCitizen platform.²⁵ Part of the growth in e-government has been facilitated by the rise of epayments, which is essential for completing transactions when payments are required. More than 90 per cent of payments on Kenya's centralized e-government platform (eCitizen) involve mobile money.²⁶

Smaller firms have sometimes faced more challenges adopting digital platforms

While many businesses have turned to digital platforms during the pandemic, they have had a diversity of experiences with these platforms. On average, small firms have had different experiences and needed different things from platforms compared to large firms, while experiences have also differed across sector. In Kenya, for example, a higher percentage of large firms have increased their use of platforms for various things including "supply chain

management, marketing, sales, payments or service delivery" when compared to small firms.²⁷ Smaller firms, however, have sometimes faced challenges adopting platforms. In South Africa, Business Unity South Africa notes that moving to digital has been one of the greatest challenges for SMEs. It is difficult for them to afford the systems needed to go digital and find the time to do so. There are benefits for having economies of scale when using digital platforms, putting small businesses at a disadvantage. Businesses have also noted sectoral differences as well, with firms in tourism seeing less opportunity in digital platforms than firms in other sectors.²⁸ Still others have noted that well-established companies enjoy an advantage. In Rwanda, Flutterwave said that Covid-19 was challenging for the company because they were new and had not had time to meet potential clients and market their products, a process they found was easiest with physical contact and negotiation with owners.

Some businesses were more likely than others to go digital and use platforms, and some saw greater benefits than others. For example, service firms saw significant benefits from technologies that facilitated work from home. Younger firms were more likely to make use of supply chain management, marketing, and payment methods than established firms.²⁹ However, more generally the World Bank noted that digital technologies can help firms cope with the Covid-19 crisis in several areas including "business planning, marketing, payments, and sales."³⁰

While digital platforms were an integral driver of change during the pandemic, businesses anticipate that some post-pandemic economic activity may revert back to in-person methods. Some businesses and consumers have adopted platforms out of necessity, for example when government restrictions force businesses to close. Some consumers prefer to do business in-person and return to that mode when it is available in the future. But others who previously did business in person may continue to use digital platforms in the future, finding that they prefer it to doing business in-person. But given the necessity of technological adoption during the pandemic, some shift back towards the physical is almost inevitable. Many service sectors, including those that focus on high-value goods, benefit significantly from the physical touchpoint. Some businesses feel that while technology may refine the in-person experience, it cannot substitute for it. Some interactions require high tech and others require the human touch. Similarly, in work that benefits from empathy, it is very likely that in-person interaction will return.

▶ Opportunities and Challenges of Digital Platforms during Covid

While digital platforms have been growing in Africa for some time, the Covid-19 pandemic sped up this trend significantly. Many businesses and consumers have been exposed to digital platforms for the first time. At the same time, many governments have taken steps to try to expose businesses and individuals to platforms, and to encourage their adoption for health and

safety reasons. While some types of economic activity will return to pre-pandemic ways of working, for others the shift from physical to digital will be permanent. This shift to digital platforms has focused attention on the opportunities and challenges that they present, which has been further highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

▶ Opportunities

Business continuity

For many businesses, continuity is the single biggest opportunity presented by digital platforms. They offer the only way to continue operating during the pandemic, and especially during difficult circumstances such as lockdowns. Platforms provide a way to do things when there are no other options. Working from home is a good example. For some workers, this has very

little effect on efficiency but ensures that they will not be exposed to Covid-19, nor expose others to it, therefore providing significant benefits. The Covid-19 pandemic points to the significant opportunities to use platforms in the future in many different circumstances, ensuring continuity of work amidst unexpected events such as when transportation links are cut due to natural disasters.

Creating new work

Both directly and indirectly, digital platforms have helped create new work, including some types of work that previously did not exist. Platforms directly create a small number of jobs in areas such as digital programming, however their bigger contribution is often indirect. For example, mobile money businesses have networks of agents who help with the digital to physical exchange of cash and provide other services to users. The number of mobile money agents grew significantly before the Covid-19 pandemic in countries such as Kenya, and the rise accelerated during the pandemic. These agents are an example of the growing numbers of “digital translators – people who facilitate and fulfil digital transactions in the real world.”³¹

The net effect of digital platforms on the creation of work is complex, and further research is needed. Some of the issues associated with clearly identifying the net effects of platforms are: (1) many suppliers use multiple platforms; (2) many platforms facilitate the digitization of work instead of the creation of new work; and (3)

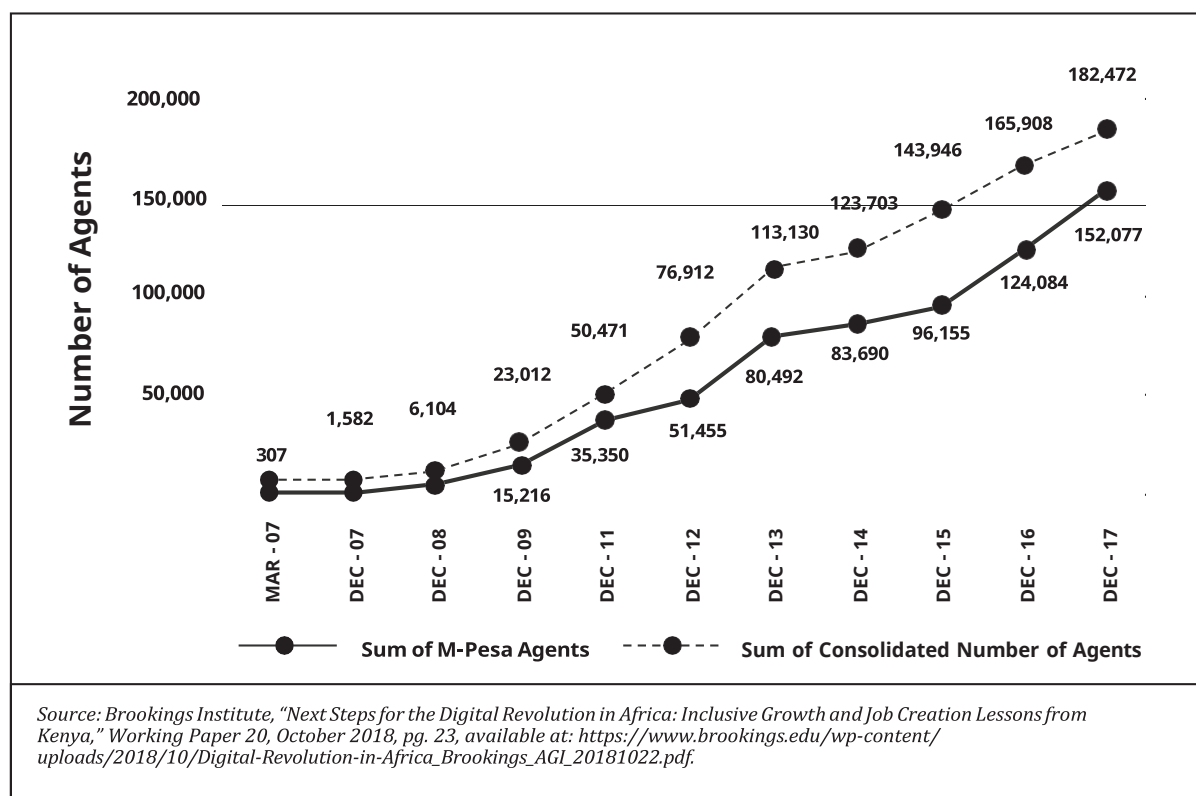
some platforms contribute to the erosion of work in established sector. The case of mobile financial agents illustrates a number of these issues. Most mobile money agents work with multiple platforms. In Kenya, the rapid growth of mobile money “led to the loss of roughly 6,000 bank jobs between 2014 and 2017” though this was more than offset by the growth in mobile payment agent numbers.³² However, to better understand the full potential of digital platforms, detailed research on the quality and quantity of work created and affected by platforms is needed.



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Figure 1. Mobile Financial Services Agents in Kenya



Accessing work and markets

Platforms help individuals and businesses access new work opportunities and markets, often opening up work in geographical locations that may not have previously been an option. Some platforms allow workers to connect to global markets that were not previously accessible. Examples of platforms that facilitate these international connections are UpWork and Amazon Mtuck. Fiverr, a global work platform that is active in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, provides a similar service. These platforms allow workers to tap into markets that previously did not exist, or help them do work for businesses in another country that previously may have required their physical presence in that country which would not have been possible due to visa restrictions. Other platforms work similarly but at a national level. Examples include:

- Glorby (Nigeria) – an outsourcing and flexible hiring platform
- Workana (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia) – a platform for freelancers from multiple sectors
- Freelance.co.ug (Uganda) – a Ugandan freelancing platform for all types of work

For many more African workers, however, digital platforms provided a tool to find work in their local market. Many workers turned to platforms when they lost their previous work during the Covid pandemic and used platforms as an alternate strategy to find work locally. While some platforms provide general marketplaces for a broad range of services, others focus on very narrow, niche markets, often in a single country. Examples of these types of niche platforms include:

- AuPairs Exclusive (South Africa) – a platform matching au pairs to employers
- Domestly (South Africa) – a platform matching ‘trusted’ cleaners to customers
- Kisafi (Kenya) – a platform connecting customers to household workers and domestic staff
- Minderz (South Africa) – a platform connecting pet owners to pet sitters, dog walkers and other animal service providers
- PrimU (South Africa) – a platform connecting customers to beauty and wellness therapists
- GetTOD (South Africa) – a platform connecting freelance tradespeople to customers

Improving efficiency and reducing overhead costs

For emerging small businesses, digital platforms have provided new opportunities to cut overheads and improve the efficiency of their operations.

Digital communications platforms are facilitating remote work, reducing the need for businesses to have often-costly office space. Many employers are looking at new opportunities to reduce the physical footprint of their office and have employees work remotely for a portion of their schedule. At the same time, digital platforms offer the opportunity for businesses to utilize assets more efficiently. For example, digital platforms can facilitate better matching with consumers, and help delivery

For businesses, digital platforms have provided new opportunities to cut overheads and improve the efficiency of their operations

businesses find more customers and utilize their delivery fleet more efficiently. Lastly, they can reduce transaction costs for some businesses, facilitating digital contracting and payments.

Formalization

Digital platforms offer new opportunities to increase formality of businesses and workers, even if they remain partly informal. Most work and business in Africa is in the informal economy. For many workers, their livelihood consists of multiple income streams instead of a single job. For example, research in Tanzania and Mozambique shows that smallholders average six different income streams per year in Mozambique, while Tanzanian smallholders have eight.³³ Businesses and workers often remain informal, due to the costs of formalization and other factors.

Digital platforms offer an opportunity to connect informal workers and businesses with some of the benefits of formality, but not all the costs.

Platforms offer an opportunity not so much to grow full time formal economy jobs but increase “people working multiple jobs with “somewhat formal” entities.”³⁴ However, evidence to date suggests that more work might be needed to facilitate this move to semi-formality. Many platform users have a few characteristics of formality, such as using mobile money. However, few platforms offer assistance to their users about how to formalize. Some platforms provide training and skills upgrading opportunities. Platforms generally do not take steps to facilitate compliance, such as by collecting sales taxes on behalf of suppliers or reporting sales data to the government. Given this, governments may have to take further steps to require or encourage platforms to play this role.

Contributing to public policy and statistics

Platforms present a unique tool to gather data on labour markets and skills, especially in the informal economy. This data, and the ability to access it in real-time, could be a boon for public statistics and policymakers, especially in data-poor environments and on topics that are tough to gather statistics about. However, at present many digital platforms do not share data with policymakers. Almost no governments have standards for how platforms should collect or report data. Instead, each individual platform determines what is collected and how it is used. Data sharing and dissemination is generally unstructured, not systemic and not occurring at regular intervals that would improve the usefulness of data when examining labour market trends. The lack of data sharing about labour markets and skill is a significant missed opportunity.

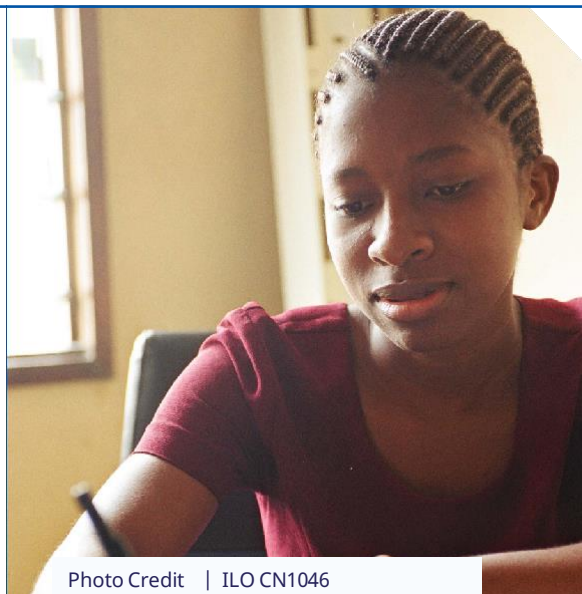


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Developing skills

Digital platforms are creating new avenues to deliver skills training and certifications and boost digital literacy. New models for skills delivery and training are desperately needed as “traditional models are failing the world’s young people; almost two-thirds of youth employment programs have no impact.”³⁵ The IFC estimates that there is a “\$130 billion opportunity ... to provide digital skills across Sub-Saharan Africa until 2030.” They note that the “largest opportunities are in business-to-business and business-to-government training for basic and

intermediate skills.”³⁶ Many platforms already offer digital skills and literacy trainings and demonstrate the huge opportunities available to disseminate digital skills. Jumia, for example, offers both online and offline training to support sellers on its platform. In Nigeria, these trainings are provided on a weekly basis and cover a wide range of e-commerce topics, such as marketing, sales, and communication, and include specific modules on Jumia’s operations, such as how to list products, managing shipping, and understanding account statements.³⁷

► Challenges

Access and the digital divide

One of the biggest challenges faced by digital platforms, and the digital economy generally, is that many people cannot participate in the virtual economy. One of the key drivers of this exclusion is cost. The percentage of Africa’s population that uses the internet is “significantly lower than the global average.”³⁸ Despite fast growth and increasing numbers of internet users, the total share of people online only about 28 per cent, so there is a huge “digital divide” on the continent.³⁹ For the poorest 20 per cent of Africa’s population, the cost of 1 GB of data is about half their monthly income.⁴⁰ Countries in Africa recognize these challenges. For example, in the Seychelles the Central Bank recognizes that the cost and availability of internet is one of the biggest barriers that keeps people from using digital payments platforms.⁴¹

Addressing access issues is complex and requires a long-term commitment. It requires collaboration across multiple departments of government and the private sector. It also requires that the educational system adapt, so that students develop digital literacy – an especially daunting challenge for children whose access to education has only been further impaired because of the pandemic. The digital divide has become even more prominent during the pandemic, as people who are not connected are often the hardest hit by the pandemic. The pandemic draws new attention and makes the digital divide a human rights issue. This has direct implications for digital platforms, as these platforms work for people who can access them but are much less beneficial for people who are not digitally included.⁴²

Competitive Dynamics of Platforms

Digital platforms have a number of competitive characteristics that are challenging for individuals and businesses, including cutthroat competition and network effects that give platforms oligopoly power. Network effects are a situation when the “value of a product, service, or platform depends on the number of buyers, sellers, or users who leverage it.”⁴³ They can contribute to a winner-take-all outcome and give platforms more power to set prices, which they sometimes use to extract higher fees from sellers. This can put significant pressure on the thousands of SMEs that sell through platforms. However, most antitrust legislation was designed

before platforms and focuses on oligopoly pricing in markets with only buyers and sellers. This limits its application to digital platforms, perpetuating challenges associated with platforms having disproportionate power.

The large number of users on digital platforms means that workers and businesses can face cutthroat competition. The marketplaces for providers of many services, such as transportation, are competitive and have become even more so as new entrants join during the pandemic. This can lead to an oversupply of providers and therefore lower incomes for each of them. This was noted

by both companies and government in Rwanda during the pandemic, when many motorcyclists started using logistics platforms when their traditional business of transporting people dried up. This large number of providers led to a fall in logistics costs but did not translate into a rise of sustainable decent employment.⁴⁴ This problem has also been cited on global platforms, such as Amazon Mturk. Numerous studies have found that while some platform users can rise above the crowd due to significant experience or high ratings, most users are relegated to low paying work or work referred through other users.

These anti-competitive characteristics of digital platforms can be made worse by other

platform practices that hurt users. One of these practices is the opaque or unfair rating of platform providers. If providers receive negative reviews, they can face challenges getting work and may also struggle to clear their name when given an unfair rating. Another challenge for users, especially of e-commerce platforms, is when platforms sell competing products, a business model of many e-commerce sites. Businesses, which are often SMEs, are put in direct competition with platforms, but the latter have a significant advantage because they have the sales channel and data on both users and sellers. These types of practices make it more difficult for both users and providers to ensure fair competition on digital platforms.

Regulating digital work and workplaces

The growth of platforms has upended traditional definitions of work and workplaces and adjusting the legal and regulatory framework to keep pace has been challenging.

In some countries, employers think there is little regulation. One of the biggest areas of discussion has been the working arrangements of digital platform workers, who are often contractors and do not enjoy the protections and benefits of employees. The pandemic also highlights the insecurity of this type of work. For example, domestic workers using platforms in South Africa are increasingly common. However, workers often have to work harder even if they earn more money, and they feel less secure – both physically and in the precariousness of their work.

Digital platforms also create new questions about the definition of the workplace. For employees working directly for platforms, remote work raises questions about the workplace, such as how this is defined when an employee works from home and what the employer's duty of care is in that situation. Much like for digital labour markets more broadly, few countries have clearly

The growth of platforms has upended traditional definitions of work and workplaces, and adjusting the legal and regulatory framework to keep pace has been a major

established laws and regulations that can help address these new questions. For platform users, however, the questions are even greater, and the pandemic has highlighted how poorly most governments regulate economic activity and work. As one EBMO noted, the government was better at regulating the physical economy, but they are being sidelined as a regulator of the digital economy. Instead, platforms are often setting the terms and conditions of work and business in the digital world, and regularly doing so to their own advantage.

Accessing social protection

Workers using digital platforms often lack access to formal social protection systems, an issue that the pandemic has highlighted in many countries in Africa. While platform work can result in higher pay, it can involve more intense work, longer working hours, and less protections.



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Organizing businesses and workers

Digital platforms present unique challenges to the organization of labour and the vital roles of workers and employer's organizations. The challenges are especially acute during the pandemic, and especially for trade unions. The growth of platforms has upended traditional definitions of work and workplaces, and adjusting the legal and regulatory framework to keep pace has been a major challenge. collect demands and do internal consultation. Some unions are advanced, and communicate with members through digital means, but many cannot.

This same challenge – where workers do not share a physical workspace – is true of digital platforms and presents a challenge for unions. The Covid-19 crisis has also increased the need for unions to constantly negotiate workplace changes, many of them related to the rise of digital work. Even for workplaces that have a collective bargaining agreement, they almost certainly did not contain a full set of contingencies for a pandemic. This has resulted in significant new demands on both groups to negotiate about remote work and the rights of home-based workers.

Digital literacy and skills

Digital literacy and skills are vital for workers and businesses to take advantage of platforms, but many workers are not yet able to develop these skills. According to one estimate, “over 230 million jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa will require digital skills by 2030.”⁴⁵ A survey of employers found that digital skills will be required in about half of jobs, and that demand for these digital skills is expected to grow at a faster rate in Africa than in other regions of the world.⁴⁶ Another study argued that nearly 65 percent of individuals recruited for

jobs require at least a basic level of digital skills.⁴⁷ Notably, employers cited both computer literacy and application of technology as among the top eight skills that they will need in the future. Digital skills are also becoming increasingly important for the informal sector. While in 2018, only 35-40 percent of informal work required some level of digital skills, by 2030 over half of informal work will require digital skills. At this time, most formal jobs – 80 to 85 per cent – are predicted to require some level of digital skills.

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