IWWAGE
Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality

LEAD LEVERAGING EVIDENCE FOR ACCESS AND DEVELOPMENT
KREA UNIVERSITY

THE CHANGING WORLD OF WOMEN'S WORK

NAVIGATING THE POSSIBILITIES AND PRECARITIES WITHIN PLATFORM WORK

About IWWAGE

The Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality (IWWAGE) was established in 2018 with an aim to build and deepen evidence around the low participation of women in the economy to find solutions to support the development of gender inclusive policies and programmes.

IWWAGE is an initiative of LEAD at KREA University, an action-oriented research centre housed at the Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR), a not-for-profit society which is also the Sponsoring Body of KREA University.

About this report

CREDITS

Technical Advisory Group
Balaji Parthasarthy, Professor, IIIT Bangalore
Anweshaa Ghosh, Research Fellow and Program Lead, ISST

Research Team
Bidisha Mondal, Prakriti Sharma, Aneek Chowdhury, Anjali S, Dipa Sinha (External Consultant)

Report Authored By
Bidisha Mondal, Prakriti Sharma, Aneek Chowdhury, Anjali S

Reviewed by
Sona Mitra

Design Support Team

Anjali S

Rachita Malik

Sruthi Kutty

Design
Design Think

Illustrations
Anjali S

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the guidance, encouragement, and support of many individuals and organisations. We are deeply grateful for the thoughtful counsel provided by our Technical Advisory Group, Balaji Parthasarathy (Professor, IIIT - Bangalore) and Anweshaa Ghosh (Research Fellow and Program Lead, Institute of Social Studies Trust, New Delhi). We are indebted to all the platform workers who participated in the study for devoting their valuable time and for sharing important insights that built the foundation of this work.

Many thanks to Priya Anant, Niharika Jain Aggarwal, and Bhavya Sharma for their support in strengthening our findings and facilitating the survey. We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to Vandana Narang, Shaikh Salauddin, and Mukhtar Alam for their active engagement and insights during our key informant interviews. We are especially grateful to the members of Gig Workers Association (GigWA), Janpahal, Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) and Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union (TGPWU), whose support and coordination were central to reaching women platform workers. Our gratitude goes to experts Madhulika T, Rakshita Swamy, and Sophy K.J., whose depth of knowledge and thoughtful contributions provided valuable perspectives for the study. We are thankful to G. Manjunath from the Government of Karnataka, whose policy expertise and contextual understanding added significant depth to our findings.

We sincerely thank Sona Mitra for her proactive role in shaping this study, providing insightful conceptualisation and steadfast guidance throughout the review process. We express our heartfelt gratitude to Yamini Mishra for her generous funding support, which made this project possible. We are grateful to our field data collection team, led by Mahantesh S and Prasenjit Samanta, for their dedicated work and sensitivity towards the participants. We sincerely thank Sruthi Kutty, Rachita Malik, Nadashree Mohan and Vidhi for their dedicated contributions to communications, logistics, and design for the study. We sincerely appreciate the steadfast administrative support provided by Preeti Bawa, Neeraj Upadhyay, and Kunwar Parijat Kumar Singh. Finally, we extend sincere gratitude to Radha Chellappa and Sharon Buteau for their invaluable support, which was essential for the smooth progression of this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of women's participation in India's platform economy, the opportunities and challenges faced by women engaged in these works across India. The study follows a mixed-method approach, involving a large quantitative survey of 598 workers (440 women), engaged in care, domestic work, beauty services, ride-sharing, and delivery services across select cities in India, alongside qualitative interviews with platform workers, union representatives, platform representatives, and academicians/experts. The findings reveal that while the platform economy offers new entry points into the labour force and promises flexibility, the findings reveal that it often replicates and even exacerbates existing precarities of informal work, with significant implications for women's empowerment.

Although the platform economy provides vital employment opportunities for women in India, still it falls short of being a transformative alternative to traditional informal work. It is characterised by income unpredictability, high initial capital requirements, high charges by the platforms, limited social protection, unsafe working conditions and reinforced gender inequalities. Meaningful improvement requires a collaborative effort involving policymakers, platform companies, and worker collectives to ensure gender-sensitive and inclusive algorithms, decent earnings, accessible social security, effective grievance redressal mechanism to genuinely address women's challenges and employ them in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Key Findings

Trends in Labour Market Transition

For a significant share of women (45%), platform work provided a crucial entry into the workforce. However, for those already working, platform work led to limited occupational diversification, since it largely represents a digital shift of the existing informal work instead of a sectoral transition. True transition was primarily observed in non-traditional sectors like ride-sharing/delivery, often facilitated by NGOs.

Earnings and Platform-related Costs

While initial earnings saw an increase in the platform work, continuous onboarding of the new workers in the platforms led to declining gig availability and income instability. Additionally, net income is significantly eroded by platform-imposed costs (e.g., registration fees, mandatory product purchases, high commissions, and vehicle rentals).

Social Security Benefits

Access to social security benefits remains limited in platform work and there is a decline in most social security benefits (PF, paid leave, gratuity) in platform work compared to previous non-platform work, with the notable exception of health insurance in some sectors (beauty, ride-sharing, delivery). Also, lack of clarity on the available benefits in the work contracts, how to avail of the benefits, and administrative delays in claim reimbursement created additional hurdles.

The Illusion of Flexibility

The advertised flexibility is largely conditional. Algorithmic control, mandatory login hours, threshold-linked incentive structure, monthly work targets force long working hours (averaging 6.5 to 9.8 hours daily) to earn a decent income. This, combined with long commutes, waiting time between gigs and the persistent double burden of domestic responsibilities, severely strains work-life balance for women.

Platform Governance and Worker Voice

The digital intermediary role of platforms obscures employer-employee relationships, weakens workers› bargaining power. Additionally, the overreliance on ratings for deciding workers' access work, earnings, and social security creates a power imbalance between the workers and the customers, often leading to depression and anxiety among the workers.

Safety, Dignity and Grievance Redressal Mechanism

Women workers face harassment and discrimination from customers in both traditional and non-traditional sectors, in both public spaces and clients' spaces. Grievance redressal mechanisms are largely ineffective, non-transparent, lacking human-supported communication channels and heavily biased towards customer complaints, leaving workers without support.

Scope for Professional Growth

Training is primarily focused on standardisation of platform services, familiarisation workers with the app etc rather than genuine skill development or career advancement. Prospects for upward mobility within platform work are limited across all sectors.

Factors Influencing Collectivisation

A significant gender gap in union awareness, domestic responsibilities leaving women no time to collectivise, and nature of women's platform work making them more inaccessible to unions as compared to men, limit women's participation in unions.

Agency and Financial Autonomy

Platform work has contributed to some positive outcomes, including increased women›s agency in household decision-making, higher say over their own earnings and greater access to formal banking. However, this autonomy remains fragile and is often contingent on stable earnings and family support.

INTRODUCTION

Estimates from NITI Aayog's 2022 Report on India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy[1] suggest that India's gig economy comprised approximately 7.7 million workers during the fiscal year 2020–21. This workforce is projected to expand significantly, with estimates indicating that it will reach 23.5 million individuals by 2029–30. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the broader Indian labour market was severely disrupted due to rising informalisation and unemployment, the platform economy displayed notable resilience to these shocks. While certain services - such as ride-hailing and care work - were significantly affected due to containment measures, others, especially delivery services for food, medicines, and essential goods, experienced a surge in demand. This uneven impact underscored both the heterogeneity of the platform economy and its adaptive capacity. The sector's ability to absorb a considerable number of workers during a period of acute job scarcity - whether out of necessity or lack of alternatives - deserves closer scrutiny.

At the same time, the demand for services facilitated by the platform-based gig economy has been rising, driven by rapid urbanisation and the increasing concentration of employment opportunities in urban centres. This growing demand aligns closely with the proliferation of digital platforms emerging from India's dynamic start-up ecosystem, which are geared towards serving urban needs through care work, domestic services, delivery and ride-sharing services. Importantly, these platforms are also developing avenues for more women to participate in the workforce, particularly in sectors where women have historically engaged informally, often in unpaid or underpaid roles.[2] Given the sector's novelty, existing research is emerging, and fewer studies have examined women's participation in gig work. In this report, the term 'gig work' specifically refers to platform-based or app-mediated forms of employment.

Women's workforce participation in India, particularly in urban areas, has historically remained low. A significant portion of the labour force in India is employed informally, with women disproportionately represented in this segment. Despite rising education levels, lower fertility rates, and delayed age at marriage, enhancing women's employment participation continues to be a challenge. Within this context, emerging forms of work in the platform economy are viewed as holding substantial potential for including women. The flexibility these jobs offer is seen as especially appealing to women, who continue to shoulder the primary burden of domestic and caregiving responsibilities.

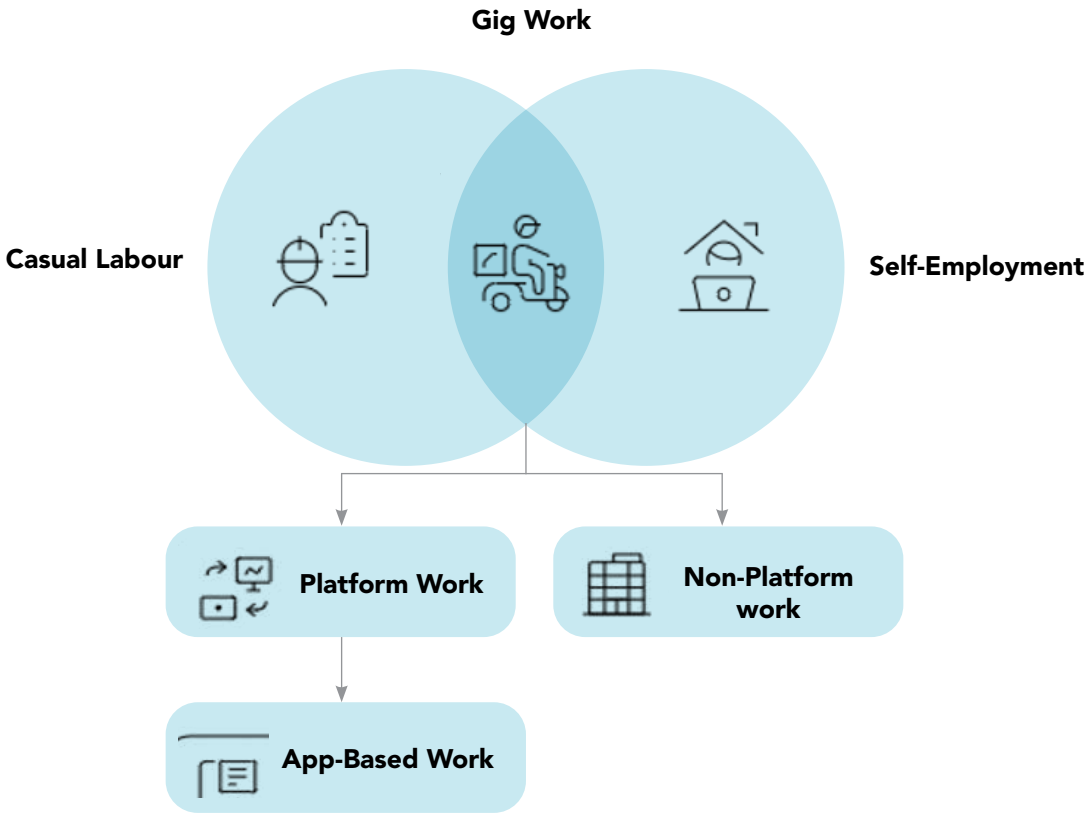
Platform-based gig work is expanding across both traditional domains of women's employment, such as beauty services, nursing care, and domestic work, and into non-traditional sectors like cab driving and delivery services in urban India. While there is a growing presence of women in some of these non-traditional areas,[3] a large proportion remain concentrated in platforms offering services historically associated with women's labour. This trend highlights the continued presence of gender-based occupational segregation, which characterises both current and emerging employment opportunities. Hence, alongside assessing

1 NITI Aayog. (2022). India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy: Perspectives and Recommendations on the Future of Work.
2 Rathi, A. & Tandon, A. (2021). Platforms, Power and Politics: Perspectives from Domestic and Care Work in India. CIS, DWRU & FIRN.
3 Sharma, I. (2023). Making Gig Work, Work for Women in India. Haqdarshak.

the gig economy's potential to generate employment for women, it is essential to examine its capacity to diversify women's work into non-traditional sectors.

Many of the prevalent forms of employment among women already exhibit features typical of gig work, including flexibility, informality, and a lack of formal employer-employee relationships - for example, agricultural work in rural areas or home-based enterprises in urban spaces. As emphasised in the *India Employment Report 2024* (ILO, 2025)[4], nearly 90 percent of India's vast workforce is informally employed, primarily in self-employment or casual labour. Both men and women, though women to a greater extent, are working under precarious conditions marked by low wages, inadequate social security, and limited grievance redressal mechanisms. It is, therefore, necessary to explore whether platform-based gig work offers an improvement in working conditions or merely replicates the same vulnerabilities and precarity in a digitally mediated format. While all gig work lies at the intersection of informal employment and self-employment, app-based gig work introduces an additional dimension through digital mediation – algorithmically assigning tasks, tracking worker performance, and connecting labour to clients in ways that obscure the employer-employee relationship. The expansion of such digitally governed work thus carries significant implications for the future of work and the broader labour market landscape. Figure 1 aims to present where platform workers lie in the gig economy landscape:

Figure 1: Where do Platform Workers lie in the Gig Economy



A critical and much-debated issue surrounding these platforms concerns the legal status of gig workers. While platform companies often refer to workers as 'partners', many workers, their unions, and labour scholars argue that they are indeed workers in the conventional sense. In this report, too, the term 'workers' is used to refer to individuals engaged in platform or gig employment. However, there remains a significant legal gap: gig workers in India have yet to receive comprehensive legal recognition or the protections accorded to formal employees. Some state-level legislative initiatives have attempted to extend limited

[4] ILO. (2025). Expansion of the Gig and Platform Economy in India.

social security to gig workers, but these efforts typically fall short of defining the relationship workers share with platforms or instituting robust wage and labour regulations. Legal recognition is a necessary step toward securing platform workers' rights, moving from discretionary benefits decided by aggregators to enforceable entitlements. These include access to social protection, occupational health and safety, fair wages, and decent working conditions.

This study seeks to explore these critical issues by examining labour market transitions, working conditions, and the potential for upskilling and career growth for women within India's platform economy. It also investigates how far gig work enables women to navigate care responsibilities more effectively and whether such work enhances their decision-making power and status within the household.

Theoretical Framework

For platform work to enable women's economic empowerment, we need to view other dimensions that foster women's transition to work. To grasp a rough understanding of their current position, we view three defining dimensions of women's empowerment: the resources they have access to, the agency they can assert and the outcomes which can be broadly termed as achievements for women. In Kabeer's framework,[5] it is argued that empowerment is centred around mentioned dimensions with respect to their ability to make decisions. Here, decisions- empowered decisions- are determined on one's ability to have not just choices but a better choice. Then, care and awareness towards one's capabilities, as Sen argues, results from the first two dimensions, resources and agency.[6] Legislative frameworks are one way to encourage better resource access and distribution as well as strengthen agency. However, what requires foremost inquiry pertaining to women engaged in platform work or aiming to join platform work is their ability to choose and its consequent impact on outcomes. To elaborate the three dimensions (resource, agency and outcomes) in this respect, one must examine:

1. the women entering and working in the platform economy, with the context of: denied and available opportunities in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds, educational attainments and skills, previous employment, digital skills, ownership of gear and initial capital as their resource pool;

2. their intra household dynamics- including the double burden that accumulates from unpaid domestic and care work, their bargaining power at household level, reasons that influence their decision to participate in platform work/ reasons influencing their participation as platform workers, dynamics if they have participated in non-platform work, tracking the movement, motivation and challenges to engage in traditional and non-traditional forms of work stemming from the scope of the agency they can assert by and large and

3. the outcome or achievements in terms of the nature and quality of platform work, opportunities for upskilling and upward mobility, presence of existing and new social networks and support systems including grievance redressal mechanisms, and current burden of overall labour they provide, both paid and unpaid.

[5] Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and change,* 30(3), 435-464.

[6] Sen, A. (1985). Well-being and freedom. *The Journal of Philosophy,* 82(4), 185-203.

Since outcomes cannot be seen in isolation, and result from the resources and agency that women have acquired for their choice to work in platforms to be an empowered one, this choice must be a true alternative and not a resort. This choice must also qualify, in one or more ways, to alter their overall livelihoods for better.

Platform work is currently contended as a promising opportunity for women with its claimed inherent flexibility, which aligns with women's unpaid care responsibilities, and its technological foundation, which can enhance scale of work, digital inclusion, and access to a wider network.

With structural supports in place, platform work may provide women with the resources and autonomy needed to make choices about their lives and livelihoods, enhancing their well-being and position within households and society. Therefore, in this report, we attempt to hypothesise and question if platform work can act as a key enabler of women's economic empowerment.

OBJECTIVES

With the mentioned context, the study has the following key objectives, towards studying the participation of women in platform work:

Platform Work and Women's Labour Market Transitions: Explore how platform work shapes women's labour market trajectories, earnings, flexibility, and working conditions. This includes understanding how access to initial resources such as education, digital tools, and previous work experience enables labour market entry and the extent to which women can make meaningful choices about work, balancing paid and unpaid responsibilities.

Digital Access as a Resource for Participation: Examine how access to digital infrastructure and skills influences platform participation. Assess whether digital access enables broader awareness, stronger networks, and the capacity to navigate platforms, or whether limitations in access and skills restrict entry and agency.

Map Shifts in Agency and Empowered Decision-Making: Understand the impact of platform work on women's ability to exercise agency over household decisions, mobility, financial control, and experiences of violence and whether platform work expands their space for making better livelihood choices.

Sector-Specific Platform Designs and Worker Outcomes: Analyse how different platform models shape workers' experiences related to disbursal of benefits, task allocation, pay structures, grievance redressal, and incentives and how these influence women's work experiences and empowerment across sectors.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining a desk review with quantitative surveys and in-depth qualitative interviews to understand the experiences of women platform workers across sectors. While the primary objective was to foreground women's voices and perspectives, the study also engaged with workers' representatives and unions to explore the structural challenges of collectivising women in platform work. In addition, interviews with platform aggregators and policymakers were conducted to capture institutional perspectives on work conditions, regulation, and accountability. Legal experts and academics were consulted to contextualise the findings within evolving regulatory, technological, and labour market frameworks. By capturing insights from across the platform economy, the study aims to offer a comprehensive view of the opportunities and constraints shaping women's participation and empowerment.

The desk review involved an examination of existing academic and grey literature on platform work and women's participation in it, platform policies of national and state governments in India as available in the public domain, and relevant legislations and bills, particularly those governing platform work.

The quantitative survey was designed to capture a wide range of information across several thematic areas. These included current and previous work experience (both platform and non-platform), motivations for joining platform work, challenges faced while working on platforms, participation across multiple platforms, access to and use of social security schemes, digital infrastructure access, patterns of earnings and deductions, involvement with collectives or unions, and household-level decision-making dynamics. However, due to the limited sample size and limited coverage of the sectors, we don't claim our estimates to be representative at any level.

Participants were reached out through platform worker lists that were provided by the aggregators, outreach through worker unions, and snowball sampling methods. These methods were adopted since locating female platform workers proved challenging due to the absence of physical workspaces, lack of 'hubs' common for male workers, and limited interaction among women, thereby exacerbating algorithmic control and domestic responsibilities.

The qualitative interviews offered deeper insights into the lived experiences of women workers. These interviews explored labour market transitions and prior work histories, access to and barriers in digital and physical infrastructure, safety concerns and experiences of discrimination, personal agency and autonomy, and the presence or absence of support systems. In addition to workers, interviews were also conducted with union representatives to understand efforts and challenges around collectivisation; platform representatives to capture operational perspectives; policymakers to examine regulatory intent and gaps; and legal experts and academics to contextualise findings within broader labour rights and governance frameworks.

This triangulated approach allowed us to draw out common patterns as well as sector-specific distinctions, grounded in the everyday realities of women engaged in platform work.

DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

1 Sample Distribution across Gender

The sample for this study consists of 598 respondents, including 440 women platform workers, 157 men platform workers, and one trans person. The sample was selected based on respondents' current engagement with platform or app-based services. To ensure diversity in occupational experiences, the study included both female-dominated sectors (such as care work, household maintenance, and beauty services) and male-dominated sectors (such as ride-sharing and delivery services). Including both types of sectors allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how gender dynamics operate differently across the platform economy.

A smaller survey of male workers, selected from the ride-sharing and delivery sectors majorly, with a very few from the care services, was conducted just for a comparative analysis with the female survey. This helped contextualise the experiences of women workers in these sectors, offering insights into gendered differences in access to opportunities, challenges, safety concerns, and collective engagement.

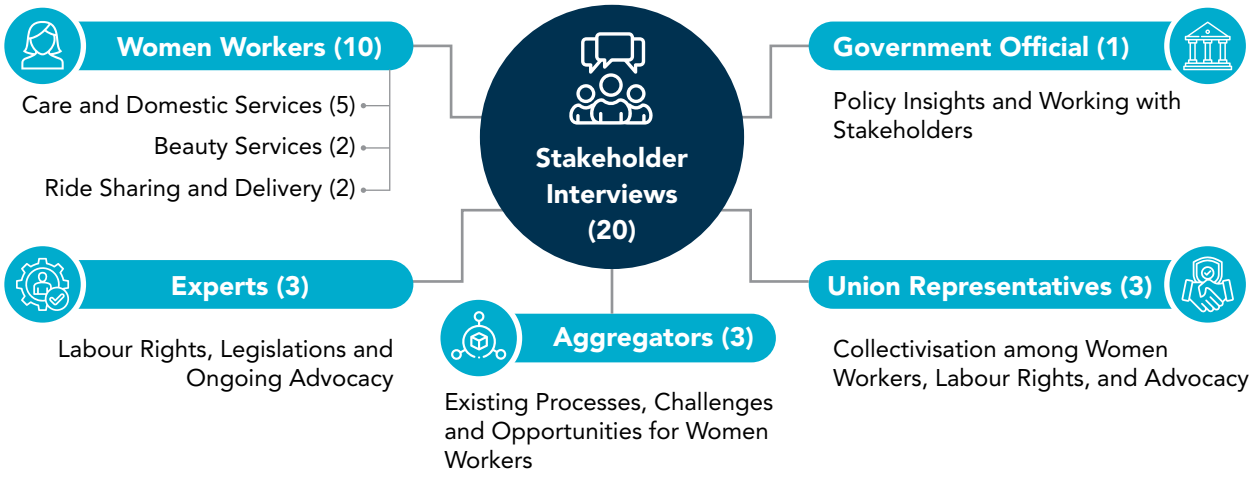
Table 1: Sample Distribution for the Study

	Male	Female	Transgender	Total
Care	10	130	1	141
Domestic	0	102	0	102
Beauty	0	81	0	81
Delivery	67	10	0	77
Ride Sharing	80	117	0	197
Total	157	440	1	598

To facilitate analysis, the delivery and ride-sharing samples have been combined. This decision was made primarily due to the small sample size of women in the delivery sector (10 respondents). Both sectors are male-dominated due to work conditions and gendered barriers, and therefore, merging the two categories allows for a more coherent and meaningful analysis. The ride-sharing sample totals 197, with approximately

60 percent being female and the rest male. Although, it is important to note that though both sectors engage only a limited number of women, their characteristics differ substantially. For instance, the timing and duration of gigs vary considerably across the two sectors, and the capital investment required is significantly different (a car vs a two-wheeler). We have recognised these differences when while merging the sectors, to ensure that variations in their operational models and entry barriers are not overlooked.

The qualitative interviews were conducted with the following respondents:



2 Sample Distribution Across Geographical Location

Figure 2: Distribution of Workers in the Sample by City

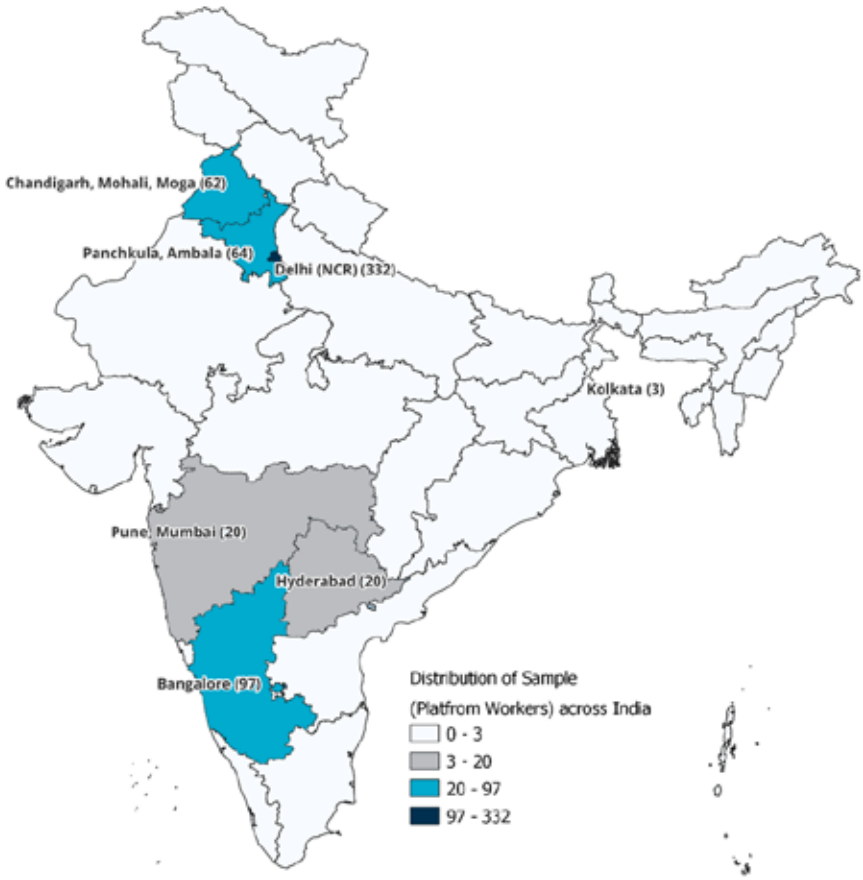
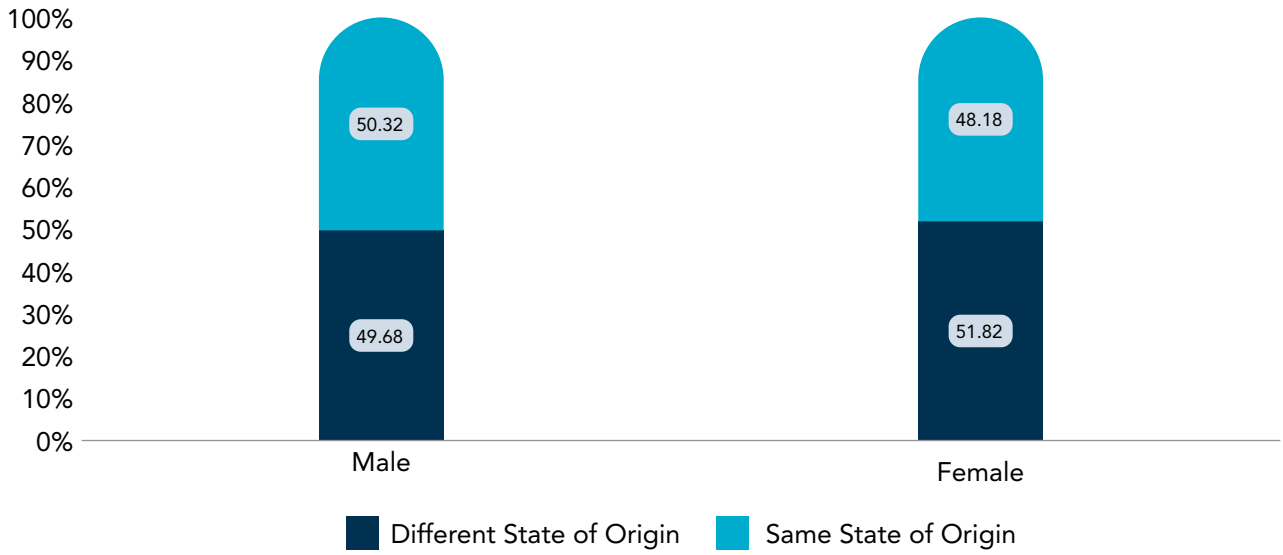


Figure 3: Share of Migrant Workers in the Sample

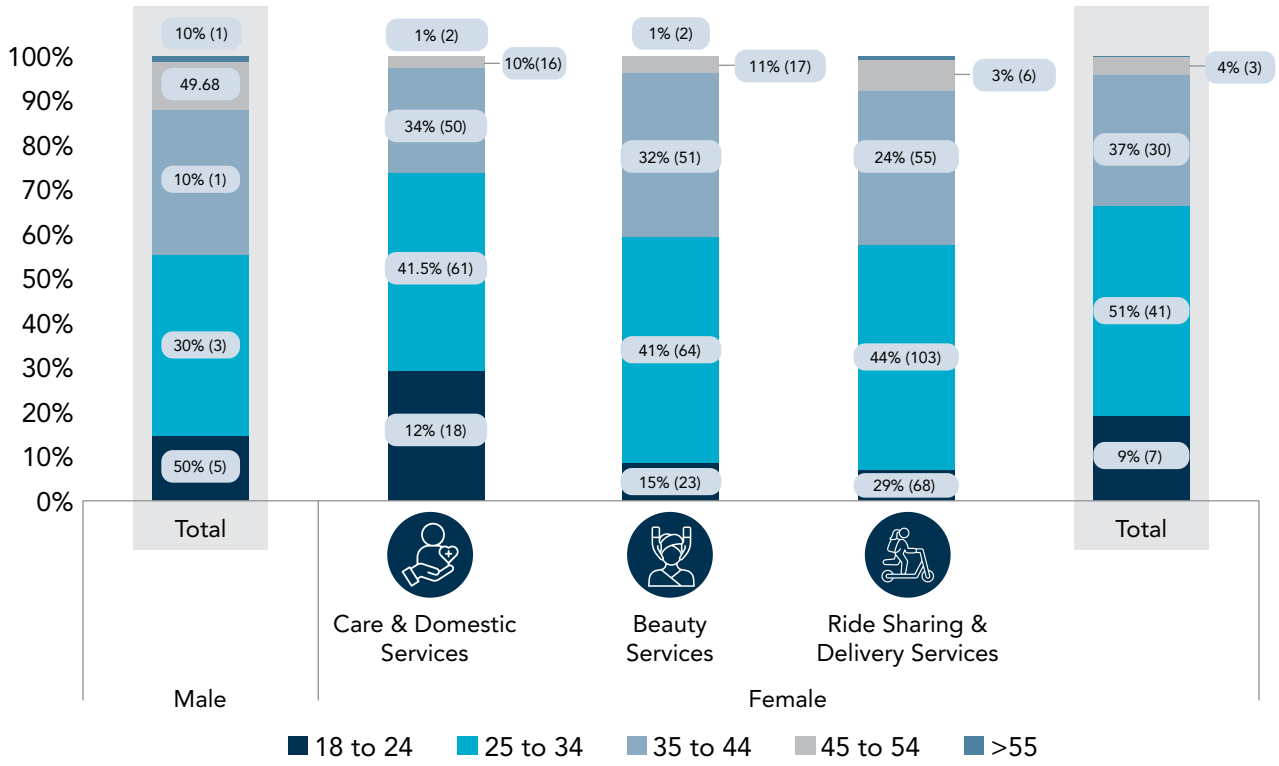


3 Sample Distribution across Age Category and Education Level

The majority of platform workers (both men and women) in the sample are in the age cohort of 25-34 years. This trend holds true for the beauty, ride-sharing, and delivery sectors. However, a notable exception is the beauty sector, which, relative to other service types, has a larger proportion of workers in older age cohorts of 35 to 44. Also, in the domestic and care work sector, we found presence of relatively younger age-cohort.

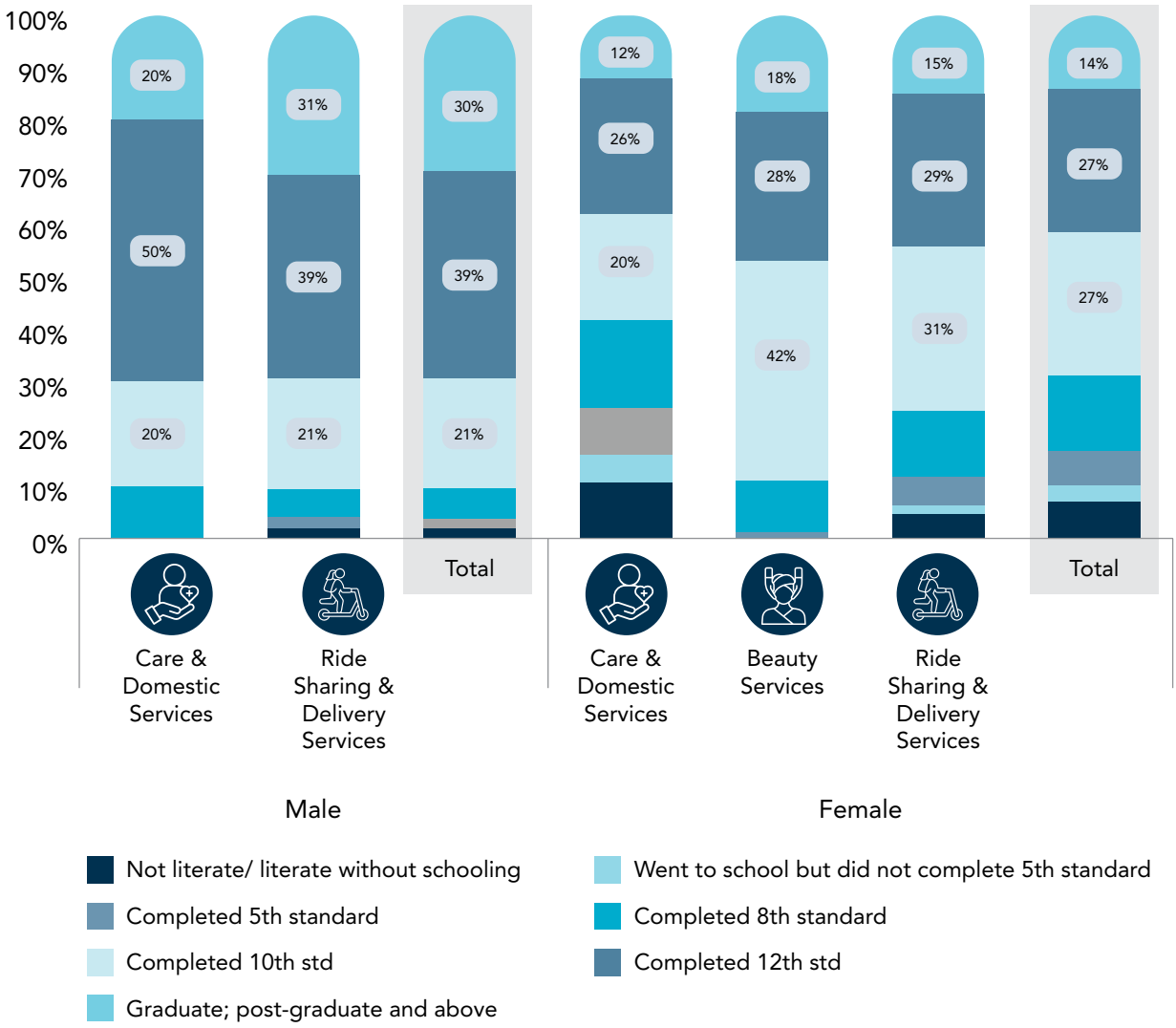
Figure 4: Age Categories of Workers Across Age Categories

Number in the parenthesis are absolute number of workers



Among the total sample of women, educational attainment varied across sector, with the educational attainment being relatively higher among women from the beauty sector, and lower among women engaged in the care and domestic service sector, when compared to women in the ride-sharing and delivery sectors. It is noteworthy that more than 10 percent women in all these sectors have tertiary level of education.

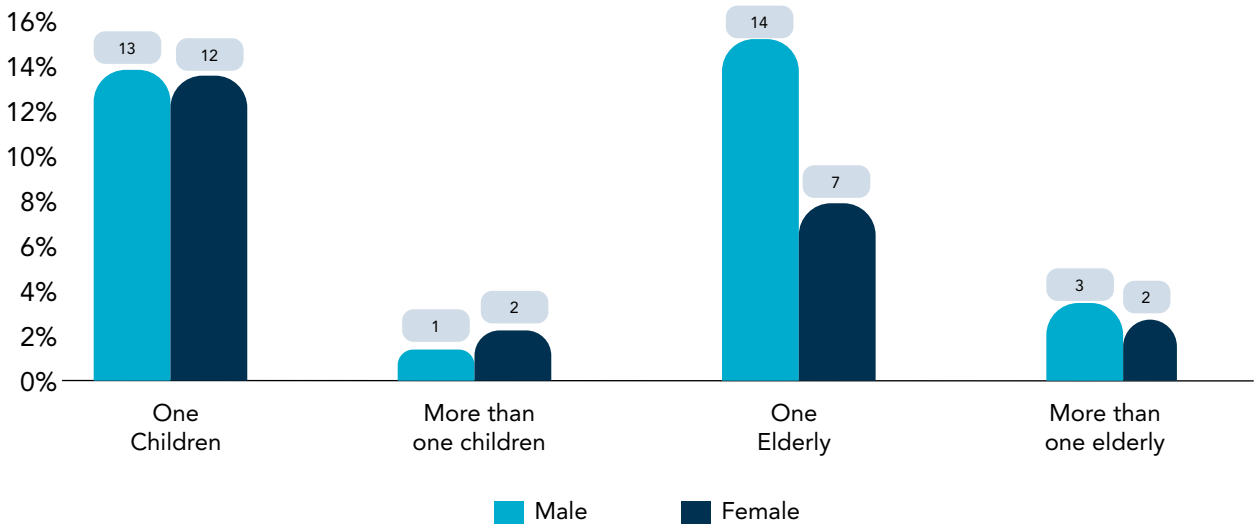
Figure 5: Education Level of Workers Across Different Platform Services



4 Care Responsibility in the Household of the Respondents

The presence of our sample population in platform work also conveys the restrictive conditions to join platform work as the figures suggest that a majority of men and women in the sample do not have to engage in domestic and care responsibilities. Further, a majority of women workers reported to have at least one other woman in their household indicating a certain degree/level of transfer of domestic and care responsibilities.

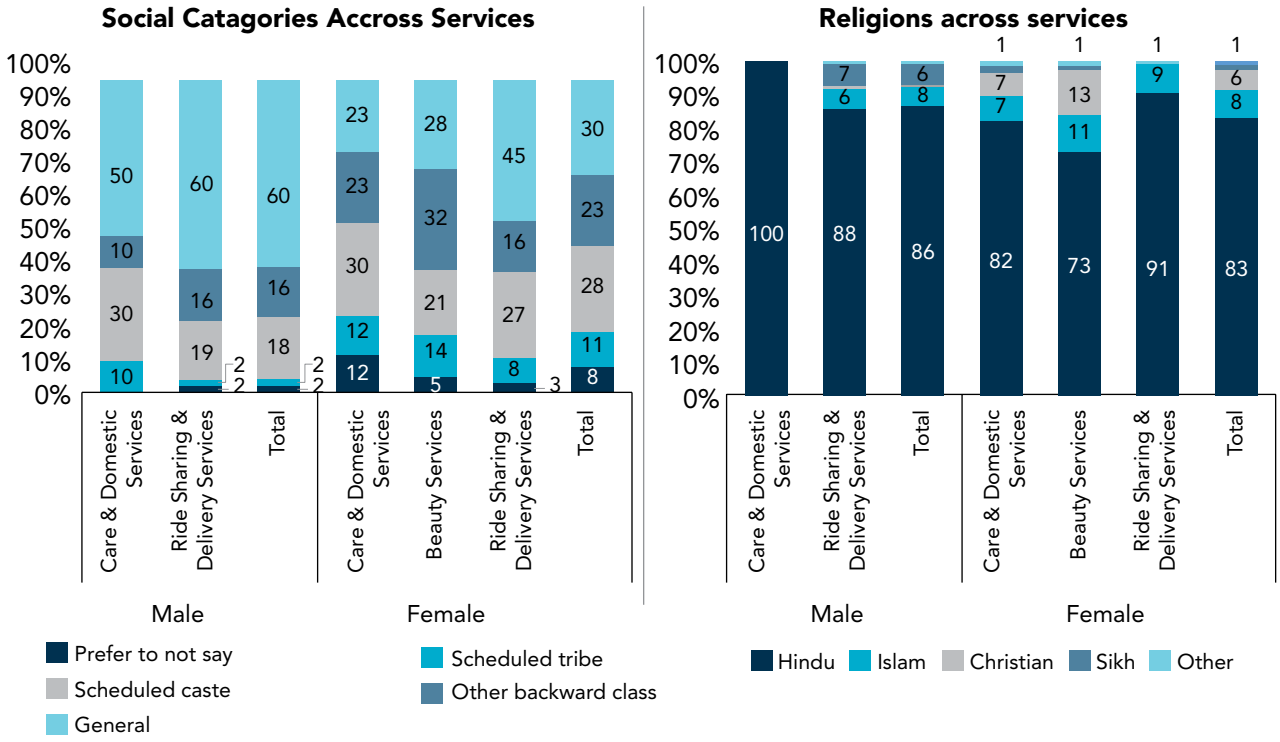
Figure 6: Presence of Child/ Children, and the Elderly



5 Sample Distribution across Religion and Social Category

In the sample with female workers, we found presence of both marginalised and privileged social categories, with some variation across the sectors. The share of forward castes is found to be relatively more in the ride-sharing and delivery workers' sample, and the share of scheduled categories is found to be relatively higher among domestic and care workers' sample. In terms of religion, a majority of male and female workers in the sample are Hindu. The beauty services sector displays relatively more religious diversity.

Figure 7: Social Categories and Religions across Platform Services



6 Part-time and Full-time Engagement with Platforms

In the sample, around 97 percent females and 92 percent of males reported that they are engaged in platform work on a full-time basis (which meant that a large/ only share of their earnings came from working on the platforms; and a majority of productive time throughout the day was dedicated to the same work). Only for a small number, this was a subsidiary source of earning. Women who have reported to have regular job and platform work as their subsidiary earnings 7 out of 11 of them are involved activities of households as employers of domestic personnel. For male workers the variation is much more, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities, human health and social work activities and etc. are sectors of their regular jobs.

Figure 8: Platform Work as Subsidiary Source of Earning (Absolute Numbers)

	Platform as subsidiary source of earning				
	Male	Female			
	Ride Sharing & Delivery Services	Care & Domestic Services	Beauty Services	Ride Sharing & Delivery Services	Total
	12	10	2	2	14
	Type of Employment				
Regular job	11	8	1	2	11
Casual work-piece rate work	1	0	1	0	1
Casual work-daily work	0	2	0	0	2

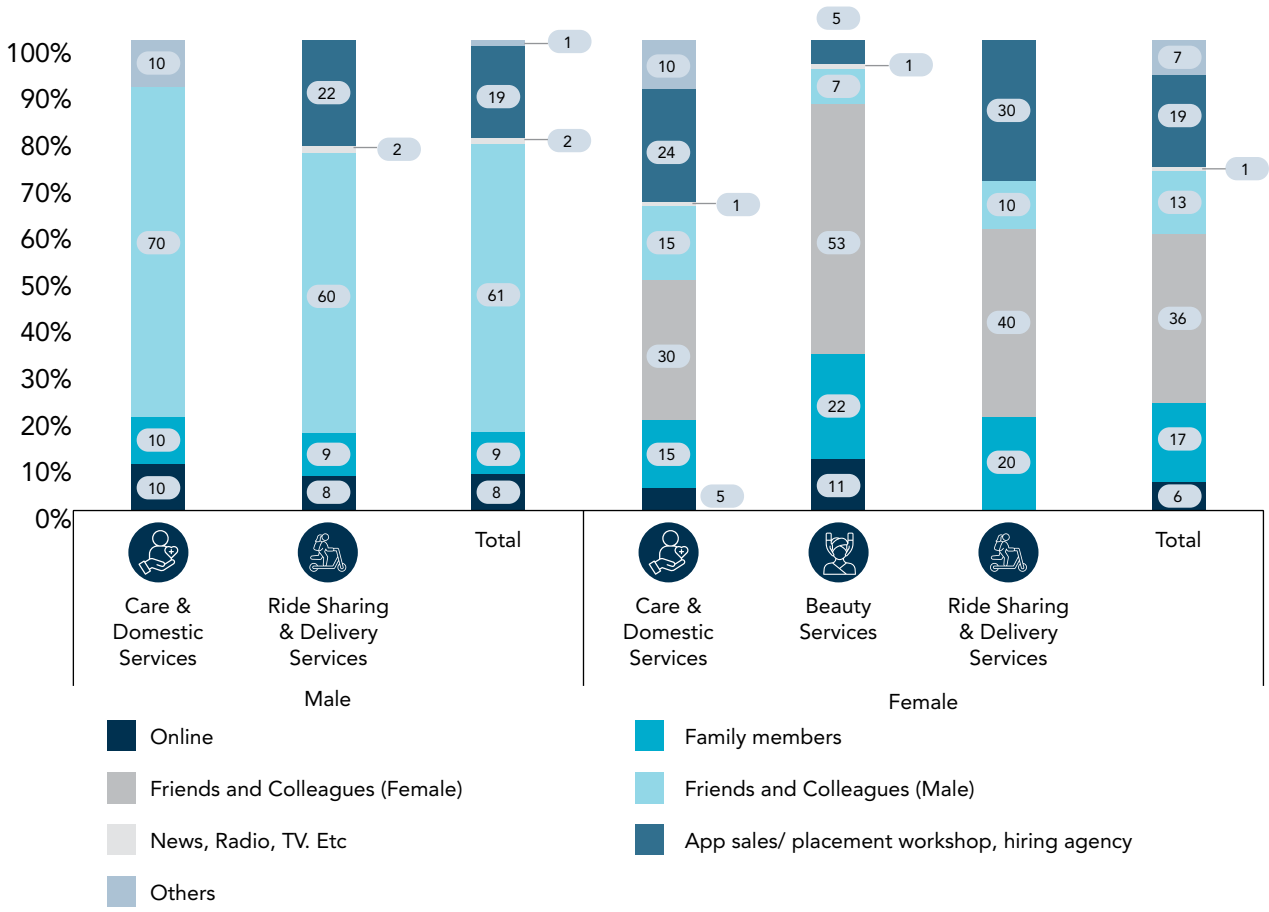
7 Source of Initial Information about the Platforms

The survey suggests that men get information more from colleagues and friends compared to females. While that is the case for men, females got information both from female colleagues and friends as well as to a less extent from their male colleagues and friends. During qualitative interviews, there was a clear distinction between women working in traditional and non-traditional work - women from beauty, domestic and care services reported finding out about the platform from previous or present women colleagues, or through a placement agency[7]. However, women in non-traditional sectors like delivery and ride-sharing reported finding out about the platforms through male colleagues or NGOs. Overall the

[7] During the survey, few caregivers reported that they found out about platform companies through placement cells of their nursing agencies and training institutions.

proportion of workers in the sample getting information from agencies/platforms was similar between males and females, among female ride sharing and delivery services this source had a relatively higher weight (30 percent) compared to both male workers as well as female workers in other sectors. Even in care and domestic services, a larger proportion of women found information from agencies/platforms as a more dependable source.

Figure 9: Source of Information about the Platform Work[8]



8 Regarding Platform Choice[9]

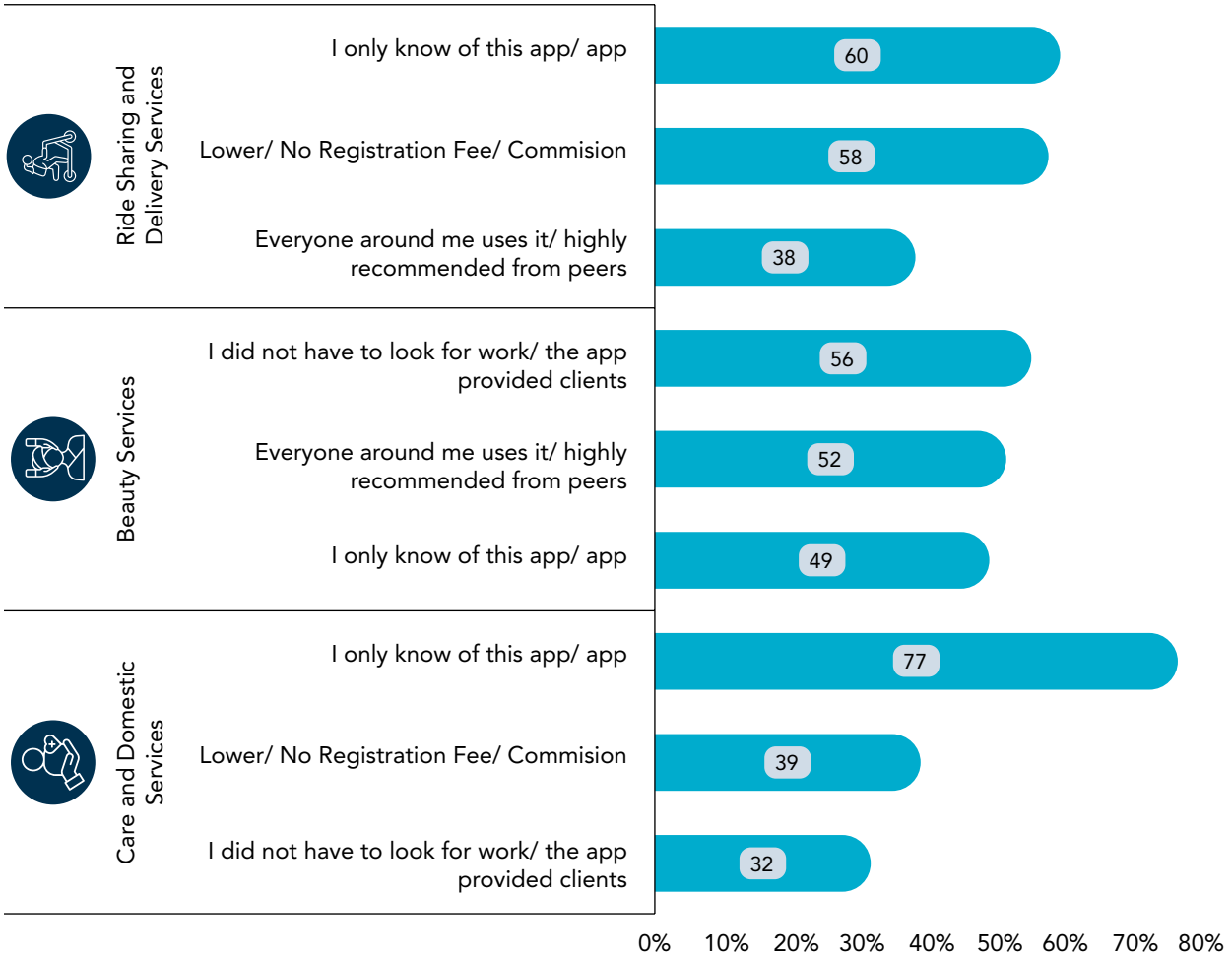
In case of care and domestic work, ride-sharing, and delivery work sector, majority of women mentioned that they joined the app since they were aware of only the app they worked for, followed by a significant share of women reporting that absence of registration fee/lower registration fee had been an enabling factor for joining the platform. In case of care and domestic sector more than 30 percent women mentioned that reasons for choosing the platform was that the app provided access to clients and thus they don't have to look for work.

In case of the beauty sector, when asked about what encouraged them to engage with this particular app, the majority of women (around 55.5 percent) reported that they joined the app since they 'did not have to look for work/ the app provided clients. Also, a significant percentage of around 52 percent, reported

[8] Sample for male care and domestic services is only 10 respondents.
[9] While recording responses on this question, the respondents were given the option of selecting multiple responses.

that 'everyone around them uses it/ highly recommended from peers' had been an enabling factor for joining the specific platform.

Figure 10: Reason of Choosing the Platform for Work



On the other hand, for men in the ride-sharing and delivery sectors, recommendation by others is a very important reason, since around 78 percent men reported that to be a factor behind choosing this platform, followed by 69 percent reporting that they had joined this app since they knew only of this app, and 44 percent of them citing absence/lower registration fee to be the reason.

KEY FINDINGS

1 Labour Market Transition

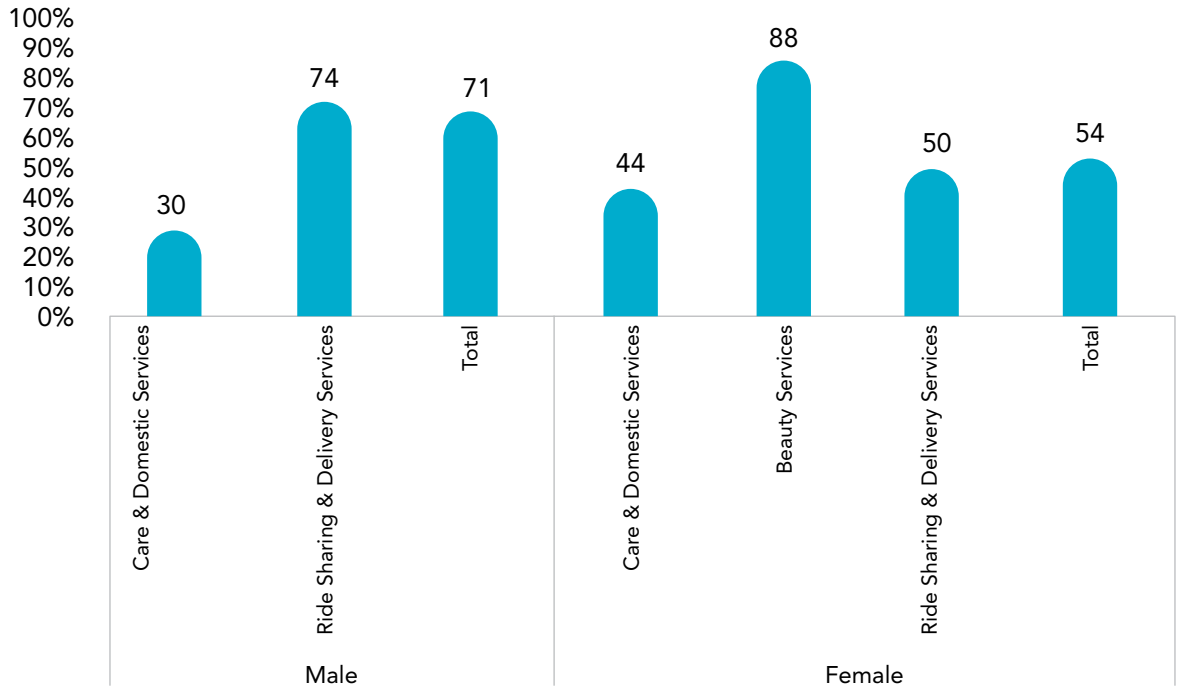
The following section examines the labour market transitions experienced by women currently engaged in platform work.

A. Comparing Traditional and Platform-Based Work

a. Pre-platform employment status

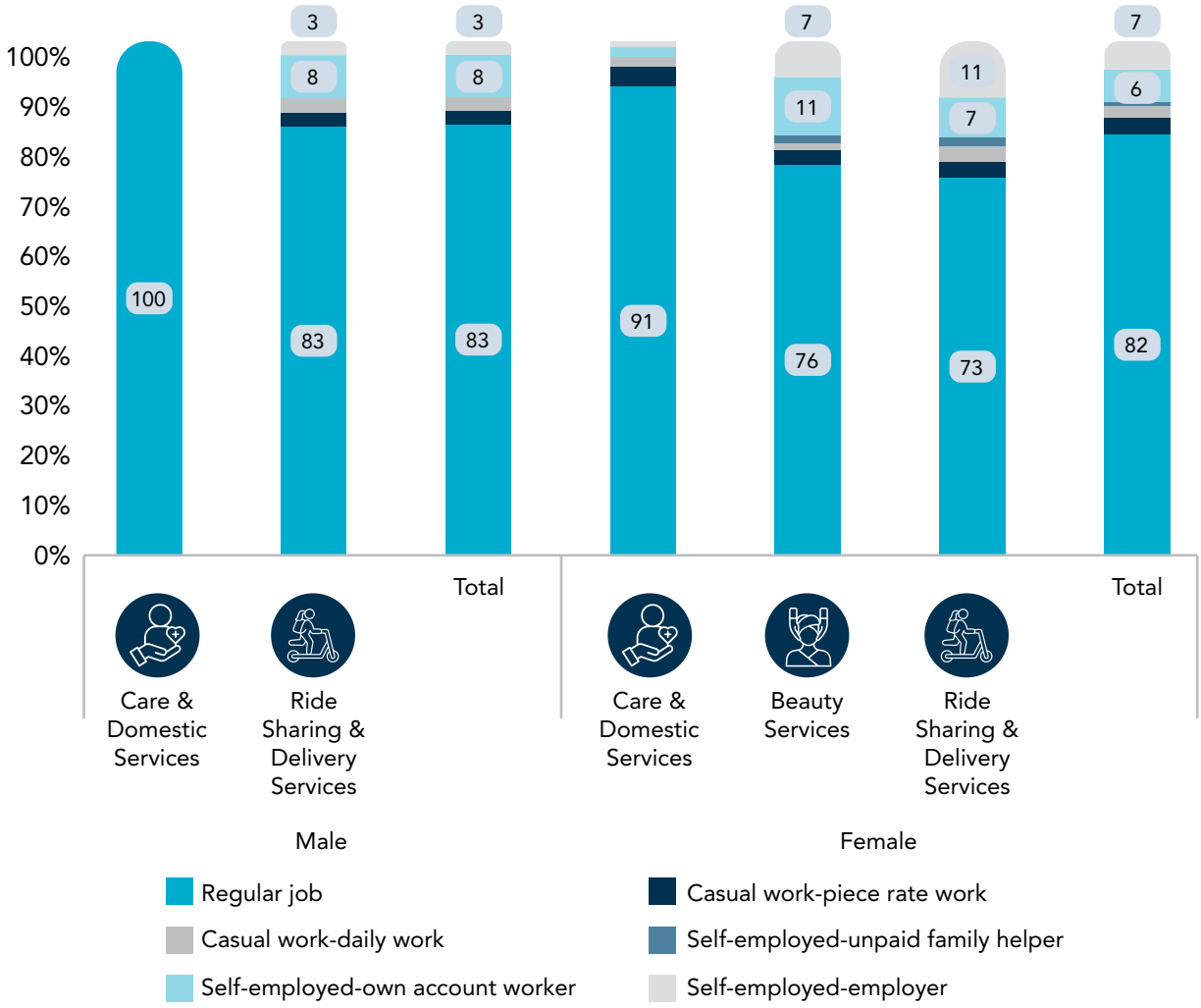
An analysis of the previous employment status of platform workers shows that while around 27 percent of men were not employed before joining platforms, the share is significantly higher among women at 45 percent, underscoring a sharper transition of not being employed before to platform work for women. Among the women who were previously not employed, 56 percent were out of the labour force as they weren't even looking for opportunities, and among those who were employed previously, around 54 percent were in non-platform jobs. A higher share of men, around 71 percent of those who were employed before joining the platform, were employed in non-platform jobs.

Figure 11: Employment Status before Joining Platform Work



Surprisingly, for both men and women who were employed before joining the platform, a significant share of them, around 84 percent among men and 82 percent of women, reported having regular wage jobs.

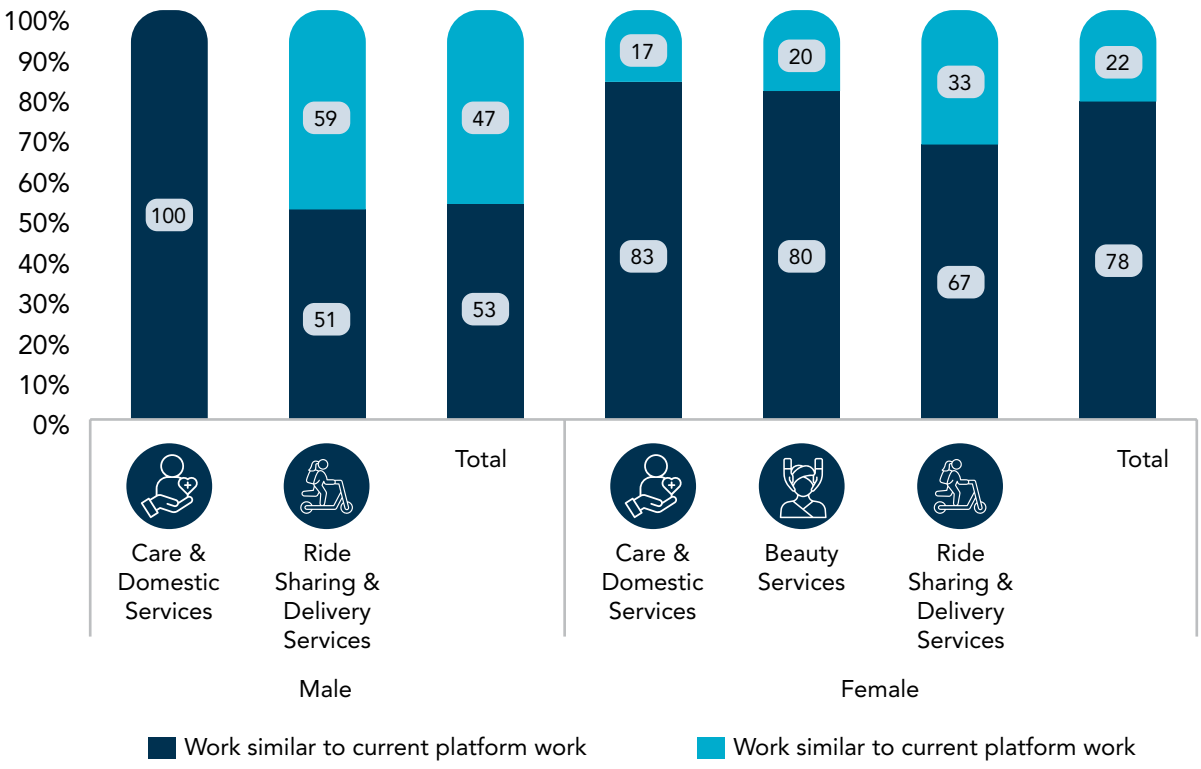
Figure 12: Type of Employment in Previous Non-Platform Work



No Real Sectoral Transition?

A high share of women who were employed before, around 78 percent, reported being in similar kind of work in their previous non-platform jobs. This was particularly true for women currently in care and domestic work and beauty services, who largely transitioned from the same sectors into platform-based employment. However, it is important to note that even transitioning within the same sector may represent a significant transition with respect to working conditions. Only in case of the ride-sharing and delivery work, a relatively higher share, around 33 percent women were engaged in some other kind of work prior to their platform engagement. In contrast, the share for men engaged in different kind of work in their previous non-platform jobs, is relatively lower at 51 percent, indicating that women were continuing similar work as before, now registered with the platform. Of the 13 women who were previously employers, five ran beauty parlours, and another five were drivers for various agencies. The remaining three worked in wholesale and retail trade, education, and human health and social work activities.

Figure 13: Transition from Non-Platform to Platform Work



This was also reiterated in interviews with experts and workers. An active legal expert working with platform workers in Karnataka mentioned that:

> *"There was no beautician who was doing nothing and became a beautician because a certain platform trained them. They were beauticians, they were working in parlours. Plumbers were plumbers, carpenters were carpenters and beauticians were beauticians. Domestic workers were domestic workers even before any new app began." (Legal Expert)*

The recruitment of experienced professionals was also revealed during the interviews with one of the employing aggregators of platform workers. A platform representative from the beauty sector in an interview informed:

> *"When we started the platform, we were only onboarding experienced persons, and giving them like a finishing school sort of a training there… we rolled that initiative back (of training freshers, which lasted for 2-3 months) and right now we are only looking at onboarding people with some work experience." (Platform Representative)*

This suggests that platforms in domestic and beauty services may prefer workers with prior experience or training, which could influence the profile of entrants. The elderly care work platform reported recruiting women from other sectors, freshers, and nursing school graduates in addition to trained care professionals, providing them with training as part of their onboarding process.

Delivery and ride-sharing services, which remain non-traditional sectors for women, appear to offer more opportunities for individuals transitioning from 'out-of-workforce' or other sectors. However, entry into such male-dominated spaces often requires deliberate mobilisation and confidence-building. Interviews with workers and union organisers highlight how training and encouragement through NGOs, particularly around driving, have played a critical role in enabling women's participation in ride-sharing. Community mobilisation efforts are essential to reassure both women and their families, who may be hesitant due to safety concerns or social perceptions. One of the ride-sharing workers, who had previously worked with such NGOs described her experience:

> *"At the NGO, we used to teach driving to women free of cost — not me personally, there were professional instructors for that… Once they joined, they received training to drive, and after completing it, they received helped in getting their licenses - all free of cost. We also worked to place them in jobs.*
>
> *Many of these women really needed the opportunity, but either their families or society didn't support them - often telling them they shouldn't drive. So, we would talk to such families, counsel them, motivate the girls, and bring them all the way to the training centre. There are many girls today who are now working, and it feels good to see them driving and becoming independent."* *(Ride-Sharing Worker)*

These efforts help explain why the share of women with prior experience in the ride-sharing sector remains relatively low, and how civil society actors have helped bridge this gap. However, she also highlighted that despite these trainings, the bridge for women to join platforms was not fulfilled due to their gaps in digital navigation. She mentioned:

> *"See, many women want to work, they want to drive, but they don't know how to use apps. The NGO teaches them driving, but they don't teach how to operate the app. So, there should be some platform that takes responsibility for this. Maybe through YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp groups, or by reaching out to NGOs and doing proper awareness."* *(Ride-Sharing Worker)*

Additionally, women who made it into the non-traditional sector, reported facing judgment from customers and subtle forms of resistance during their work. A bike-taxi service worker employed in Delhi shared,

> *"He got down immediately, handed me the helmet, and said, 'Sorry, I don't sit with female drivers.' I replied, 'Sir, you've just wasted an hour of mine, at least pay me for that. If you don't want to sit with a female driver, that's your choice.'" (Ride-Sharing Partner)*

Among women who reported working in sectors unrelated to their current platform roles, 22 percent (53) were previously in sectors such as wholesale and retail trade, education, households as employers, information, communication, financial, insurance, and real estate related activities etc.

As we compare earnings from previous non-platform employment and current platform employment across sectors, we find that both men and women experience an increase in net earnings (deducting work related costs), with women seeing a much larger rise than men.

On average, men currently engaged in platform work earn an average of **17,202 INR per month,** compared to **16,710 INR** in their previous non-platform roles. Meanwhile, women, who previously earned **15,849 INR per month** in non-platform work, now earn **26,227 INR per month** through platform employment.

Sector-Specific Trends for Women:

1. **Care and Domestic Work:** Women in this sector now reported earning average of **14,502 INR per month,** up from **12,379 INR** in their previous non-platform roles.

2. **Beauty Services:** The increase is particularly striking here, with current earnings at average of **51,350 INR per month,** far exceeding their previous earnings of **22,951 INR.**

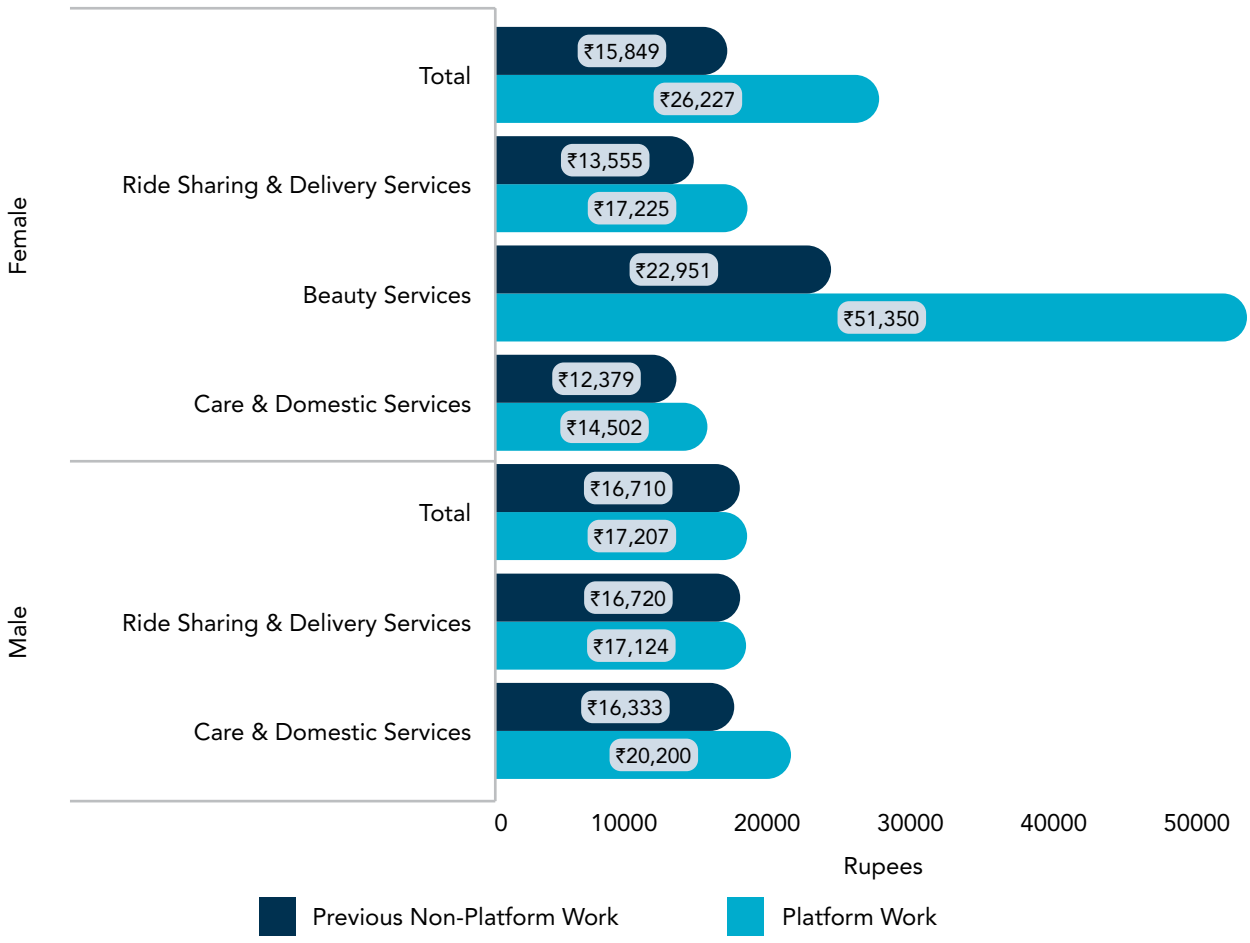
3. **Ride-Sharing and Delivery Services:** Women in these roles now earn average of **17,225 INR per month,** a notable increase from their previous average of **13,555 INR.**

The data demonstrates significant increase in earnings for women in platform-based work, especially in beauty services. However, these net earnings also came with **several additional costs** such as product costs, travel expenses, internet packs etc. that were not typically incurred in non-platform work, and workers expressed mixed views, often debating whether their earnings had declined over time. One of the beauty service workers during her interview described her rise in earnings on joining platform work, and its consequent steep decline over the years:

> *Earlier, I used to earn ₹32,000. But after joining the app, I've earned up to ₹1 lakh, even ₹1.5 lakhs. When I had just started, the difference was huge. I was doing work worth ₹1.5 lakhs, and on those days, I'd leave home by 7 in the morning without even eating, sometimes as early as 8 AM, and return by 9 at night. It was long and tiring, but I was genuinely happy.*
>
> *As I said, everything I've been able to build has been through this work. Now, I'm earning around ₹20,000–₹25,000 a month, because they've started giving out fewer bookings. They've also added more conditions." (Beauty Service Worker)*

Therefore, the participant notes how there was a significant rise in earnings – however, these earnings were essentially linked with the time that they put into the day, often exceeding 12 hours. These challenges are further explored in Section B of Part 4, and the work timings are further discussed in the following section.

Figure 14: Earnings (per month in Rupees) Comparison between Current Platform and Previous Non-Platform Work



b. Working hours and domestic responsibilities: Previous non-platform and current platform

Concerning working hours, around 50 percent of women and 84 percent of men agreed that their **working hours increased** marginally in the current platform work as compared to the previous non-platform work. However, the estimation of working hours does not include the waiting time between tasks and also commute time. When the women were asked to compare the previous non-platform with the current platform job in terms of getting time to manage domestic responsibilities, **around 71 percent women felt that they had less time for managing domestic responsibilities in their previous non-platform job.** In contrast, there was a perceived sense of flexibility that women in platform work observed - though their domestic and care responsibilities did not lower with their transition to platform work, some women during qualitative interviews reported that not working in a confined space and for a specified time did allow them a degree of flexibility to manage household and domestic responsibilities. One beauty service worker explained,

> *"It's not like I'm working continuously for 12 hours. For example, if I get a booking at 7 in the morning, it's usually for 2 hours. Then if I have another one at 2 PM, that's around 2 hours again. And if I get one in the evening, that might be 2 hours as well. So, in total, it adds up to around 6 hours.*
>
> *In between, I can come home, check on my children, and take care of small household chores. That's the flexibility I have now, which I didn't have before."* *(Beauty service worker)*

Figure 15: Comparison between Working Hours: Previous Non-Platform and Current Platform Work

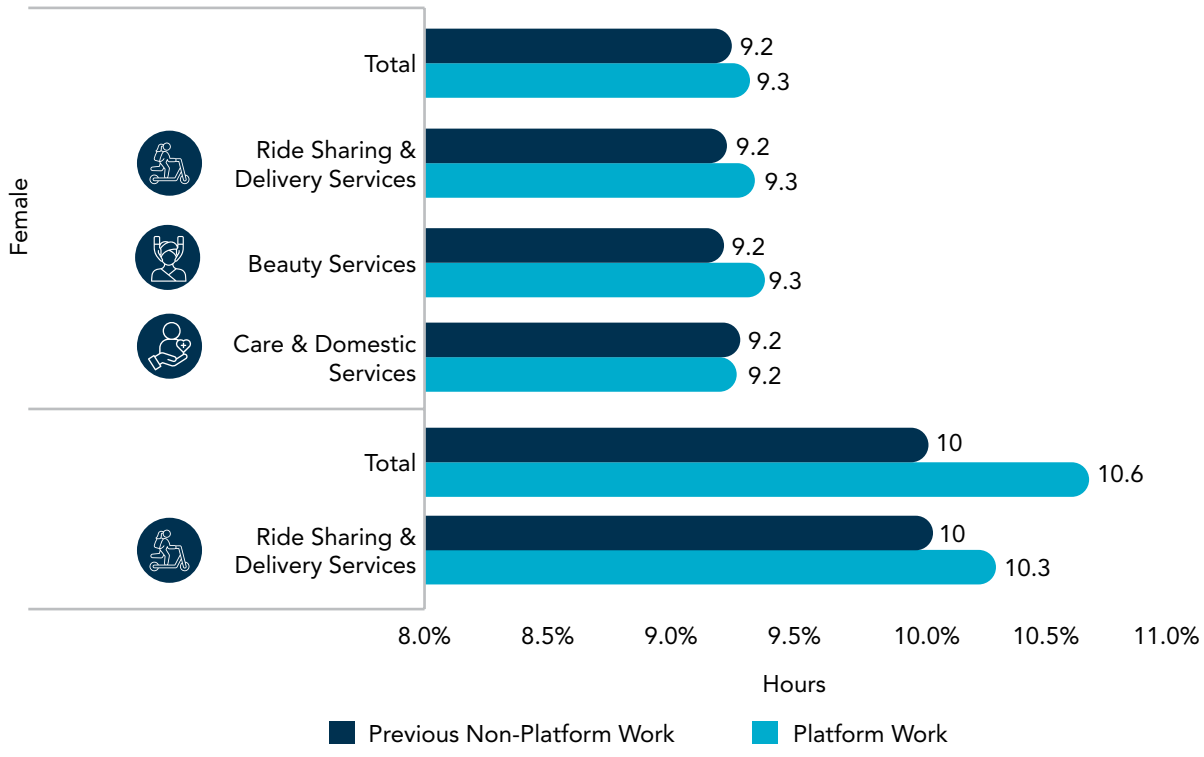
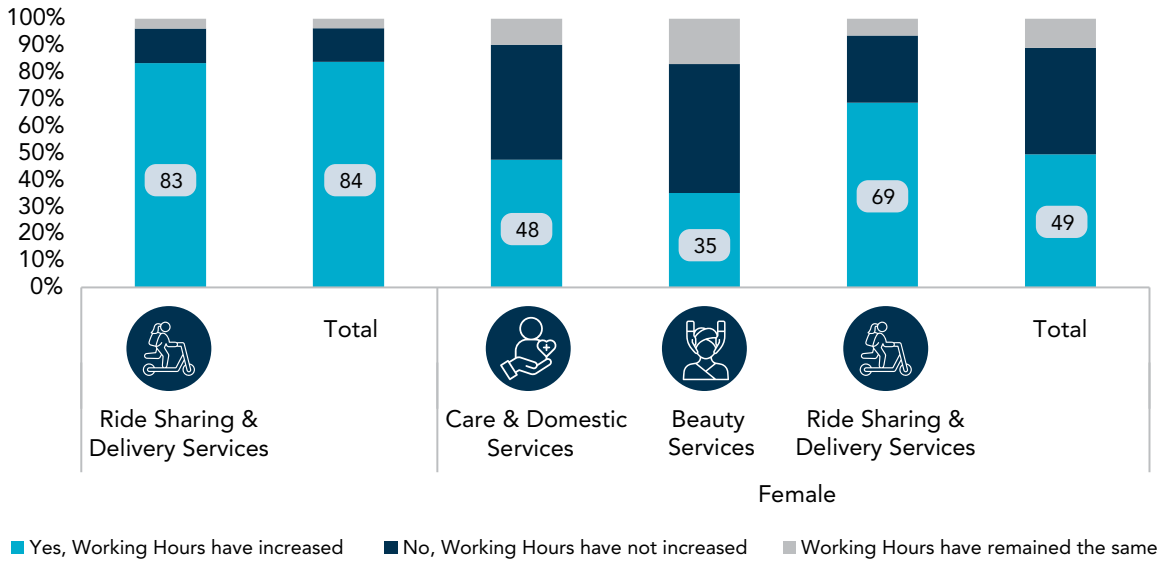


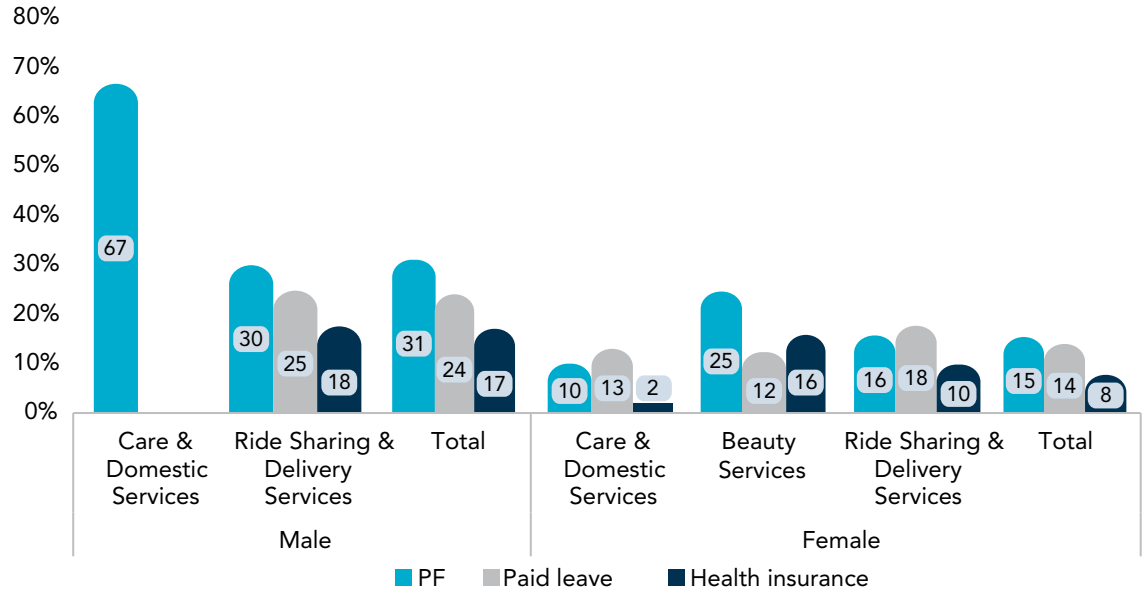
Figure 16: Changes in Working Hours



c. Social security benefits: Previous non-platform vs. current employment

Regarding social security, a higher share of women currently working in the care platform reported having access to provident fund (PF), and maternity benefits in their previous employment as compared to the current one. For women engaged in beauty services, while the coverage of health insurance has increased significantly from 16 percent to 44 percent, they reported better social security benefits like PF, PPF, maternity benefits, paid leave, gratuity in their previous non-platform engagement as compared to the current platform work. A similar trend is observed among ride-sharing and delivery workers, with a clear decline in PF benefits and paid leave, except the increase in health insurance coverage.

Figure 17: Access to Social Security Benefits of Workers in Previous Non-Platform Jobs



2 MODES OF OPERATION

Different digital platforms exhibit varied operational modalities, driven by sector-specific requirements and inherent platform design choices. This section delineates these variations based on factors such as the definition of a 'gig,' payment structures, commission models, and worker registration and onboarding processes. It is crucial to contextualise these modes of operation within India's existing informal labour landscape for women. In the **Domestic and Care Sector,** platform operations represent a significant digital extension and scaling of traditional placement agency models. For the **Beauty Sector,** platforms function as a digital and large-scale aggregation of previously fragmented small beauty salons and individual home-based beauticians. Conversely, in the **Food Delivery & Ride Sharing Sector,** this mode of operation is largely novel for women, as their participation in these roles was historically negligible or non-existent, thus introducing entirely new avenues for engagement. However, the digital and algorithmic mechanisms and the relatively large-scale operation of previously existing sectors and up and coming forms of work, do not translate to formalisation of work in any of these sectors.

Features	Beauty Sector	Care and Domestic Sector	Food Delivery & Ride Sharing Sector
Recruitment/ Identifying Workers	Previously trained as beauticians, masseurs, etc. register themselves to work as service professionals. Workers mostly came to know from their peers and networks.	Most platforms locate women already working as domestic workers and caretakers by collecting information via pilots conducted in areas where workers are concentrated. Another platform in the care sector reaches out to colleges, training centres, etc. to recruit women.	No specific recruitment process.
Definition of Relationship with Platform Worker	The platforms typically define workers as independent contractors and service professionals and clearly state that they do not employ the workers.	Platform define workers as care professionals and domestic help, stating they are independent contractors.	Platforms refer to workers as 'partners', 'captains', etc. stating that they do not employ these workers.
Registration (Cost and Contracts)	The platforms charge a registration fee and mandatory products to be purchased at the time of registration. A legally binding contract is present and verification documents such as Adhaar Card, passport size photograph, etc., are required.	While some platforms have a legally binding contract, others do not. In fact, aggregators collect documents such as Adhaar card, passport size photograph for registration throughout WhatsApp messaging.	Platforms charge a registration fee. A legally binding contract is present. Documents such as a Driver's License, Adhaar, PAN Card, Passport Size Photograph, etc. are required for registration.
Data Collection & Privacy	Aggregators have access to private information and can track workers GPS, Phone Calls, etc. Policy states that platforms own this data and on deactivation of workers ID too, platforms have the right to use the data for their purposes.	While some platforms collect limited data for authentication purposes through informal channels like WhatsApp messages, others collect and maintain a formal record.	Aggregators have access to private information and can track workers GPS, Phone Calls, etc. Policy states that platforms own this data and on deactivation of workers ID too, platforms have the right to use the data for their purposes.

Features	Beauty Sector	Care and Domestic Sector	Food Delivery & Ride Sharing Sector
Initial Trainings & Skills Required	Initial Trainings are mandatory and only skilled workers- previously working as beauticians, electricians, etc. can join the platform. The initial trainings are around usage of application, professional behaviour, standardisation of services, required gear and products. Later on, the trainings are linked to new service launch by the platforms and purchase of products post-training is mandatory.	While some platforms in care sector provide free and proper training programmes with professionals for 2 to 3 months and cover expenses for travel and accommodation, most platforms do not provide any trainings	Skills like driving, riding, operating a smart phone (including understanding of at least one language in which platform app operates) is required. No trainings provided by platforms.
Definition of Gigs	Typically range from an hour to a couple of hours. Location of work includes public spaces to travel to multiple households and the households themselves.	While there are platforms who define and offer gigs on hourly basis, some of the platforms in both sectors have 24-hour monthly *gigs* too.	Typically range from minutes to a couple of hours. Workplace is generally public and residential areas including waiting time at hubs/ stores/ restaurants and parking areas.
Choice of Choosing Gigs	Workers have limited choice of gigs. It is based on the location and the 'hub' is defined according to the radius of their geographical location. Some platforms have a SOM [10] feature that auto-assigns workers to customers but workers must earn a 5-Star Rating for 20 gigs in order to be eligible for it.	While some care platforms do not offer the choice to choose gigs and allocate gigs to workers based on the needs of the households and the abilities of the workers, some domestic and care platforms offer the choice via an IVR call.	Choice of gigs is offered by most platforms but declining more than a set number of gigs in spatial proximity can result in penalties and further decrease in availability of gigs.
Required Gear and Associated Costs	Products such as beauty and skin care products, massage tables, steamers, etc. need to be purchased from the platform. Cost of travel from one gig to the other, internet, charges of the partner needed for completing a gig etc., is borne by workers.	While travel cost is incurred by workers on some platforms, some care platforms do not require any additional costs and gears (gears provided by platform when required).	Petrol, vehicle maintenance, internet plans, additional helmets, carry containers, equipment to travel in adverse weather, etc. are borne by the workers. Apps have a store for workers to purchase their gear from.
Subscription and Commission Fee Models for Workers	Subscription model categorises workers into different categories in addition to their categorisation on the basis of their ratings. The subscription models range monetarily and the more expensive the plan, the more workers have protection from ID Blocking, impact of ratings on work, better social security benefits, etc. Platforms charge a commission fee per gig from worker's earnings ranging from 8 to 30 percent.	No subscription models for workers as such. Some care platforms do not charge any commission from worker's earnings.	Subscription models are linked with lower commission rates and increased availability of gigs to the worker via the platform. All platforms charge commissions but the range of commission fees vary and shift dynamically based on other platforms commission fee charge, design and structure.

[10] A self-organising map (SOM) is an algorithm that helps a platform's system sort and group a large number of users or services. This helps the platform quickly identify the best available driver for a new ride request, improving efficiency and service quality.

Features	Beauty Sector	Care and Domestic Sector	Food Delivery & Ride Sharing Sector
Main Source of Generating Revenue	Platforms primarily generate revenue through commissions from service fees, subscriptions for professionals, and in-platform advertisements for local businesses. A significant revenue stream also comes from selling tools, service kits, and branded products to service partners, with some platforms earning 20-30% on these sales.	Platforms earn through subscription models and service fees from customers. Some platforms earn from commission charged per gig too.	Platforms primarily generate revenue via commission-based deductions from fares and primarily profit from commissions and subscriptions (from customers, workers, and intermediaries like restaurants), delivery fees, and advertising on their platforms.
In-person interaction & Network	Interaction only limited to trainings and access to headquarters in case of grievance redressal.	Some care platforms have in-person interactions with fellow workers and platform employees during trainings, at temporary accommodations, etc. Others have limited in-person interaction.	No in-person interaction necessarily mandated or planned in design.
Grievance Redressal Mechanism	A chat-bot feature is present. For workers facing an emergency- wrt to safety at work, a SOS button is present. To resolve or file grievances in-person, the workers need to travel to headquarters. Grievances are internally resolved without involving state actors such as police.	Some care platforms have worker and gender sensitive grievance redressal mechanisms while most lack effective mechanisms and modes of communication.	Most platforms have chat-bot features, some maintain informal communication through immediate supervisors, while others have human points of contacts. By and large, grievance redressal mechanisms lack effective functionality and are algorithmically driven.
Importance of Ratings/ Role of Algorithmic Worker Management	Ratings play a substantial role in determining workers' ability to work, access to social security, availability of gigs, frequency of gigs offered, etc. There are platforms that require workers to maintain ratings as high as 4.7. Workers are temporarily blocked, re-trained with mandatory product purchase in case their ratings fall below the mentioned.	By and large, ratings do not play an important role.	Ratings are linked with availability of more gigs to choose from and type of social security benefits workers can have access to.
Penalties & ID Blocking	Incurred on complaints, delays in providing services, on affiliations with workers' collectives. Workers are not necessarily intimated/ consulted before IDs are blocked and penalties are imposed.	Some platforms charge penalties for absence at work (24 hour gigs) and delays but no arbitrary blocking of IDs.	Incurred on complaints, delays in providing services, on affiliations with workers' collectives. Workers are not necessarily intimated/ consulted before IDs are blocked and penalties are imposed.

Features	Beauty Sector	Care and Domestic Sector	Food Delivery & Ride Sharing Sector
Use of Phone, Internet & Platform Application at Work	Notable digital integration via algorithmically driven app for workers. Heavy dependence on phone and internet during work for traveling for work, blocking gigs, GPS tracking, ordering products required for work. Workers are supposed to select gigs, use application for tracking workplace, updating status of work, etc.	Digital integration for workers not as prevalent. While some care sector workers maintain attendance via app, most platforms do not require heavy dependence on mobile phones for work. Low dependence on internet but phone is required.	Proper digital integration via algorithmically driven app for workers. Heavy dependence on phone and internet during work. Workers are supposed to select gigs, use application for tracking workplace, updating status of work, etc.
Social Security Benefits	Only health insurance is available. Quality of insurance policy is dependent on ratings, subscription plan, etc. No orientation/ induction regarding the same.	Limited social security benefits with some platforms registering workers on E-Shram. Social security limited to health insurance.	Only health insurance is available. Quality of insurance policy is dependent on ratings, subscription plan, etc. No orientation/ induction regarding the same.
Scope of Upskilling and Upward Mobility	Limited scope of upskilling. Little to no scope of upward mobility.	Some care platforms have scope for upskilling and seeking better jobs with the platform and otherwise, most platforms- especially domestic sector- has no upskilling or upward mobility at present.	Limited scope of upskilling. Little to no scope of upward mobility.
Incentives & Bonuses	Incentives are based on maintaining high ratings and meeting high number of gigs. Seasonal demand may result in incentives on earnings. No bonuses provided.	No bonuses or incentives are provided by and large.	Incentives are based on maintaining high ratings, working at peak log-in hours and meeting high number of gigs. Seasonal demand may result in incentives on earnings. No bonuses provided.
Additional Support Infrastructure	No additional support such as resting facilities, travel arrangements and expenses, creches' for working professionals' children, etc. are present currently.	While some care platforms have hostel accommodation present for numbered days available as workers are mostly migrants, most platforms do not have any additional support infrastructure in place.	No additional support such as resting facilities, travel arrangements and expenses, creches' for working professionals' children, etc. are present currently.
Allocation of Supervisors	Trainers are allocated as supervisors.	While some care platforms have physiotherapists and social workers allotted in supervisory positions, most platforms do not have trained or established supervisors.	Some platforms in the delivery sector have 'team leaders' and immediate supervisors working for the platform while others do not have an established immediate supervisor.

3 Entry into Platform Work: Initial Barriers and Enabling Factors

A. Barriers to Entry in Platform Work

Women in India continue to face a range of structural and social barriers that restrict their entry into paid work. These barriers often begin early, with many girls facing interruptions in or denial of educational opportunities due to prevailing gender norms. Even among those who complete their education, restrictive household expectations around caregiving and domestic responsibilities frequently limit their ability to seek or sustain employment. Concerns around safety in public spaces and restrictions on mobility, particularly for unmarried or younger women, further constrain their choices. These intersecting constraints often result in women having fewer opportunities to enter or remain in the labour market, shaping both the nature of work they are able to access and the terms on which they engage with it.

Across sectors, a consistent set of initial barriers emerged for women entering platform work. In all three segments, care and domestic services, beauty, and ride-sharing and delivery, the burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities was cited as the most common obstacle, with around half or more of women workers identifying this as a key challenge.

Other frequently reported barriers included the lack of access to digital tools or skills, such as knowing how to use mobile phones or apps, reported notably in beauty services (33 percent) and ride-sharing and delivery (48 percent). Lack of initial capital or assets, such as phones, bikes, or grooming kits, particularly relevant in beauty services and among male workers in delivery services.

However, distinct patterns also emerged across sectors:

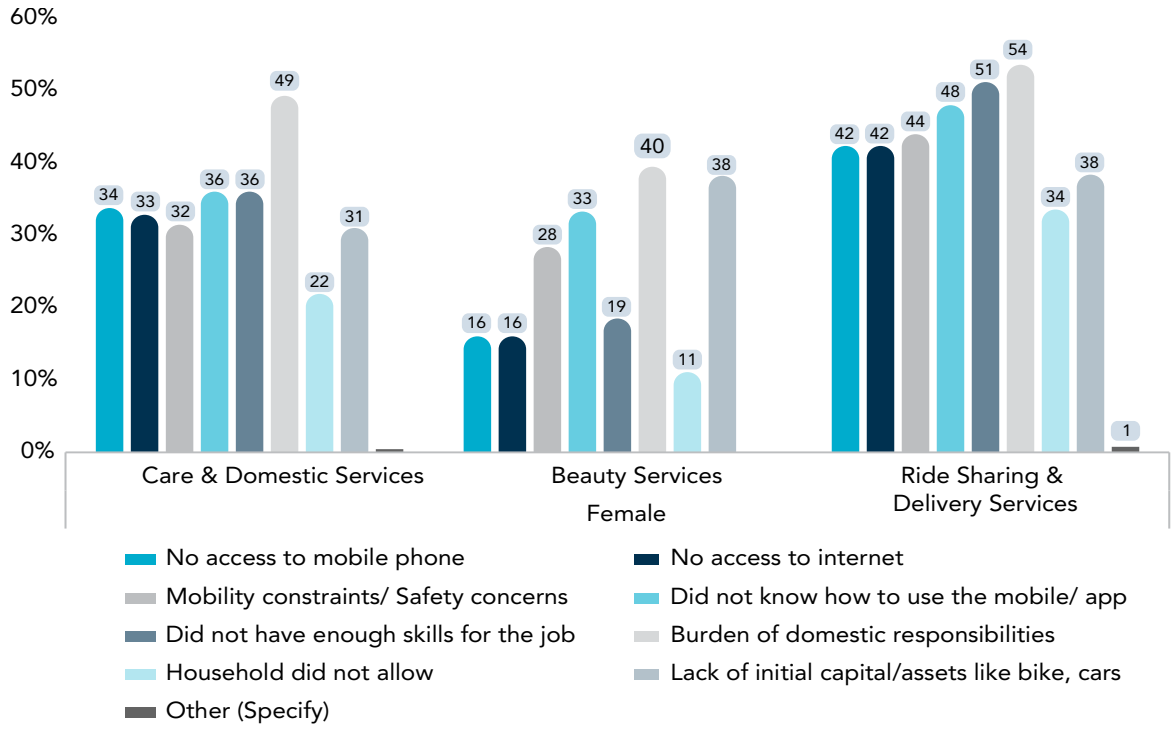
1. In care and domestic work, beyond domestic burdens, women cited restricted mobility due to social norms, including the need for household permission, and limited access to digital infrastructure.

2. In beauty services, capital constraints such as affording service equipment or product or transport were more prominent, alongside digital literacy barriers. Workers reported their discontentment with rising fees in the interviews as well:

> *"They say, "We have to pay 18,000 at first. Today it has become 36,000. Then we have to pay 18,000 … Entry fees."*
> *(Beauty Service Worker)*

3. In ride-sharing and delivery services, women were more likely to report a lack of job-specific skills (51 percent) like driving as a barrier, in addition to digital access issues. For men in this sector, lack of access to vehicles was the most frequently reported barrier.

Figure 18: Initial Barriers to Join Platform Work



B. Enablers to Joining Platform Work

Women's entry into platform work is shaped by a mix of enabling factors, access to digital tools, supportive social networks, lower household burdens, and prior skill exposure. These vary across sectors, reflecting both the specific requirements of the job and broader gendered social norms.

Across sectors, three major enabling factors stood out:

1. Access to digital infrastructure: A significant majority of women across all sectors, ranging from 75 percent to over 90 percent, reported having access to mobile phones before joining the platform. For many, this access was exclusive, allowing independent navigation of work apps.

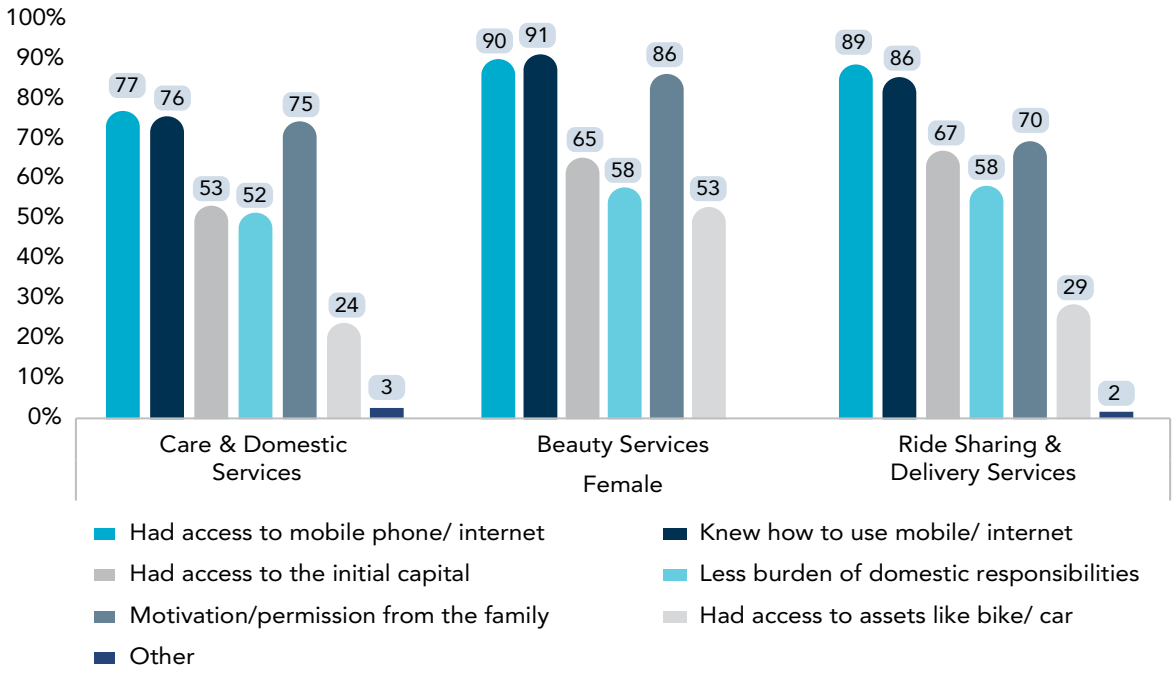
2. Family encouragement and support: Between 70 percent and 86 percent of women highlighted motivation or support from family members, particularly spouses, parents, or in-laws, as a key factor in enabling them to take up platform work.

3. Reduced domestic responsibilities due to support from other family members, such as mothers or daughters-in-law, allowed women more availability for paid work outside the home.

4. For women entering this male-dominated space, motivation and training from NGOs like Azad Foundation,[11] and access to pre-owned gear like a scooter, were particularly important. These helped overcome initial gendered barriers to entry.

11 The Azad Foundation's "Women with Wheels" program provides a skills curriculum that focuses on offering women gender-just education and job opportunities in non-traditional fields.

Figure 19: Initial Enablers to Join Platform Work



Our qualitative interviews revealed that, with the exception of women engaged in domestic and care services, most women working with other platforms transitioned to platform work either in pursuit of better earning opportunities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, or because they were left with no viable alternatives, such as shrinking local employment options, or increased household financial pressures that pushed them to seek immediate income-generating avenues.

4 Platform Work: Associated Challenges and Opportunities

While our findings indicate some shifts in women's work trajectories and improvements in earnings, it is important to take a closer look at these figures, and better understand the nature and quality of work platform economy offers. This includes examining whether and how platform work has improved women's employment experiences, the challenges it continues to pose, and the extent to which it has contributed to women's economic engagement and autonomy.

A. Shifts in Employment Status

The emergence of platform-based work has restructured conventional worker-employer dynamics by introducing the platform as an influential digital intermediary. This shift has not only changed how services are delivered but also redefined the nature of accountability, control, and negotiation in the workplace. The platform, through its evaluative metrics, tends to influence workers' access to jobs and income stability.

a. Shifting Employer Dynamics: Navigating an Unseen Employer

Many platform workers we spoke to reported a limited understanding of who operates the platform they work for. In several cases, workers shared that they did not know where the company's office

was located or whom to contact in case of issues. This lack of visibility contributed to a sense of detachment from the platform as an employer or support system. In our qualitative findings, workers across sectors exclaimed,

> *"I have no idea who created this platform. Who is behind it? Where did they come from? I've never seen anyone running the show. There's no personal requirement or interaction from their end ... I never get any messages, updates, or communication." (Ride-Sharing Worker)*

> *"What do they (the platform) know about us? They don't know my house. All they know is my Aadhaar card and my photo." (Domestic Worker)*

This disconnect is further reinforced by the absence of formal recognition or acknowledgement of workers' efforts and milestones by the platforms. A ride-sharing worker during her interview expressed,

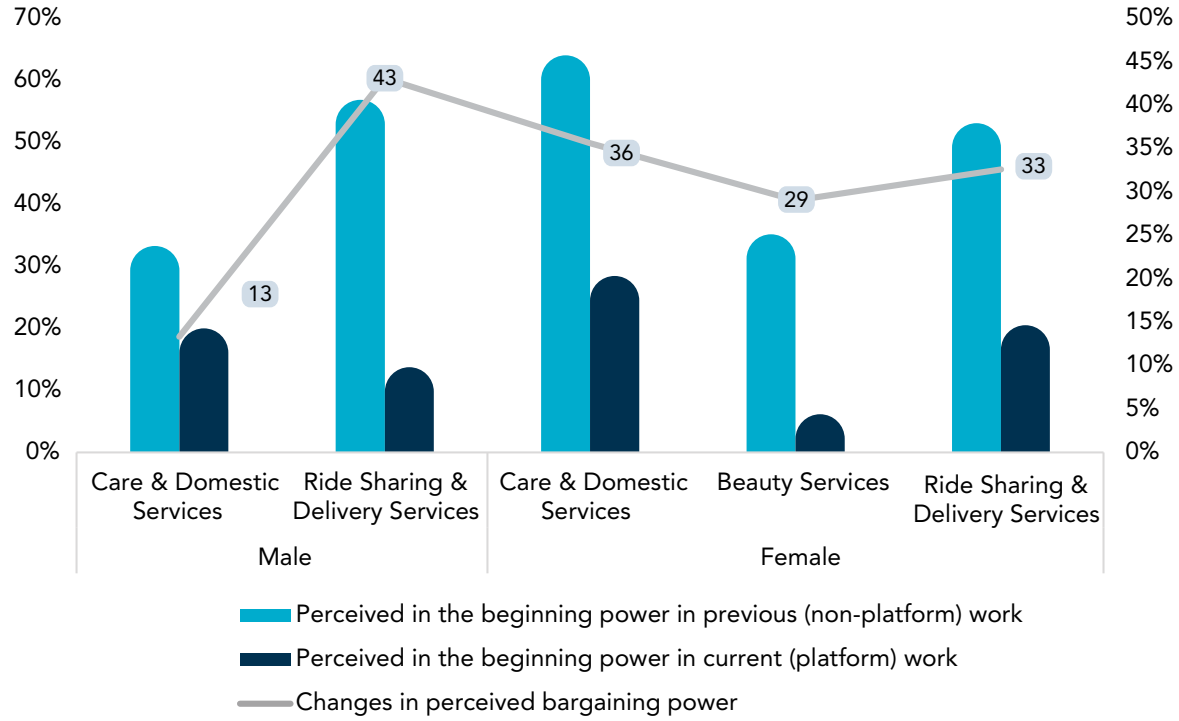
> *"Just like some companies organise a celebration on their anniversary, there's nothing like that with the app. No message, no recognition, like, it's been so many years, so many rides completed, nothing. It's as if we're driving through a desert, and even if we vanish into it, it won't matter to anyone." (Ride Sharing)*

This variation in familiarity suggests that the design and onboarding processes adopted by platforms significantly shape workers' perception of accountability and support.

b. Influence on Negotiation Position

Even if familiarity with the platform varied across service segments, many workers within all sectors expressed limited autonomy in negotiating the terms of their work. When asked through a simple binary-coded question whether their bargaining power within their new employment status declined in the current platform job, in comparison to the previous non-platform employment, around 53 percent of the women, and 56 percent of men responded 'yes'.

Figure 20: Bargaining Power - Comparison between Previous Non-Platform and Current Platform Work



The direct engagement between workers and clients that existed earlier is replaced by platform-mediated interactions, where customers can register complaints and platforms may respond with warnings. In contrast, workers often found it difficult to voice their concerns or seek resolution, leading to a perceived imbalance in how accountability is distributed. One domestic worker during an interview reported,

> *"They (customers) don't care about us. They only care about the app. If they have any problems from us, or not doing any work, or going late, then they call them (the app). They say that girl didn't come, she is late. Then they call me, "Where are you? You haven't reached yet. Ma'am is calling." I said, "Ma'am, I am on my way. I am reaching soon."" (Domestic workers)*

While some platforms include features allowing workers to provide feedback on customers, the implications of such feedback are not equally weighted. The power dynamics between workers and customers remain unequal, and workers often fear repercussions if they raise concerns. This imbalance is particularly evident in delivery and domestic work platforms, where team leaders or supervisors are present but are primarily focused on meeting operational targets, limiting their capacity to support workers. Even while probing further on the issue during our interviews with platform representatives, the qualifications, roles, and training of such supervisory staff was also not clearly communicated to us.

In contrast, workers in the elder-care platform surveyed in this study, reported that the platform employs team leaders with backgrounds in social work and nursing. This has contributed to more empathetic engagement with workers and has supported caregivers in retaining some degree of negotiating power and workplace agency, as revealed in the interviews with the workers.

Workers from this platform were largely migrants from tribal pockets of Jharkhand, Maharashtra and other states. They shared maintaining a relationship with platform trainers, supervisors and allied team beginning from the recruitment process, trainings, interaction with workers and staff at the hostel accommodation during two-month long trainings and an ease in reaching out to support staff of the platform whenever they faced any issues.

c. Ratings and Performance Metrics

Dependence on customer reviews contributed to feelings of anxiety and insecurity among workers, who felt their individuality and labour were rendered invisible under a system focused on numerical metrics. Ratings from customers, sometimes based on subjective expectations, directly impacted visibility on the app and access to future tasks.

Within the beauty sector, women shared that maintaining a high rating, often above 4.7, was perceived as important for continued task allocation and visibility on the app. Workers noted that even minor dips in ratings could affect the number of job assignments they received or eligibility for certain incentives, including health-related benefits offered by platforms.

Many workers highlighted that customer ratings were sometimes based on subjective preferences or expectations, rather than the quality of service delivered. For instance, in our qualitative findings, some reported receiving verbal appreciation from clients but being given a rating they felt was lower than deserved. One beauty service worker stated,

> *"It really affects you mentally. Some clients even write "Good service" in their review, and still give 4.5 stars. But they don't realise — even that brings our overall rating down." (Beauty Service Worker)*

During interviews, the workers explained the inconsistency in customer perceptions that added uncertainty to workers' experience. A few workers shared that receiving low ratings over a period of time affected their motivation and overall experience on the platform. Others mentioned that repeated lower ratings, especially without clear reasons, had an impact on their confidence and overall mental health. A worker in beauty services revealed,

> *"This whole rating system… it's just too much now. Some girls have even gone into depression because of it." (Beauty Service Worker)*

In some platforms, access to benefits such as health insurance was tied to performance thresholds, including ratings and job completion metrics. Workers reported that maintaining the required scores was a constant consideration, influencing how they planned their work schedules and interactions with clients. A beauty service worker explaining this mental tussle reported,

> *"I could sense that the mood in the house was tense. I thought to myself, "If I say even one wrong thing or if anything feels off, she might give me a low rating." So, I didn't start the job immediately. (Beauty Service Worker)"*

These findings suggest that while rating systems are intended to ensure quality control, they also introduce an element of unpredictability that can influence workers' financial stability, mental wellbeing, access to benefits, and their perception of job security.

B. The Financial Landscape of Platform Work: Navigating Earnings, Costs, and Variability

Across platform sectors, care and domestic work, beauty services, and ride-sharing and delivery, women workers reported limited control over their earnings. Compensation is typically determined by platform-specific structures such as fixed salaries, service-based payments, or incentives tied to login hours or client volume. Few workers reported having any bargaining power to influence these arrangements.

Despite the increase in income compared to some non-platform work, women across sectors noted persistent and emerging challenges:

a. Limited Influence Over Pay Structures

In the care and domestic work sector, 75 percent of women were on fixed salaries, while others indicated that their earnings depended on login hours (19 percent) or the number of clients served (11 percent). Both men and women workers in this sector reported having no bargaining power in determining their earnings.

In the beauty sector, 90 percent of women were paid per service, and 91 percent said they had no influence over how their earnings were set. Although average gross earnings were high at ₹50,261, net earnings dropped to ₹45,853 after accounting for basic costs like transport and internet. However, the costs like product purchase, uniforms and other accessories, and helper charges are not considered while calculating the net earnings. On average, beauty service workers reported spending ₹17,798 on products within the last three months. Close to 70 percent of beauty service workers indicated they had purchased such items during this period.

For ride-sharing and delivery, vehicle ownership significantly influenced net earnings. Women without vehicle ownership reported paying an average rent of ₹16,134 per month. Additionally, 24 percent of female ride-sharing workers used the platforms through intermediaries (third-party agencies which may charge additional commissions on top of platform fees), where earnings were lower (₹15,189) compared to those working directly with aggregators.

The median earning for women in the care and domestic sector is ₹16000 and ranges between ₹2000 to ₹40000. For beauty services the median earning is ₹40000 and ranges between ₹6000 to ₹145000 per months. For ride sharing services ₹17800 is the median earning and ranges between ₹1651 to ₹41700.

b. Gender Pay Gap

In the care and domestic work sector, women earned roughly 75 percent of what men earn, with greater variance in earnings among women. While the male sample was limited, only 10 male workers providing 24-hour care earned an average of ₹20,328 per month, compared to ₹18,866 for women in similar roles, and ₹15,850 for women providing non-24-hour care. This disparity exists one reason might be because all the men in the sample provide 24-hour care, while most women are in part-time care roles.

In ride-sharing, average earnings appeared similar across genders, ₹16,521 per month for men and ₹16,440 for women, but this masked key disparities in asset ownership. Over 90 percent of male drivers owned their vehicles, compared to just 23 percent of women. Women using rented vehicles earned an average of ₹8,682 per month (after deducting the rent), while their male counterparts earned ₹16,521.

c. Shifting Patterns in Work and Pay

Many workers across platforms reported that when they first joined, they felt they were earning well and saw the work as a promising opportunity, and even received great returns. However, that sense of financial stability has diminished over time. With the continuous onboarding of new workers, earnings have gradually declined, and the availability of gigs has reduced. This saturation has led to heightened competition and a sense of disposability, where workers feel easily replaceable and unable to negotiate better terms. These challenges are further intensified by the rising cost of living and inflation in urban areas, making it harder for workers to sustain themselves on their current earnings. One domestic worker during her interview highlighted,

> *"I've set aside some savings for the kids, and the household runs well without any major issues.*
>
> *All of this became possible after I joined the app. Though in the past two to three years, the work has slowed down, I don't know why, they don't give as many bookings as before."(Beauty Worker)*

> *"Earlier they used to give me Rs. 8000-9000 for cooking. Now they have reduced it to Rs. 4,500… If someone else is agreeing to work at a lower rate, then that is what you will offer to me.. I may not have any other option, what will I do, I will accept only. And where will the extra money go?" (Domestic worker)*

Several women highlighted that despite joining platforms for better opportunities, their earnings were now similar to or even lower than in non-platform work, especially when factoring in the additional costs they must bear.

d. Platform-specific Additional Costs

Across all sectors, women reported a range of additional expenses that significantly reduced their net earnings. These costs varied in form and intensity across different platform types but were a consistent feature of platform-based work.

- Commission deductions by platforms were a consistent feature across all service types. During the interviews, workers reported that a portion of their earnings was routinely deducted as platform commission. Beauty workers also revealed how these commission rates have also increased over time. A worker shared,

> *"Now maybe they thought it through, earlier when the client booked small services, the commission was low at about 5 percent, and we could convince the client easily (for other services, outside of platform).*
> *This way, I've been able to earn ₹2000 or ₹3000 from a ₹600 booking (through extra services). But now they've made even small bookings 15 percent, and big ones up to 25 percent. Earlier, big jobs had 30 percent and small ones had only 5 percent."*
> *(Beauty Worker)*

While this was understood as part of the platform-service model, many found that the lack of transparency around how these commissions were calculated, combined with other costs, significantly reduced their take-home income. In the absence of clear communication or standardisation, several workers expressed uncertainty about the overall percentage being deducted and whether it varied across service types or over time. This lack of transparency was especially evident in domestic work and delivery services. A domestic worker iterated,

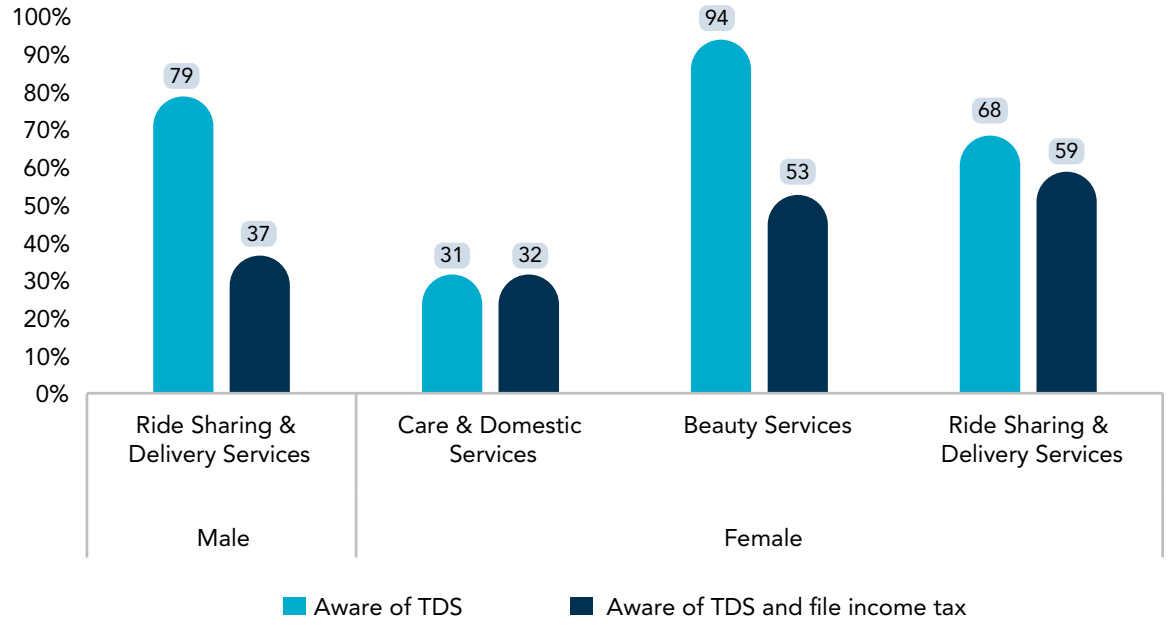
> *"They were taking ₹30,000 from the client, and what were they giving me? Only ₹22,000. The app never told me that we are taking so much from them. When she (my client) had a fight about something, she said that she is not giving ₹30,000 this month for this work."* *(Domestic Worker)*

The initial cost of gears like vehicle also demands repair especially as it is consistently used for work at length. This is especially concerning for food delivery and ride sharing services as a disabled worker who delivers food on her scooter-wheelchair shared,

> *Once, I started working in the rain. The controller of the vehicle costs ₹2000. I didn't know it could break due to rain. I drove a lot in the rain, and the controller broke. I got it repaired, and it costed me ₹2000. I didn't get it repaired immediately… We don't get raincoats. We have to pay for them ourselves… another time my vehicle broke down. I was working while it broke. Now, the charger costs ₹5000, the battery costs ₹25,000. I ordered a small tyre—it cost ₹500." (Food Delivery Worker)*

- **TDS (Tax Deducted at Source)** was applied across platforms, though awareness of such deductions varied. For instance, in the care sector, only 31 percent of women reported being aware of TDS. In contrast, 94 percent of women in the beauty sector acknowledged TDS deductions. Among ride-sharing workers, 68 percent of women had TDS deducted, though only 59 percent filed tax returns.

Figure 21: Awareness of TDS Deductions and its Return



- Product costs in the beauty sector emerged as a recurring financial responsibility for workers. Over 70 percent of women reported being required to purchase service-related products directly through the platform. These purchases were often weekly and non-optional, making them a regular cost that impacted net earnings. On average, workers spent ₹17,798 over a three-month period on such products. During qualitative interviews, many shared that they were expected to use only platform-supplied products, limiting their ability to explore more affordable alternatives. In cases where workers were unable to pay upfront, platforms offered loans, sometimes with

high interest charges, which added to their ongoing financial commitments. One beauty worker detailed,

> *"There is an App store on the phone, from which we can shop for the products. So, we have to order at least 4 days before. Earlier, they used to do orders for ₹1000. Now it's like, if you place an order for ₹1500 only then, it will be placed, otherwise there will be a delivery charge of ₹99."*

- Registration and security fees were also highest in the beauty sector: Together, 85.19 percent of women in the sector have reported that they have paid registration/security fees. The average amount is 15303, ranges between 800 to 60000. Here, a worker in the beauty industry reported mandatory costs associated with trainings and registration. After working with the same platform for years and observing a notable rise in prices of products, the worker shared,

> *"Some people opted for loans (to cover for the initial batch of products), but I didn't. The kit cost was around ₹35,000. I preferred paying in cash, so I paid the full amount directly — I felt that was the best option for me. the products they gave us were worth much less than what they said. At that time, I even asked my friend, and she told me, "Please don't worry — even if they're charging you ₹35,000, you'll earn well later, so don't think of it as a loss." She said the earnings would make up for it. But honestly, the products they gave were worth far less than ₹35,000.*
>
> *Even now, they've launched some new facials. For these, the products they provided are roughly worth ₹18,000–₹19,000. Out of that, they got a loan processed for ₹13,250. But the actual product value was only around ₹5,000–₹6,000. But what's happening is — they're just increasing the prices of everything. That's not fair. For example, a clean-up product that normally costs ₹109 or ₹146 — they're selling it for ₹186. So, they've raised the price of every item."*
> *(Beauty Sector Worker)*

- Average monthly transportation costs for women in care (who did not stay at client's home) and domestic services were ₹1,184, unlike male care workers who typically stayed with clients and incurred no such costs. During interviews, women in beauty services also informed of transportation costs, who used either their own vehicles, which were often two-wheelers, or booked ride-sharing bike taxi apps for mobility. One worker specified,

> *"Even if the next job is just 4 kilometers away, I might still take a bike (taxi), because I don't have time.*
>
> *I'm coming straight from one job to the next.*
>
> *Sometimes I even book the next job from the current one, just to save time, especially if I'm running late."* *(Beauty Service Worker)*

These additional costs, some of them often non-negotiable and platform-mandated, substantially impacted net income, and were cited by many workers as a key deterrent to financial stability.

e. Impact on Financial Stability

For many women working particularly in the beauty, ride-sharing, and delivery sectors, income unpredictability emerged as a key challenge to financial stability. During interviews, workers noted that fluctuations in demand of 'gigs', inconsistent booking volumes, and dependence on peak-hour incentives made it difficult to anticipate how much they would earn each month. As a result, most reported being unable to plan long-term or consistently set aside savings. A ride-sharing worker highlighted,

> *"Right now, even if I earn ₹200 in a day, I end up spending all ₹200. Nothing gets saved. But when I used to get a monthly salary—even if it was just ₹25,000—I could plan. A week before the month started, I'd divide it: this much for groceries, this much for other expenses. Even after all that, I'd still manage to save ₹10,000.*
>
> *But here, nothing is left. Out of ₹200 I earn in a day, ₹100 goes to petrol and the rest into daily household needs. I'm left with nothing in hand. And it's not even possible to track how much I actually earn in a month because it just comes and goes daily."*
> *(Ride-Sharing Worker)*

C. Work Hours, Flexibility and Work-Life Balance

While many women reported joining platforms for the perceived flexibility they offered, particularly to manage caregiving and domestic responsibilities, their experiences across sectors suggest that flexibility often comes at a cost. Whether it is through incentive-linked thresholds, login expectations, or the need to secure a high number of gigs to earn adequately, platform structures increasingly reward full-time engagement. Flexibility, in most cases, remains conditional or illusory.

a. Work Duration and Compensation

Both men and women working in the care and domestic sector reported to work on all seven days of the week, but men worked for around 21.4 hours on average per day, whereas women worked for around 6.5 hours on average in a day. This disparity arises because all the men are engaged in 24-hour care services, whereas a major share of women is engaged in part-time care services. The variance in women's work hours is much higher, ranging from 35 minutes to nearly the full day, while men's work hours range from 14 hours to 24 hours.

Women in the beauty sector worked around 9.3 hours/day, six days/week. In qualitative interviews, women reported that were paid per service, which directly linked income to the number of gigs accepted, making refusal difficult even when work hours became long or unpredictable. Despite being advertised as flexible, workers reported being expected to be available throughout the day, especially during peak demand hours.

Women also highlighted the growing prevalence of on-demand work within beauty service platforms. While participation in such tasks is often presented as optional, the implicit pressure to accept assignments at short notice can erode the perceived flexibility of platform work, particularly for those seeking to balance paid work with domestic responsibilities. A beauty worker explained,

> *"In SOM (an auto-assign system), you're required to accept the job — it's compulsory. You'll get a notification or a bell sound, and that's it — your job is confirmed, and you have to go. You don't even have the option to accept or reject it; it gets accepted on its own.*
>
> *I didn't feel comfortable with that, because now my elder daughter is growing up, and I can't give that much time like before. I don't want to work nonstop anymore. I'd rather choose when and how much I want to work.*
>
> *With auto-assigned jobs, you don't even know when you'll need to leave or when you'll be free — and that doesn't suit me right now."*
> *(Beauty worker)*

In the ride-sharing sector, both men and women in our survey reported working an average of six days a week. Men work approximately 9.6 hours daily, while women average is slightly higher at 9.8 hours, and in spite of that women earn marginally less than men. However, the variance in daily work hours is significantly higher for men, ranging from just 5 minutes to 18 hours, compared to women's range of 30 minutes to 16 hours. Many accepted longer hours to compensate for lower per-gig income or to meet platform incentives. 36 percent of women stated that there are compulsory login hours for working with ride-sharing platforms, a proportion higher than that reported by men (28 percent).

b. Domestic Responsibilities, Work-Life Balance and Work Time Preferences

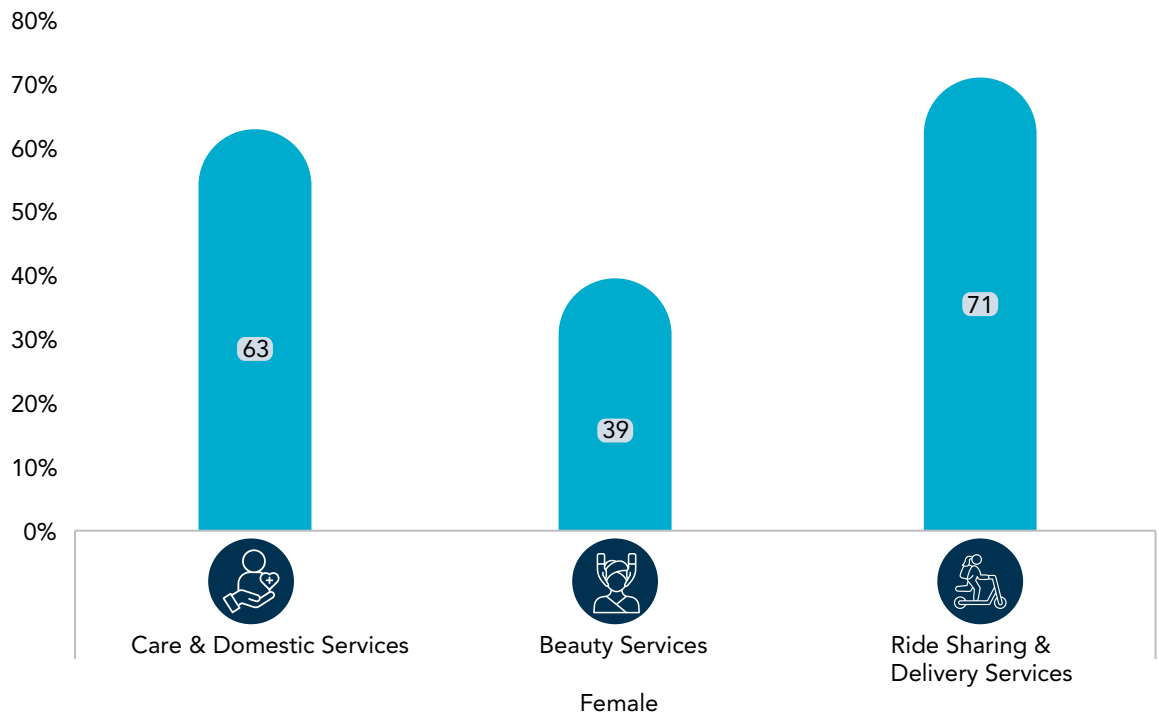
Across sectors, a significant proportion of women reported having little to no time for rest, leisure, domestic duties, or social interaction after completing platform work: 69 percent in care work, 39 percent in beauty services, and 71 percent in ride-sharing.

Although, some women also reported valuing the relative flexibility it offered, particularly in sectors like beauty services and bike-taxi services. During an interview, a beauty worker noted that the varied appointments allowed her to manage household responsibilities and childcare alongside her job. Similarly, a bike-taxi rider shared that she was initially introduced to platform work with the notion that it would provide a way to earn supplemental income. She hoped to combine it with other commitments, viewing it as a way to stay financially active while managing her time independently. She detailed,

> *"He (a colleague) once told me, 'You travel 40 kilo meters every day — you could earn something along the way too'… I laughed and asked, 'How?' He said whenever he leaves home, he switches on the app — he has a bike — and picks up a rider on the way. He earns ₹100 to ₹150 just on the route, which covers his petrol expenses."*

However, this flexibility may not be equally applicable across all platform-based ride-sharing services.

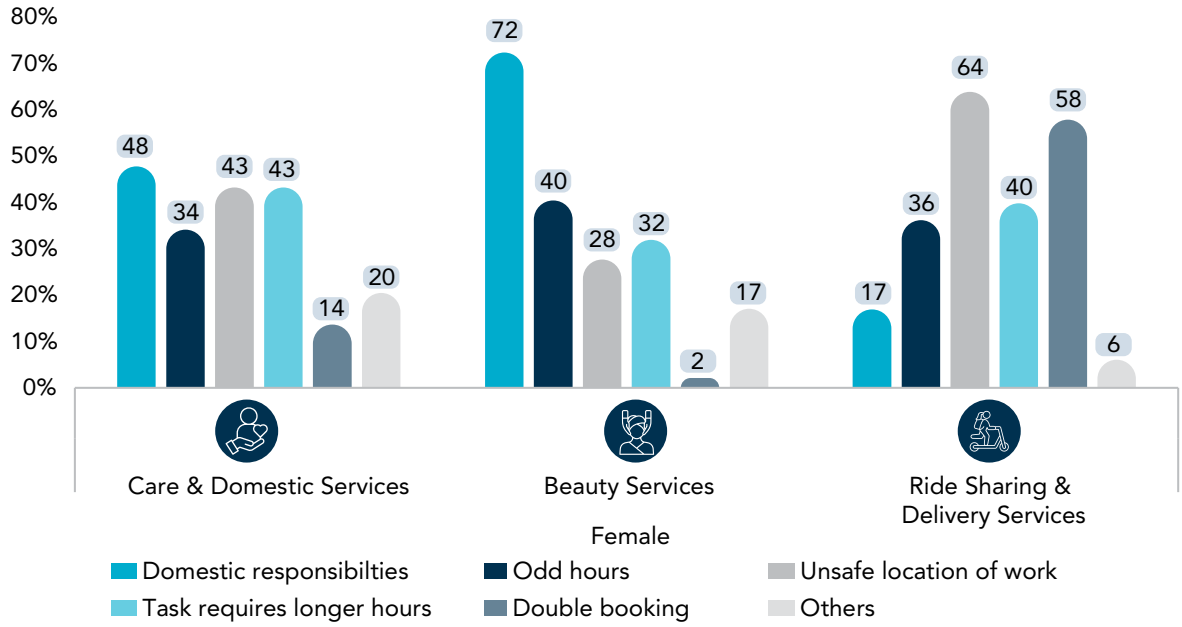
Figure 22: Perception of Less Time for Leisure After Joining Platform Work



Across all sectors, caregiving and domestic obligations were cited as the most prominent reasons for rejecting work or being unable to engage consistently. Many women highlighted that platform work, while advertised as flexible, still requires availability that often clashes with household duties. This tension was particularly noted in care work and beauty services, where tasks are time-bound and require physical presence at the client's location.

In the beauty sector, 72 percent of women cited domestic responsibilities as the primary barrier to accepting platform-assigned work. This was similarly reflected in the care and domestic work sector, where women frequently mentioned prioritising family care over platform engagements, especially during children's school hours or evenings.

Figure 23: Reason for Declining Services on Platforms



Many women indicated clear preferences around working hours, particularly to avoid night shifts due to safety reasons, or early mornings due to household responsibilities, but found it difficult to act on these preferences due to income insecurity, incentive-based structures, and customer demands.

1. In care work: 21 percent of women preferred to avoid certain work times, of these, 46 percent avoided night shifts
2. In beauty services, 44 percent preferred not to work at night, 33 percent avoided early mornings
3. In ride-sharing, about 60 percent of men and 44 percent of women expressed a preference for avoiding work during certain times of the day. Among these women, 40 percent prefer not to work at night, and 42 percent prefer not to work in the afternoon. For men, approximately 42 percent prefer not to work in the afternoon, with a smaller proportion (33 percent) expressing an unwillingness to work at night compared to women. A substantial 68 percent of women reported that they lack sufficient time for leisure, socialisation, family time, or domestic chores after completing their platform work.

A ride-sharing worker also reiterated the responsibilities women hold while working during an interview:

> *"Because companies think, "We're already running fine. We have enough men." And yes—there are men who work 9-to-5 jobs and still drive for Ola or Uber until 11p.m. But women can't do that. A woman can't do it easily because she also has to give time at home. And even if she becomes totally "free" like me — in my case, being "free" doesn't mean I have no responsibilities. That's not possible. There's always something or the other to take care of."*
> *(Ride-Sharing Partner)*

While the nature of work across platform sectors varies, the barriers to accepting work, domestic obligations, concerns over safety, and the structure of task timing, are commonly shared by women workers. The degree to which these barriers affect participation differs by sector: care and beauty work are more heavily impacted by caregiving demands, while ride-sharing and delivery work are significantly shaped by safety concerns and social perceptions.

These patterns suggest that flexibility, as promised by platforms, is often conditional, dependent on women's ability to manage competing responsibilities and navigate risks that are not equally distributed across all workers.

c. Commute Time

Travel to and from work significantly extends the workday for many platform workers, particularly in customer-location-based roles like care and beauty services.

1. The average one-way commute of women in care and domestic work is 73 minutes. Where, 32 percent used public transport, 32 percent auto/bike-taxis/cabs, 20 percent walked, and the rest 9 percent travel by cycle.
2. For women in beauty services, the average commute is of 2 hours one way, where 49.4 percent used two-wheelers, and 46.9 percent auto/ bike taxis/ cabs.
3. Travel is embedded in work of women who are in the ride-sharing services, but women drivers renting vehicles often worked longer to offset rental costs and reach income thresholds.

Therefore, although platform work was initially associated with autonomy, many workers now report algorithmic control over tasks, gig availability, and earnings thresholds. Combined with rising competition and declining per-gig rates, this has transformed flexibility into a constrained choice.

Hence, across care, beauty, and ride-sharing sectors, the narrative of flexible work is increasingly being questioned by workers' lived realities. For many women, especially those in urban areas juggling unpaid care work, paid platform work is reported to have become a demanding, full-time occupation, often without the formal protections or predictable schedules of traditional employment.

D. Navigating the Occupational Landscape: Safety, Contracts, and Social Security

While some platforms have begun introducing welfare measures, workers continue to experience uncertainty around access, awareness, and entitlements.

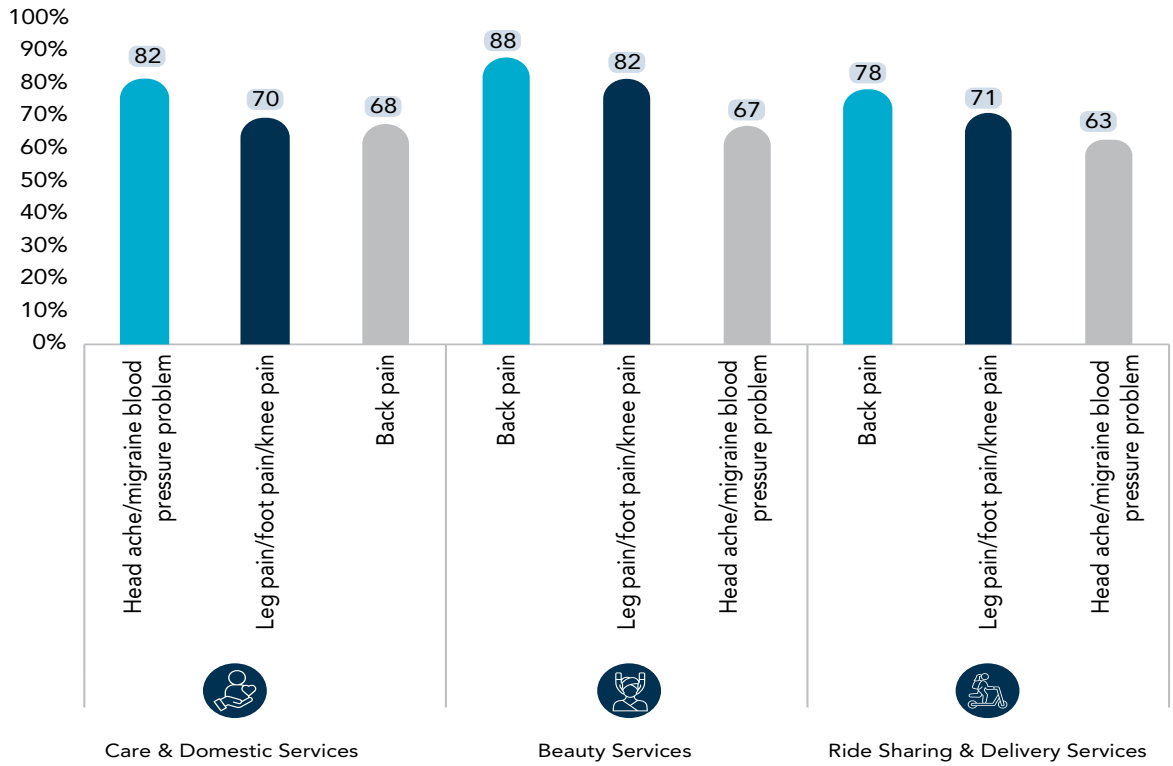
a. Health and Safety in the Platform Ecosystem

As we inquired about the health-concerns due to the platform work, overall, 69 and 83 percent of men and women respectively reported that they suffer from health issues.

In the ride-sharing and delivery sectors, around 78 percent of women reported back pain, 71 percent suffering from leg pain/knee pain etc, 63 percent experiencing head ache/migraine blood pressure problem, reflecting the health-related issues arising while working.

In the beauty sector too, majority of women reported health-concerns due to the platform work, around 88 percent reported back pain, 82 percent mentioned about suffering from leg pain/knee pain etc, and 67.1 percent experiencing head ache/migraine blood pressure problem, reflecting the health-related issues arising while working in these sectors. And in the care and domestic sector, around 82 percent reported headache/migraine etc, 70 percent suffering from leg pain/knee pain etc, 68 percent experiencing back pain, reflecting the health-related issues arising while working in these sectors. We note that the causal relationship between platform work and health concerns cannot be correlated due to pre-existing health issues of workers. Therefore, we have attempted to corroborate job specific occupational hazards considering the new challenges introduced by platform work.

Figure 24: Major Health Issues Reported by Women Workers



b. Mapping Access to Social Security

Majority of workers in all the three type of services do not receive any social security benefits. Regarding social security benefits, only about 2.5 percent of both men and women in the ride sharing and delivery services reported having Provident Fund (PF) benefits. However, health insurance coverage was more prevalent, with 40 percent of men and 50 percent of women reporting it. Additionally, 13 percent of women stated they had paid leave. In the care and domestic sector, around 87.5 percent of women mentioned about not receiving paid leaves, only 5 percent of them had PF benefits, and only 2 percent women had health insurance coverage. Out of the 10 men surveyed from the care platforms, only one man reported to have health insurance benefits, and one man had PF benefits. In the beauty sector, almost all 99 percent of them had no PF benefits, and only 44 percent women had health insurance coverage.

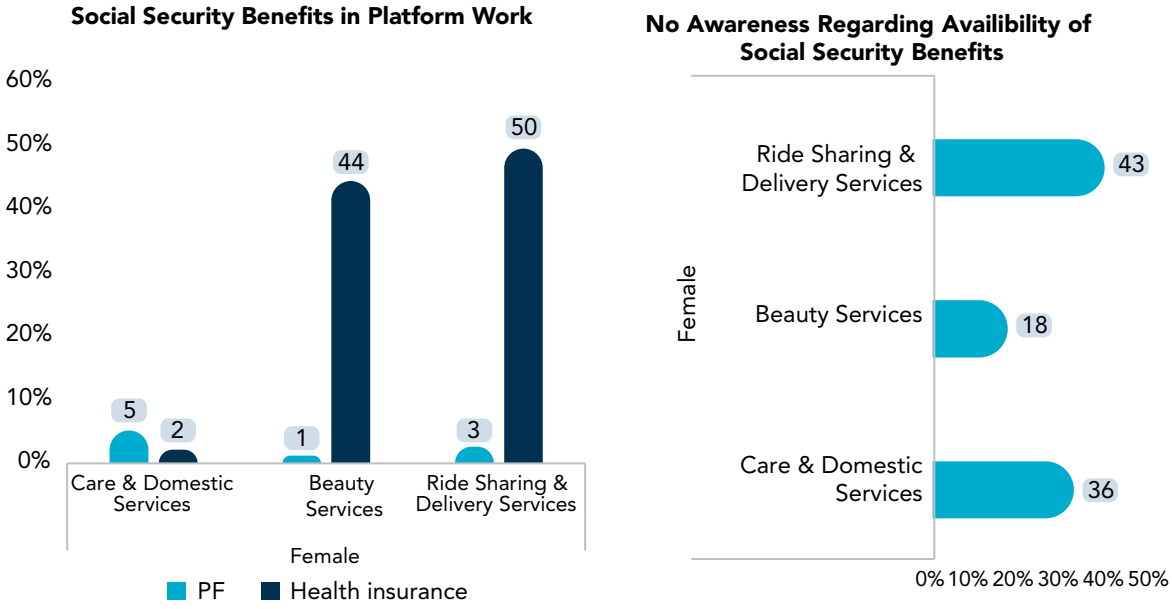
Further, an organiser shed light on the vitality of these benefits for workers as even though platform work is pitched as flexible work, to make ends meet, there are workers who pull-off long shifts and pursue platform work as their only source of livelihood. She shared,

> *"If a person is giving 17 hours to the company, then the company should think about this and should take care of the workers. The needs of the workers should be fulfilled. Sometimes they should also ask why have you worked for 17 hours. The company should also know this. They must inquire that what is the workers' problem that they have to work for so many hours? They work continuously without a day off. I was surprised to hear this."*

A ride-sharing worker who had platform as the sole means of earning highlighted the need for paid leave given the nature and quality of work expressing,

> *"For me, working as an employee is the best option. I don't even mind not having Saturdays off, but there should be at least one Sunday off, so total 4 offs in a month – because everyone has a family and personal life. No charges should be deducted for those basic off days. Right now, if I take a leave, I'm not paid. That shouldn't happen."*

Figure 25: Social Security Benefits in Platform Work



Another worker from the same platform reported,

> *I fell ill. I had an infection in my stomach. I borrowed money from someone else and got it checked. They gave me a medicine for ₹350, I took it. I called him (the immediate supervisor), but he didn't answer. I called him three times…I was asking for a two-day leave, but they don't give leave. They cut my wages. I asked him if they would cut my money if I take two days' leave. He said, "Yes, they will cut money, and talk to me after I come there." If he cuts my money for two days, I'll say, "If you're taking ₹10,000 commission, why are you cutting my two days' salary?" (Care worker)*

The respondent was nearing 50 years of age and had been working as a domestic worker for over 30 years, and currently working at a household as a care-worker she added,

> *There should be holidays. If not four, then at least two holidays should be given. At least. All this is not good, it's not good. They (platforms) work in such a way "We're paying you, so just do the work." And when we go to someone's house, we have to work according to their needs and schedule. No holidays. I had said this before. Last month, no holiday was given. This month, I said I'll take two holidays. When I brought up the payment, they said they would come and talk. If the money was deducted, they'd return it. But they never came. They just said, "You go and work." (Care worker)*

This highlights the need and raised demand for paid leave by workers and its importance for older, disabled and pregnant women especially. A disabled worker working on a food-delivery platform reported a discontentment from the current social security benefits available by stating,

> *"They'll just give ₹5000. If it's a serious injury, then ₹1,00,000. But even ₹1,00,000 isn't enough for proper treatment. If someone has money, they go to a private hospital. But if someone doesn't, what will they do? They'll think about expenses, about their family, children, and home. It has happened to me. We are not that rich. We have to do everything carefully. My father takes care of the house. We pay rent. We pay hospital bills. We pay for treatment. A poor person can't manage everything. I have plates and screws in my spinal cord. They need tightening and loosening regularly."*
> *(Food Delivery Worker)*

c. Benefit Systems: Awareness and Accessibility

Among the women who reported to get any of the social security benefits from the platform around 43 and 19 percent of them in beauty and ride sharing & delivery services don't know how to avail the benefits. In the domestic and care sector, while two men (out of ten), knew how to avail of these benefits, only 64 percent women were aware about how to avail of these benefits. In the beauty sector, of the 44 percent who had social security benefits, only 81 percent of women were aware about how to avail of these benefits.

Those attempting to access benefits report administrative delays or lack of clarity in processes

Here too, the absence of proper channel of communication and the role of platforms in disseminating information regarding workers' welfare plays a key role as despite benefits mentioned in the contract, workers' face multiple barriers in accessing them. An organiser shared her disappointment as she focused on how insurance for gear that acts as a pre-requisite is also necessary especially in the case of ride-sharing and delivery services,

> *"I ask these drivers directly: 'Have you ever met the owner of this company?' They say no too. Has there ever been any funding or help from the company? Do you get any bonus? Does your PF get deducted? Because PF should be deducted. They deserve medical insurance too — for themselves and their vehicles. But nothing like that exists. And honestly… what can we even do about it?"*

A lack of clarity from platforms also leads to frustration and distrust amongst workers and this raises questions around platforms' will and intent as a domestic worker expressed,

> *"And this is when the platform promised us that they will give us the insurance policy and everything but they didn't give us anything. You can go on YouTube and have a look at their video. In that video they promise everything. They said that they will give us the hospital expenses and everything…The person (platform) who actually wants to provide the benefits will give them to us the very day we join and properly inform us too."*

The worker added about anxiety around lack of reliable information too and she added,

> *"They just said that you can watch on YouTube. We will give you everything slowly. Gradually you will start to get the benefits but we will give benefits. We don't know when they will give. If they had said clearly, we would have had patience that the person would give it in a month, in two months or whatever their timeline is. No problem. We would have waited. But nothing. In the video it also says that if you go to the doctor, we will give you an ESI card. We didn't get that also."*

Currently, workers registration on E-Shram[12] is mentioned across platforms and workers unions and associations have assisted workers in the registration process too. However, our interviews with legal experts and academicians revealed that mere registration on E-Shram does not guarantee a platform worker access to social security and health benefits. In fact, Social Security Welfare Schemes and Employment Schemes are the two categories of schemes on the portal that further consists of schemes. The thirteen existing welfare schemes do not provide universal coverage that would include them without restriction.[13]

d. Ambiguities in Work Contracts

Many workers are unsure if they are bound by a formal contract or what its terms entail. Of workers involved in ride-sharing and delivery services, when asked about job contracts, 53 percent of men and 41 percent of women reported having some form of contract when joining the platform. Despite this, a significant portion of these workers, 43 percent of men and 50 percent of women, either didn't understand the contract at all or lacked clarity. The primary reason cited by women for this lack of understanding was that the "app/platform doesn't fully explain" (46 percent), whereas men primarily attributed it to "complex terms and conditions" (72 percent).

[12] The Ministry of Labour and Employment states that the creation of E-Shram Portal is to maintain a centralised database of all unorganised workers (UWs) including Construction Workers, Migrant Workers, Gig and Platform workers, Street Vendors, Domestic Workers, Agriculture Workers, etc., to be seeded with Aadhaar and ensure effective implementation of social security schemes. However, the E-Shram lacks clarity around the details of the schemes that it covers and aims to provide.

[13] Singh, G. & Surya, A. (2025, June 13). Trapped in a disguised employment relationship, India's platform workers deserve a new lease on social security. The Leaflet.

In the domestic and care work sector, only 29 percent women reported to have some sort of job contract while joining the platform. However, over 50 percent of these women either didn't understand the contract at all or lacked clarity, with the reason primarily being the language barrier, followed by insufficient explanation of the terms and conditions by the platforms.

In the beauty sector, only 56 percent women reported to have some sort of job contract while joining the platform. However, over 89 percent of these women either didn't understand the contract at all or lacked clarity, with the reason primarily being the 'app/ platform doesn't fully explain' (73.3 percent), followed by 'complex terms and conditions' (16 percent).

From no contracts to an absence of fair contracts around sectors, in the absence of having supportive legal provisions, workers' during interviews note an unease around larger job security with the platform. Even with current precarity as an association organiser expressed how workers' perception of platform work is impacted by changes in the overall platform economy ecosystem. She shared,

> *"You must have seen BlueSmart, how big a company it is. The workers have come to the streets. What was the fault of those workers?"*

Another worker highlighted the need for proper binding contracts in the absence of clear communication and added,

> *"You can take and give me as much work as you want. At least give me something. But if the other person doesn't answer the call only, how can we expect any answer? I believe such platforms would also have some form of insurance on paper. But the problem is, they don't inform us about it. I'm sure something does exist—it's not like it doesn't. Actually, it feels like these companies don't even recognise that women exist in this field, or that women go through very different kinds of challenges."(Ride-sharing Worker)*

e. Gaps in Care Infrastructure and Policies

The absence of a regular monthly income makes it challenging for workers to plan savings and complicates financial planning, making it difficult for workers to build a safety net. The stress of meeting daily income targets often forces workers to forgo necessary time off, further exacerbating their precarious situation. This pressure not only affects financial stability but also strains personal lives, as the balance between work and family responsibilities becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. An organiser articulated this reality where the lack of decent wages and the inability to sustain livelihood without over-working oneself clubbed with the fashion in which payment is inconsistently received, stating,

> *If they do not give them (the platform) 10-14 hours a day, they will not get ₹1000 in the evening because their daily schedule is like this. If we have to take care of our children in the evening, then we have to take ₹1000-1200 home. For which we have to deliver 15-20 orders. So now they do not have any reason to take a leave.*

For women, where the burden of household responsibilities persists in the form of unpaid labour persists, the absence of facilities specifically catering to their needs inevitably rises. Despite income instability and the delusion of flexibility, paid leaves become crucial and the demand for a re-thinking social security benefits catering to women's needs emerges as obvious conditions to continue in platform work. In the domestic and care sector, a link between women's support system where they can shift childcare/ domestic care responsibility and their availability to work long hours to sustain was observed during in-depth interviews. An organiser, after sharing narratives of women with young children and packed schedules expressed,

> *The first woman who was connected with us had a divorce. Her children were small. When I met her, I felt that her children are very young and she is forced to work in these circumstances. They take care of their children and earn money. This is why these women work. If a woman does a duty, they can't spend 8-9 hours a day. They are not able to take care of their children. First of all, be it single mother or married, their young children should get a creche. A creche is a place where a woman can leave her child safely. In such a place, the child's nutrition is taken care of. Proper activity, proper nutrition, everything is available. They should get a creche for their children.*

She added as she elaborated on the need for paid leaves for women especially by stating,

> *I just wanted to tell them (relevant stakeholders) that during periods, they also have a right to rest. Those days are very difficult for them. They should have some provision for that.*

Not just mothers with child-care responsibilities but unmarried women who spend time providing unpaid elder care labour at home also expressed their desire for rest and paid leave,

> *There's no paid leave here (on the app). In an office job, you take a day off and still get paid. But here, if I take a break, I earn nothing. That's the reality.*

E. Safety and Dignity at Work

For many women engaged in platform-based livelihoods, the workplace is not a fixed site, it is a customer's home, a vehicle, the streets or a location assigned via an app. These workspaces often lack formal protections, leading to persistent concerns about safety, access to basic amenities, and there exist power asymmetries with clients. Our findings indicate that platform work continues to operate within a landscape marked by gendered norms, mobility restrictions, and unequal treatment.

a. Social Perceptions

Many women during qualitative interviews shared that platform work is still seen as "low-status" or transitional, both by themselves and their families. This perception impacts their sense of stability and social identity. This feeling was shared across all platform workers who stated,

> *"If I were to tell a family member or a friend from my personal circle... they'd start assuming all sorts of things: "Oh, she must be roaming around all day with people". (Ride Sharing Worker)*
>
> *"I tell my son that if he studies, he will be successful. Otherwise, everything is useless. If my parents would have encouraged me to study like they did with my brothers, maybe I would have been working in a good job". (Domestic Worker)*
>
> *"Please don't think that because I am working for this app, I come from a bad family. I come from a very reputed household, but I have to do this work because it's helping me generate some income for myself. (Beauty Service Worker)"*

These experiences reveal how, beyond economic constraints, the women grapple with social perceptions, familial judgement, and internalised guilt, all of which reinforce a sense of inadequacy despite their active contribution to household income.

b. Worker Experiences of Adverse Behavior

The graph shows that a significant share of women, across the platforms, reported feeling unsafe, or faced adverse behaviour at times, with the share being relatively higher in ride-sharing and delivery services in comparison to other platforms. In the ride-sharing and delivery services, even a significant share of men reported to feel unsafe at times.

Figure 26: Care and Domestic Services – Incidence of Adverse Behaviour by Customers

Figure 27: Beauty Services - Incidence of Adverse Behaviour by Customers

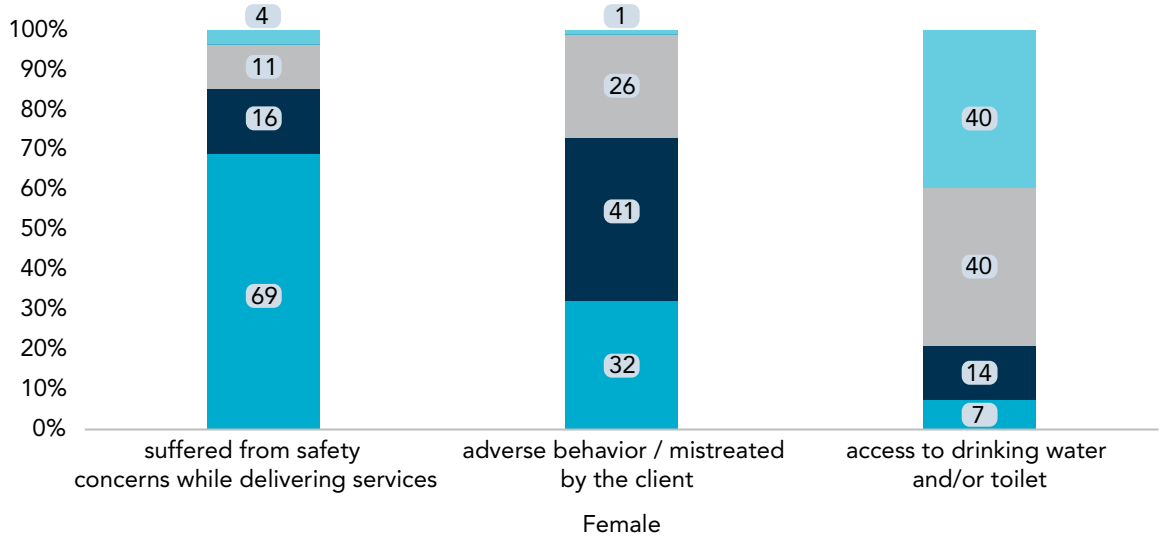
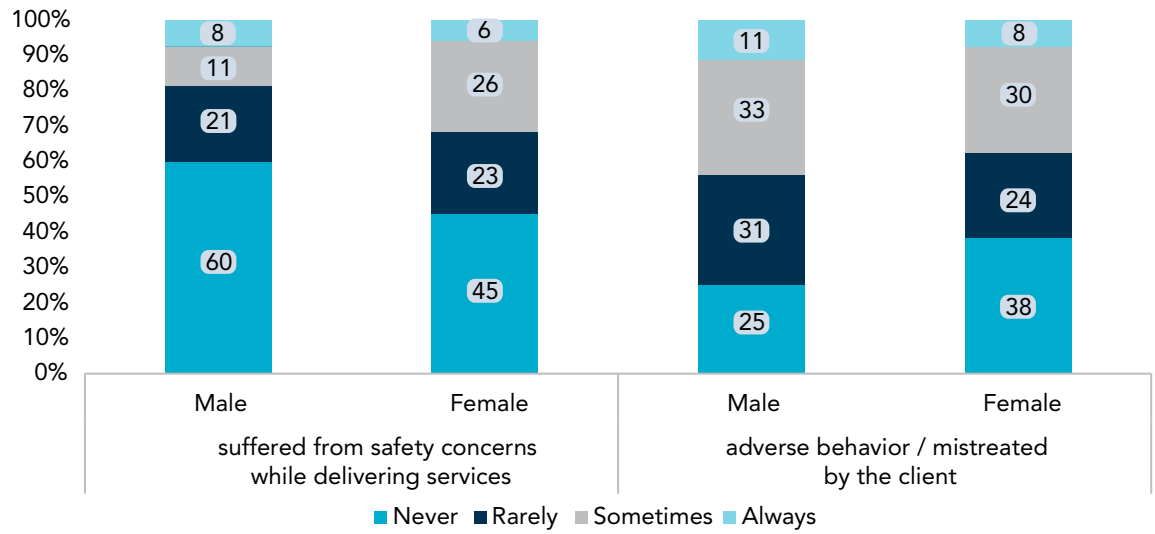


Figure 28: Ride Sharing and Delivery Services - Incidence of Adverse Behaviour by Customers



Worker Accounts of Unchecked Customer Conduct: During interviews, women across platform types, except elderly care, described incidents where they faced inappropriate behaviour during the course of their work. These included verbal abuse, unwarranted personal questions, and derogatory language; intrusive behaviour, including clients attempting to overstep professional boundaries or engaging in suggestive talk and even inappropriate physical contact, especially in ride-sharing or delivery services, where close proximity in enclosed spaces increases vulnerability. A ride-sharing partner shared,

> *"There have been moments, like someone placing a hand on my shoulder while getting in. Later, they'll say, "Don't mind, I was just getting in." And I say, "Okay, fine. Get in. But did you really need to place your hand on my shoulder for that?" Maybe that's just their way of making contact, but we can't fight with everyone."*
> *(Ride-Sharing Partner)*

While such instances were not uniformly experienced by all workers, a significant number reported that even occasional occurrences created a sense of unease and over-alertness during assignments.

Gender-Based Harassment in Public Areas: Women engaged in platform work, particularly in sectors such as ride-sharing, delivery, and beauty services, often operate in public and mobile environments, which can expose them to various safety concerns, including harassment. Several workers and organisers noted that harassment is not uncommon, especially during late hours or in isolated areas. A higher proportion of women in ride sharing apps, as compared to other platforms, also report 'unsafe location of work' and 'double booking' as their reasons for rejecting services.

While many platforms highlight features such as SOS buttons or emergency assistance tools within their apps, workers often reported that these mechanisms are reported to be either unresponsive or ineffective when needed. A representative from a beauty services platform highlighted these existing mechanisms, but also remarked, *"There are people who are able to handle that. And there are people who are not able to handle that,"* suggesting that the capacity to manage safety threats is seen as a matter of individual ability rather than a shared responsibility. This perception was echoed by a union organiser who shared the following account of a worker:

> *"She (a platform worker) was telling me that one day, she was coming home at night. She had her daughter with her. She was sleeping behind her. Two boys were following her on a scooter. She was very bold. She fought for herself. She stopped the scooter and asked why they were following her. They refused and said that "we are not following you". She said that if they follow me, I will tell them. She was bold. But not everyone is bold. But there is a compulsion to work."* *(Gig Worker Organiser)*

Experiences like these draw attentions to the critical role that platforms play in creating not just job opportunities but also safe working environments. Given that the nature of platform work demands

public mobility, often outside typical working hours, the responsibility for addressing safety concerns should not rest solely on the individual worker. Platforms, as key stakeholders in the ecosystem, have a role to play in ensuring timely support, preventive mechanisms, and accountability structures that prioritise worker safety.

Uncompensated Work and Biased Treatment: Beyond gender, some workers, particularly those in care and domestic services, reported encountering caste- and class-based discrimination, reinforcing long-standing social prejudices within newer forms of employment.

During interviews, workers reported that some clients restricted physical access to spaces, such as barring workers from entering kitchens, touching utensils, or using shared amenities like toilets or drinking water. This behaviour, while not always explicitly articulated, was often perceived by workers as stemming from assumptions about their social background, caste, or occupation. A domestic worker shared her experience,

> *"Here, we are not allowed to open the fridge. They say, "Don't touch. Don't even touch the utensils." It's completely prohibited. The day the person who washes the utensils doesn't come, then those days I will wash the utensils. Then one day I asked Aunty, "You don't let me touch the utensils. If I wash them, I will touch them. Then what will you do? Will you wash them with holy water?"*
> *(Domestic Worker)*

In many such instances, this discriminatory behaviour was coupled with unpaid extraction of additional labour. For example, workers shared that they were occasionally asked to perform tasks outside the scope of the agreed service, such as cleaning tasks for another relative's household, washing utensils, or taking care of pets, without any additional compensation or consent. These tasks were often presented as informal "requests," making it difficult for workers to refuse.

Such incidents, while not representative of all clients, indicate that platform-mediated work has not entirely dismantled pre-existing social hierarchies. In fact, within the relatively unregulated and individualised context of home-based or customer-location work, some of these dynamics may be reproduced in subtle ways, particularly when clients see workers as disposable or inferior. One of the aggregators even specified maneuvering through such client requests:

> *"Because even if people say, for example, they have selected that they want a worker from a certain religion, it doesn't matter. Then customers start asking what is the caste of the person?. Of course, we take a very clear stance there that we're exhausting a replacement. Plus, we are not going to cater to this as well. So, please behave. But the reality of people in the country is what it is at the moment." (Platform Representative)*

c. Workplace Infrastructure: Access to Basic Amenities

A recurring concern across all platform types is the lack of access to basic facilities, such as toilets, drinking water, and rest spaces, especially in work that is mobile or based at client locations. This issue not only affects comfort and dignity but also contributes to physical strain and reinforces unequal working conditions.

In the care and domestic work sector, around 8 percent of women reported that they never had access to basic amenities like drinking water or toilets in client homes. These challenges were especially pronounced among domestic workers, who often remained in the household for several hours without being offered food or water, and sometimes felt invisible to those around them. A domestic worker during an interview detailed,

> *"I didn't bring food for two days. They didn't say that you haven't eaten food yet. Since you are sitting here, why don't you eat food? Nothing. They were so busy with each other that no one paid attention to me." (Domestic Worker)*

Similarly, in beauty services, when asked how often do workers have access to drinking water and/or toilets, 7.4 percent of workers reported never having access to basic amenities in clients' homes, 14 percent suggested rarely, 40 percent suggested sometimes, and the rest reported having access always. Since these services often require travel between multiple client locations in a day, carrying a load of products and goods for servicing: the absence of safe, hygienic, or designated spaces to rest, eat, or use the bathroom made the workday physically taxing.

In ride-sharing and delivery services, the nature of work is entirely mobile, making consistent access to sanitation or rest infrastructure particularly challenging. Workers frequently mentioned having to buy bottled water, avoid working during peak heat, or plan shifts near metro stations to access public amenities. Despite the presence of designated rest spots on paper, many workers felt they were not accessible by workers. A ride-sharing worker iterated,

> *"That's why I usually avoid driving during the hot hours. I prefer driving in the evenings, mostly near metro stations. That way, I make about ₹200 to ₹250 a day, which helps me manage my basic household expenses." (Ride-Share Worker)*

In addition to these physical infrastructure gaps, digital connectivity and phone battery life emerged as critical yet often overlooked concerns. In the absence of safe or accessible charging stations, several workers shared that their mobile phones, essential for accessing gigs and navigation, would often run out of charge by the afternoon.

F. Grievance Redressal Mechanism

Across platforms, with one exception, we found that the Grievance Redressal Mechanisms perform poorly for workers. While a supportive mechanism exists for customers availing services, we note in the following areas where inconsistencies persist:

a. Mode of Communication/ Design of Grievance Redressal Mechanism

While one platform, out of all the platforms covered in this study, had a worker-friendly design and functional grievance redressal mechanism, most of the platforms did not have effective and elaborate mechanisms. A worker in the domestic sector responded,

> *"There's a WhatsApp option where you can chat with them, but the issue is—it's just chat. You can only send messages. It's like the complaint box outside a school—you drop your concern in, and maybe you get a reply like, 'We'll look into it', but when they actually do something about it, you never really know. And frankly, it hasn't happened so far."* *(Domestic Worker)*

Workers expressed not having clear communication lines with their immediate supervisor and in the absence of an employer-employer relationship with the customers, they expressed a complete void of approaches to report their worries. A worker shared,

> *"If we try to call them, they don't even pick up—because the call is routed through the company and it stays on record…they only gave an app where they could send something or the other. I could not raise anything from my side. I couldn't put anything from here regarding what my problem is. I couldn't even speak. Then I had to use WhatsApp. I used to do the same on WhatsApp. Then I said, what is the purpose of the app? I am deleting it. She said, delete it."* *(Domestic Worker)*

Another domestic and care worker, who has worked via informal kin networks, then shifted to agency placements and finally to platform-based work, reported,

> *"They don't offer any help. They don't even come to pick us up. They come only to drop us at the workplace. If I leave work, they won't come to get me. They come to drop us off once, and even if I die, they won't come to help."*

This also highlighted the inaction by aggregators to improve and address the issues about their redressal mechanism itself. On inquiring further about the overall state of the platforms' policy and action towards complaints, a domestic worker who previously got work via a local agency but has been working for 8 to 10 hours in a platform-allocated household regularly for months now, reported,

> *"If you ever decide to pick up the phone, then only you will know my problems and what facilities I want, right? If you don't pick up the phone, how will you give me the benefits? You won't give me the facilities through the phone also… If I leave work today, you will forget me tomorrow. That means you won't give me the benefits."*

In this manner, a poor or absent grievance redressal mechanism that also functions as a supporter of the worker is missing from both- the design intent and the training of the supervisors/ overall intent of the platform. Only one exceptional case where care was provided to design has been noticed in one platform where the aggregator and the workers narratives were in synchronisation and the aggregator reported,

> *"We also have a person who works on retention, exclusively retention, nothing related to business or work but exclusively on retention and care giver well-being in Delhi. All she does is calls care givers, checks their well -being, what are they up to, has general chats with them, finds out and then reports directly into the business and gives inputs. I think that mechanism works better because you are having, like I would say an agenda free call, so it is an open conversation and you are letting the conversation, you know, without any specific structure or wanting to accomplish anything from that conversation. So, it gives the care giver the space to talk about whatever is bothering her or whatever she is happy about, you know whatever…We are also thinking about enabling, you know, voice messages. Sometimes, writing may be a challenge, right? Many of us, also if we have to write down something we have to think carefully what to write, how should we write it and all. So, we are also trying to see if it is, you know, you can do voice-based support."*

b. Asymmetries in Grievances Redress:

Regarding platform support to address these safety and adverse behaviour issues during service provision, a substantial majority of both men (80 percent) and women (57 percent) reported that the platforms do not take any action. Further, a significant challenge for workers is the inherent imbalance in grievance redressal mechanisms. These systems are often skewed heavily towards customer satisfaction, leading to situations where workers' concerns are frequently dismissed or inadequately addressed. Workers have consistently reported a lack of transparency regarding

customer complaints lodged against them, with platforms often taking swift disciplinary action without providing clear explanations or opportunities for workers to present their side. This lack of due process and the opaque nature of complaint resolution adds to workers' low-perceived status of work. A ride-sharing worker shared an instance where the platform received a complaint from the customer after the customer had misbehaved,

> *"He even filed a complaint and sent an email, and someone from the platform called me about it. I told him clearly: 'Yes, I work with the platform, but that doesn't mean I'll allow anyone to mess with me or my vehicle. I wasn't comfortable.' I even told them I was willing to forgo the full payment — the passenger was drunk. If something had happened to me, would you have been there to help me in that moment? If you think you could've helped, then please tell me how. He had no answer. Then he said, 'Ma'am, but at least try.' And I replied, "No sir, I can't try in such situations. If you want, I'll stop using your app altogether. But don't expect me to "try" at the cost of my safety. Instead, tell me that you'll try to support us."* (Ride-sharing worker)

A gig workers' association organiser reported obstacles workers noted on another platform, highlighting how the worker is on the shorter end of the stick despite no role to play in the overall grievance,

> *"if a worker goes to a customer's house and the customer cancels your booking, then she will not get anything, the company will give you transport money later. She says, "I have not received the money since two visits, I received it once. But I have not received it since the last two times, I have spent the money. When the company will give me? I will cry in front of them as I have spent the money. Should I beg to them to give me my money? This is a penalty on us. We have spent Rs. 200-300 and we have to pay…"*

Workers across platforms shared a discontentment with an absence of proper grievance redressal mechanism, transparency and protocol. On their untimely response and ineffective systems and its ties with feeling unsafe at work, a worker candidly shared,

> *"And honestly, there's no real support system for us. If a person files a complaint against us, it would've been treated as a priority. No one would have asked us what kind of misbehaviour I faced — whether I was abused or if there was any violence. Instead, we would be the one questioned, "Why did you do that?" "Explain clearly what happened." As if we are the one on trial…Now imagine this: suppose something goes wrong with a client – they get into an argument, they damage my vehicle – break my helmet, my mirror, or my headlight – and run away. I can't just leave my vehicle and flee. Even a man won't do that. But can I expect the company to listen to me or understand my side? That's why there should be a clear safety plan. Give us whatever title – pilot, captain, anything – but ensure there's real safety backing us."*

In the absence of traditional employee-employer relationship that the workers would share in the informal set up even with traditional gendered occupational segregation, workers now report a hesitation in approaching the clients they work with through the platform and their helplessness in reaching out to the platforms. This is furthered when platforms are quick and swift to reach out to workers on receiving complaints from customers about them but don't reciprocate the same courtesy to workers. A worker shared how this dynamic affected her ability to report any grievances she faces at the household she works at,

> *"They will only answer the calls of their customer. If I call the platform, the platform will in turn contact the customer asking them if there is a problem since I was calling the platform. And then the customer will ask me later, "why were you calling them, is there a problem? Did you call them?" (Domestic Worker)*

c. Limited Avenues for Challenge After Platform Exclusion:

Another issue reported by workers related to poor grievance redressal mechanisms is linked to finding a transparent mode of communication post- ID Blockings. Workers expressed difficulties on two levels. Firstly, they were not intimated before their ID was blocked and secondly, after they found out, there was a clear absence of any mechanism to find and address the reasons for ID blocking.

An organiser also shared a common concern amongst workers stemming from actions against their freedom of association and involvement with union activity. There was a disparity between the information received from the aggregators and the workers and organisers. While aggregators maintained that they do not reprimand workers for the same, the lack of proper redressal mechanism

meant no real onus on platforms' end to explain arbitrary ID Blocking. The Gig Worker Organiser stated the response shared by the platform representatives as,

> *"So, the ID of 3-4 workers has been blocked. One worker's ID has been blocked by saying that you were involved in such a strike. That's why your ID is being blocked. One worker's case is that you were misbehaving. Most of it has to do with their involvement in the strike, that's why their IDs are being blocked."*

Organisers report that these actions also in turn affect workers' ability and willingness to collectivise,

> *"Workers do not know why platforms are not picking up the phone after their ID is blocked. They (workers) don't know why they are wasting their time. They don't know why they have to fight. They don't know how to explain to their family." (Gig Worker Organiser)*

d. Effect on Workers' Well-Being and Affiliations

A result of the abovementioned leads to the overall well-being of workers being affected. It adds to workers' anxiety related not just to the issue/ grievance at hand but has deep links with, what is for some, the only employment option at present. An organiser shared,

> *"Today if their ID will be blocked, they will not be able to see anything in their ID. How much they worked, how much they earned, why they were blocked…As long as they are working, they will be able to see that. As soon as their ID is blocked, they will not be able to see anything. The company should think about this."*

This circles back to human resources, structure, hierarchy and design of platforms, whether algorithmically generated or handled by options other than chat-bots, the presence and role of immediate supervisors then, can be vital in listening, addressing and taking forward the concerns collectively raised by workers. This, however, was found to be the case in one platform only where workers shared having cordial relations and aggregator reported an intent to work towards creating a better relationship and improving channels to receive better workers' feedback. The sensitivity in design also came from appointing social workers who shared some rapport with the workers. The aggregator, keeping in mind the inherent dynamics between supervisors and workers shared,

> *we say that it is not just about the care manager but they are also very wary (of sharing honest feedback and grievances) because these are also people who are first generation workers they are just too afraid to do anything that can cause trouble and care manager is their immediate supervisor.*

The interviews from care-workers of the same platform resonated with aggregators feedback as the workers shared that even though there may be times where addressing a grievance requires time, the platform does not feel out of reach. A worker shared that arranging for a substitute while the current worker requires leave takes some time from the platform's end but the request gets met eventually.

However, in most cases, what prevailed were strained relationships between workers and their supervisors, leading to a complete void to report any problems and the possibility of those issues being addressed with sensitivity and sincerity. Most workers from the ride-sharing, beauty, delivery and domestic work sector shared this sentiment. This was also found to be the case when organisers' approached workers' immediate supervisors as a potential channel to strengthen redressal mechanism. A gig worker organiser reported,

> *Like when we go there (the hubs), and Team Leaders (immediate supervisors) are there, they do not allow the workers to even talk to us directly. Because if we go, there will be a Team Leader in the crowd who will be listening to us. After we leave, he will tell them whoever will join with us, they will block their IDs. He gives a direct threat. This is his role. He tells the organisers that we also have to answer why the workers are not working, or why they are raising their voices. When we met in a protest, we did not know that the Team Leader is there… He informs the workers that whoever goes to this to the protest site, their ID will be blocked… Team Leaders will not be there when workers have an accident or when they are blocked.*

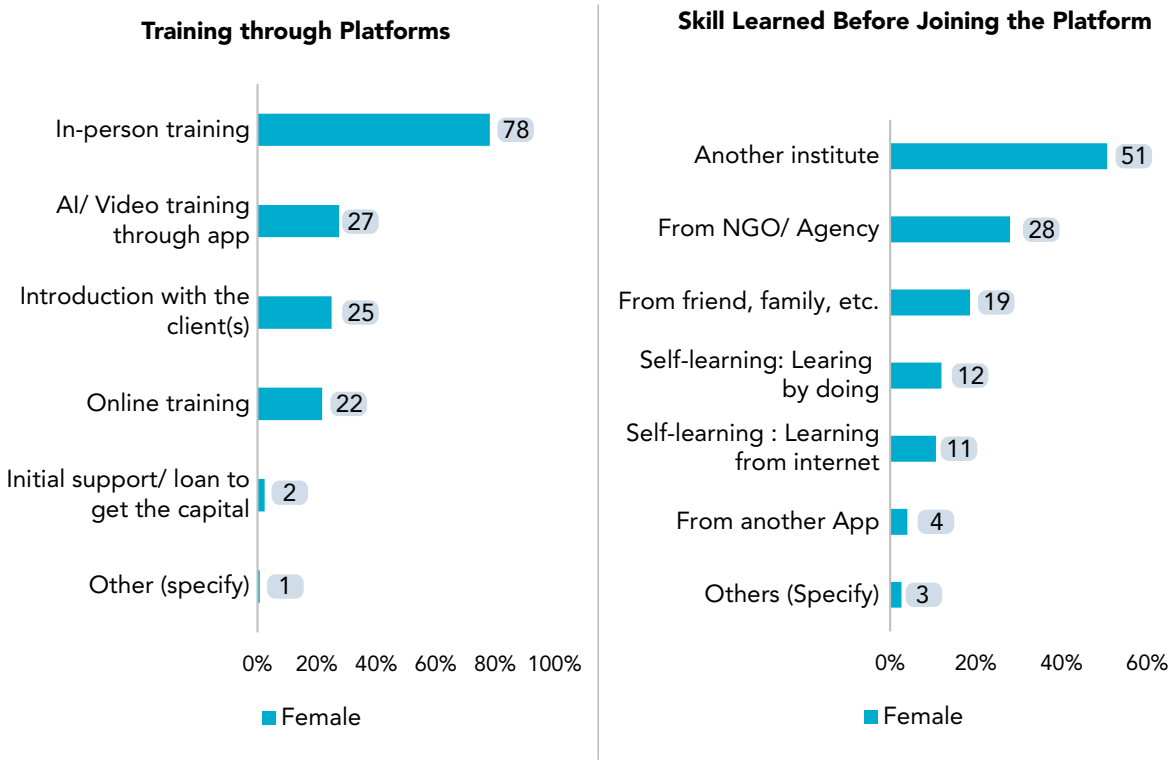
G. Training, Skill Development and Perceptions of Upward Mobility

Platform-based work brings varying experiences with training and skill development, depending on the sector and the worker's background. While most platforms offer some form of onboarding or orientation, the nature, mode, and effectiveness of these trainings, and their long-term implications for career growth differ widely.

a. Access to Training Opportunities

- **Care and Domestic Work Sector:** Among women working in care and domestic services, about 32 percent received training directly from the platform, with in-person training being the most common mode (78 percent). A smaller share received online (22 percent) or AI/video-based training (27 percent). For many, prior skills were obtained through NGOs, agencies, or other institutes, accounting for 79 percent of those who had training before joining the platform.

Figure 29: Care and Domestic Services - Mode and Source of Training and Skilling

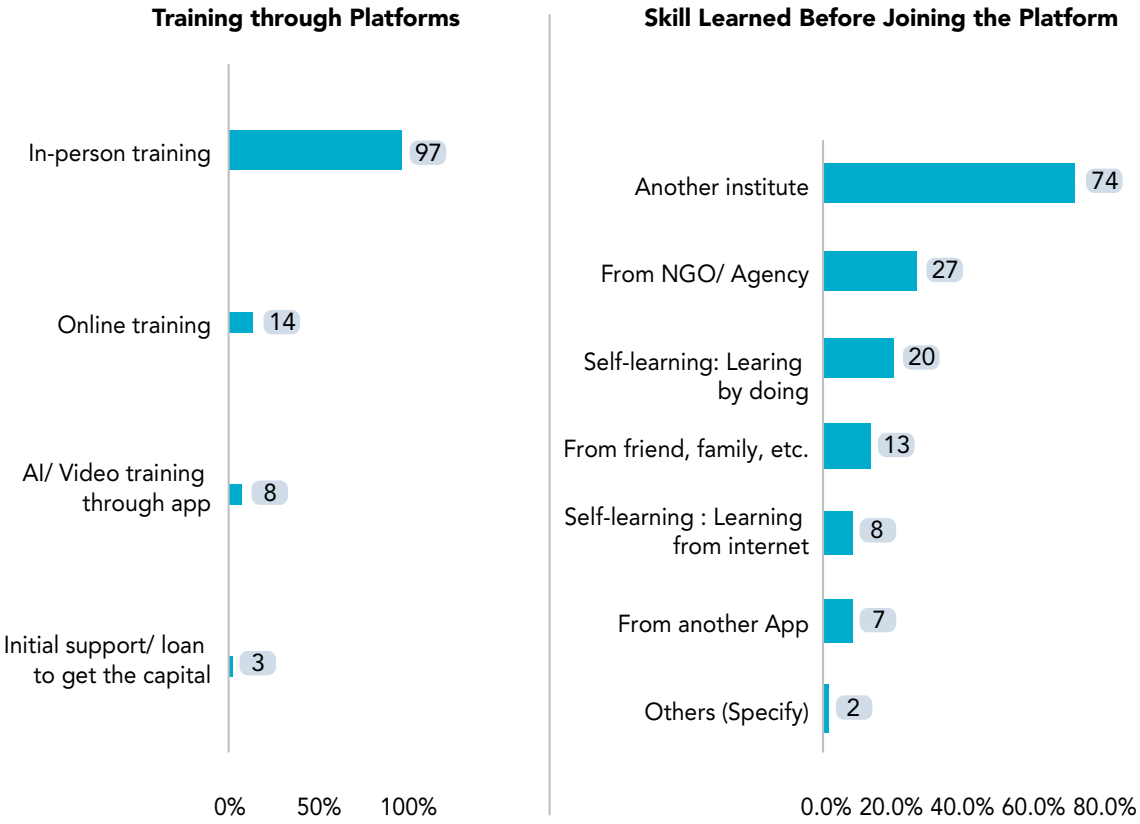


An elderly care platform was highlighted for offering structured training to both experienced nurses and freshers, often in formal training centres. Platform representatives mentioned that the platform also supported continued education or pathways to upskilling, which contributed to a perception of possible upward mobility in the sector.

> *"Another thing that we do with the caregivers is support for higher education. If anybody wants to pursue higher education, we negotiate, talk to the client, provide means to them. Providing in the sense that we allow them to go and come back. We let them come back to the situation where they are comfortable."*
> *(Platform Representative)*

- **Beauty Services Sector:** In the beauty sector, almost all women reported receiving some training from the platform, with 98 percent receiving this training in person. Around 74.1 percent had already acquired skills from NGOs or other institutions before joining. Additionally, 28 percent said they were self-taught or had learned on the job.

Figure 30: Beauty Services - Mode and Source of Training and Skilling



However, during interviews, many beauty professionals noted that the training and work allocation on platforms emphasised standardisation of service and customer handling, rather than strengthening technical skills or offering opportunities for specialisation. Workers were often categorised by years of experience, but not necessarily supported in expanding their capabilities. One worker reported,

> *"They taught us how to operate the app, how bookings come in, how to check locations, what to keep an eye on, how credits are deducted, and details about the products we'd be using. Basically, they explained everything related to their platform. After that, they also helped us arrange tools and kits."* *(Beauty Worker)*

Some women expressed concern that over time, they had lost previously acquired skills due to being restricted to repetitive tasks. For instance, individuals with backgrounds in makeup artistry or hairstyling reported feeling de-skilled because their current work was limited to waxing or massages. A beauty worker explained,

> *"Earlier, I used to do a lot of makeup and hairdo work — and I was good at it too. But after getting involved in this, I left that part behind. Because of that, I lost many of my contacts as well. So now I want to restart that." (Beauty Worker)*

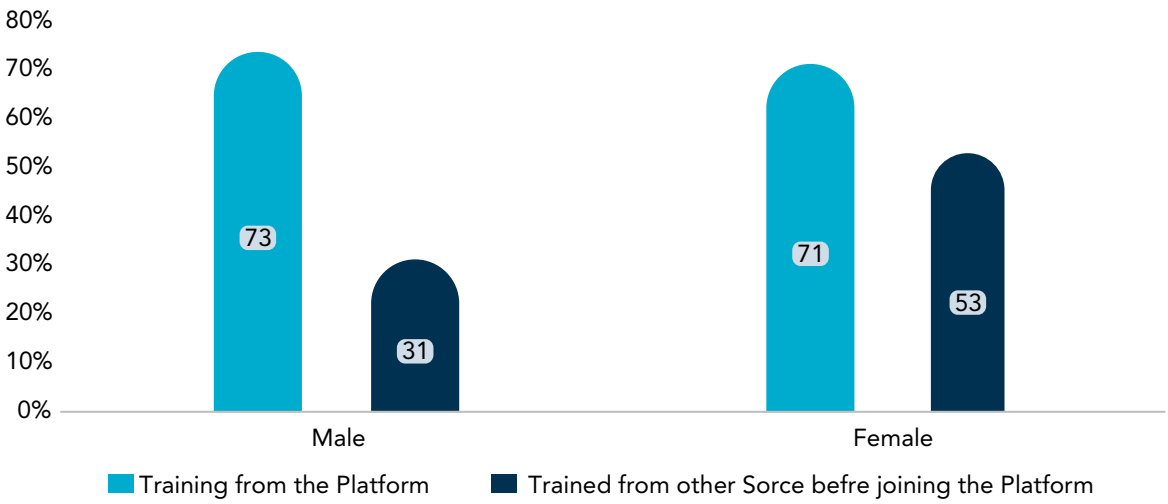
While beauty platforms did offer these in-person training sessions free of charge, these were frequently tied to the purchase of associated beauty products or kits, resulting in a significant financial burden for many workers. In some cases, workers reported that repeated purchases were required to remain eligible for certain job categories. Additionally, these trainings were sometimes mandated if a worker's customer rating fell below a certain threshold. Declining ratings could automatically trigger compulsory re-training, with implications for job access and scheduling until completion. This further added to the pressure workers faced around performance metrics and financial commitments.

Platforms mentioned offering logistical support, such as skill training like riding a two-wheeler and/or vehicle loans, but these were also conditional, typically tied to accepting instant bookings or reaching certain performance benchmarks.

Ride-Sharing and Delivery Services: Before joining the platform, 58 percent of women learned to drive through NGOs or agencies, while 68 percent of men were trained by friends or family, pointing to underlying gendered differences in access to mobility-related skills.

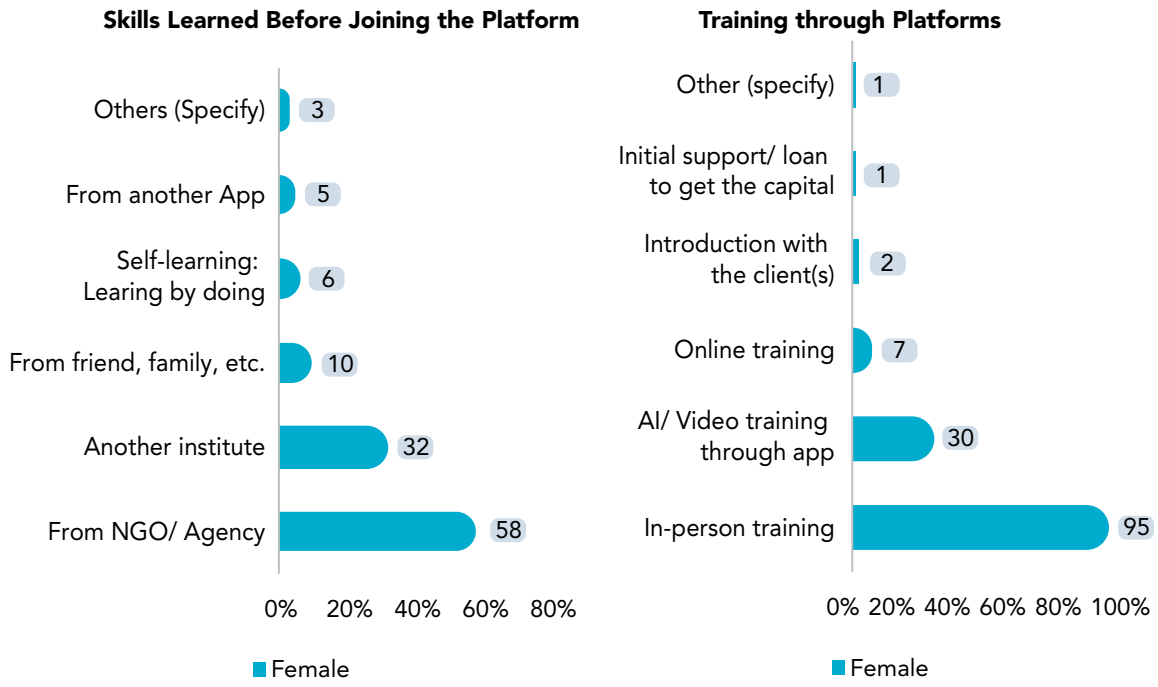
Over 70 percent of both men and women reported receiving training from the platform upon joining. However, training modes differed by gender. However, this training pertained to basic app usage.

Figure 31: Ride Sharing and Delivery Services - Training Before and After Joining the Platform



Several women also highlighted the role of non-profit organisations in helping them learn how to drive, and that support that was crucial for their entry into this sector. Yet, many noted that once onboarded, no further skill-building or safety training was offered.

Figure 32: Ride Sharing and Delivery Services - Mode and Source of Training and Skilling



b. Perceptions of Career Growth

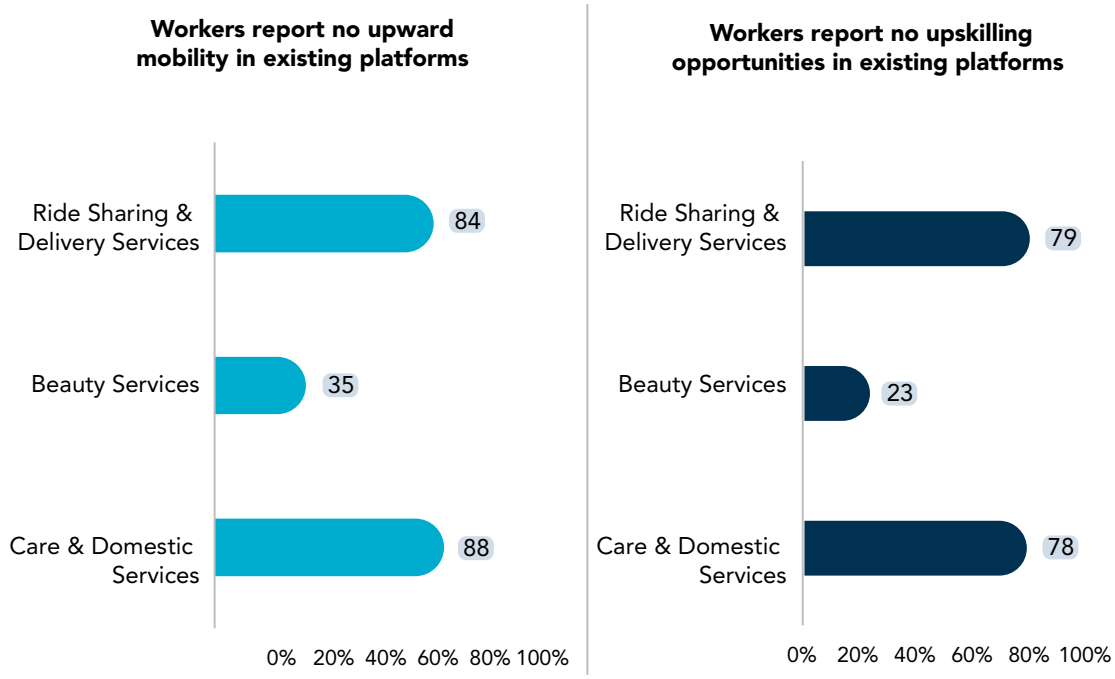
Across sectors, many women expressed limited optimism about upward mobility within platform work.

1. **In care and domestic services,** 88 percent of women reported no visible career growth, and 78 percent said there were no upskilling opportunities. Nevertheless, most intended to continue in their current role, reflecting both familiarity with the job and limited alternatives in the labour market.

2. **In beauty services,** 35 percent of women felt there were no career growth pathways, and 23 percent reported a lack of upskilling options. Despite this, the majority still planned to stay in their current work, citing stability and lack of viable alternatives.

3. **In ride-sharing and delivery services,** the outlook was even more constrained: 84 percent of women saw no scope for career progression, and 80 percent reported no training for skill enhancement. Notably, over 93 percent of women and 98 percent of men planned to continue working on these platforms indicating limited confidence in accessing better jobs outside the platform economy.

Figure 33: Lack of Growth Opportunities in the Platforms



5 Digital Integration in Platform Work

Platform work is deeply intertwined with digital infrastructure, most notably smartphones and app-based interfaces. While many women cited digital access as a key enabler for joining platform work, the degree of integration, utility, and challenges faced in using these tools varied widely across sectors and roles.

A. Access to Smartphones

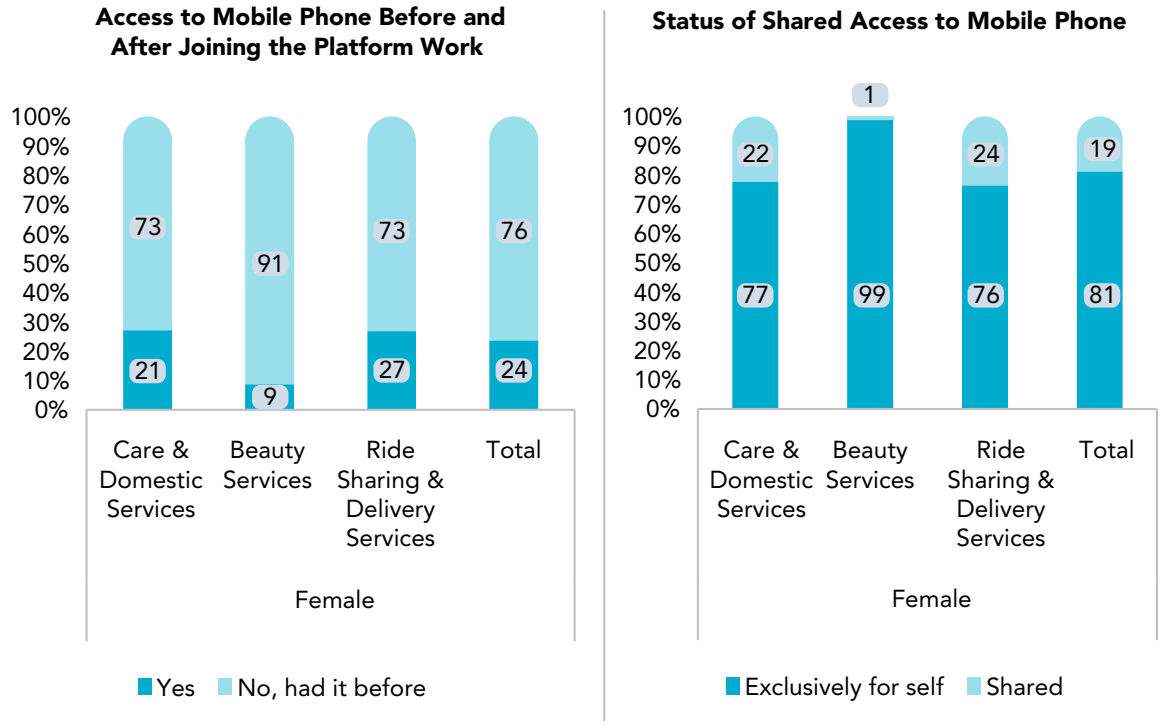
Access to personal mobile phones, particularly smartphones, was commonly reported by women as a crucial prerequisite for participating in platform work. Approximately 76 percent of women had a mobile phone before joining the platform, and 80 percent of them used a phone exclusively for their own use, indicating a relatively high level of digital access at the outset.

Many workers emphasised that in urban settings, smartphone ownership was already normalised, and joining platforms did not necessarily drive phone purchases.

However, as per interviews, digital integration was not reported to be uniform across all types of platform work:

1. Care and domestic workers, often did not need smartphones. Many were connected through IVR systems or through calls with platform representatives.
2. Elderly care workers in platforms used phones to mark attendance or log checklists (function still under development).
3. In contrast, platforms in beauty, ride-sharing, and delivery required active smartphone use to access gigs, receive updates, and mark job completion.

Figure 34: Access to Mobile Phones



B. Usability Hurdles in Platform Interfaces

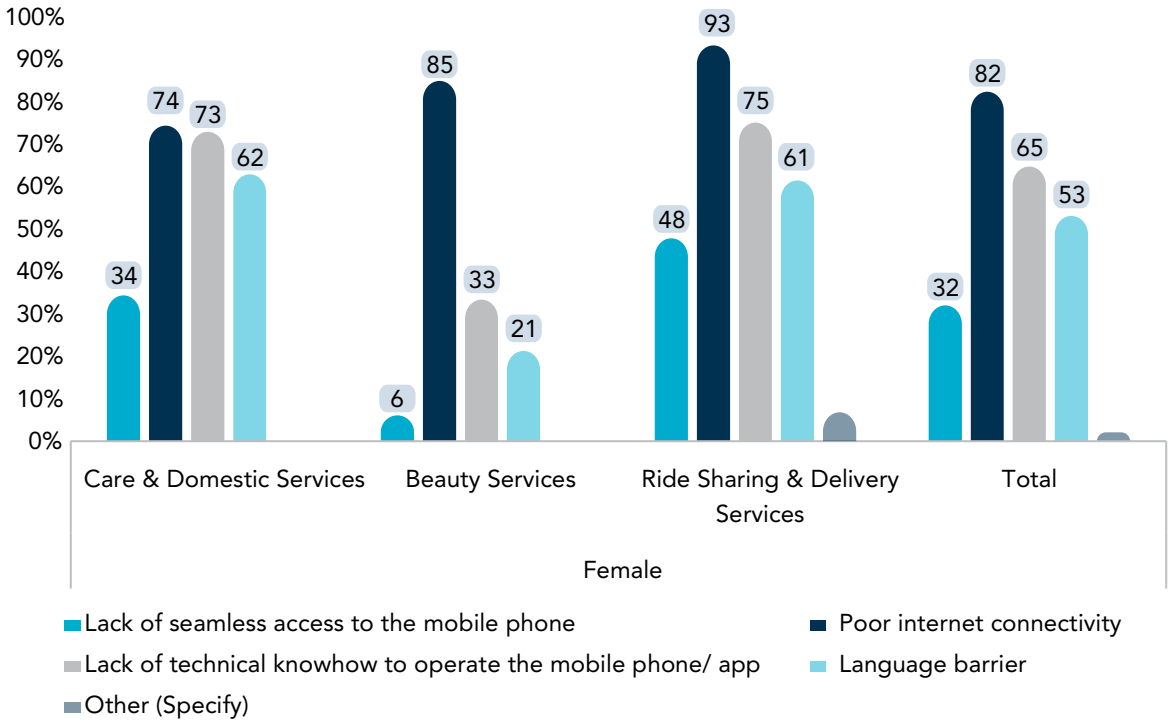
Despite access, many workers faced challenges using mobile phones and apps for work. Among those surveyed:

1. Poor internet connectivity was the most commonly cited issue.
2. Limited digital literacy and language barriers also posed challenges, especially for older workers or those less familiar with smartphones.
3. Workers also mentioned more routine challenges such as battery drainage, lack of rest stops to charge phones, and high data costs, particularly relevant for workers in mobile roles like delivery and ride-sharing. A worker detailed,

> *"Earlier my phone would last through the day, but ever since I started driving for the app, I need to charge it by 3 PM. And it's not like we can just walk into anyone's shop and plug in the charger. So, we have to buy a cup of tea, just to request — 'Bhaiya, can I charge my phone for a while?' They agree, we plug in our phone, keep it in the bag, and wait. That's how it works now."* *(Ride Sharing)*

Nevertheless, around 72 percent of women stated that they learned to use their mobile phones more effectively after joining platform work. This was facilitated by both training sessions on app use and the repetitive daily use of apps for work.

Figure 35: Challenges While Using App/Phone



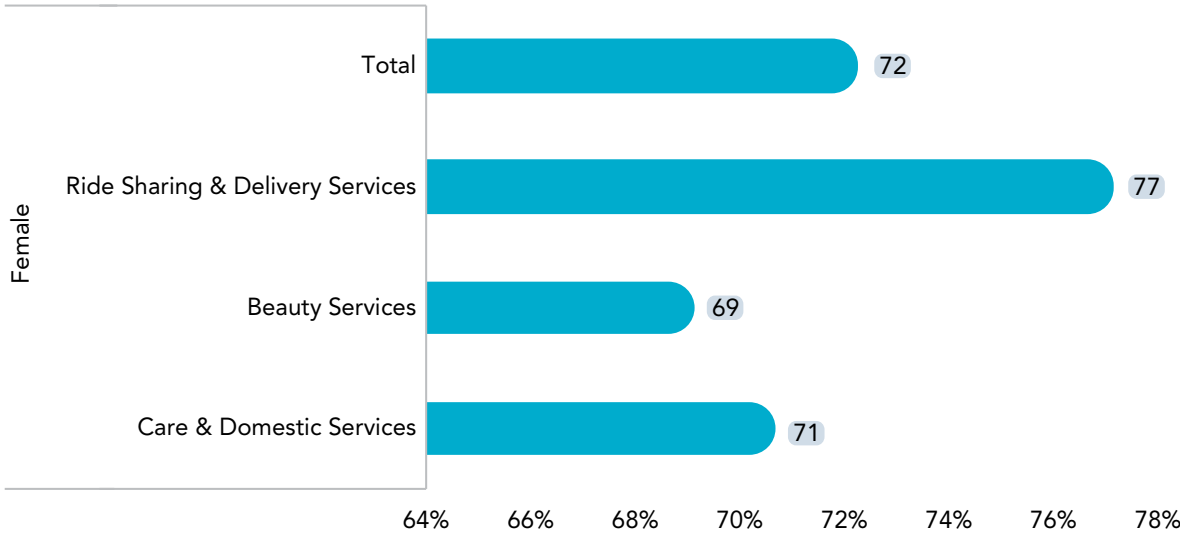
C. Expanded Digital Use Beyond Work

Platform work also appeared to improve digital familiarity and engagement beyond the immediate context of paid work. Many women reported using their phones to stay informed through news and online searches, seek new job opportunities via apps and WhatsApp groups, access entertainment, such as music or videos and maintain social connections with friends and family via messaging apps and social media.

However, qualitative interviews revealed some unintended consequences. Some women said they struggled to use their phones freely due to the large number of work-related apps installed, which slowed down phone performance and made usage for personal purposes difficult.

> *"I can't download many Apps because of this (the current platform app). And I have to keep updating it every 3 -6 months. Sometimes, in 15 days." (Beauty Service Worker)*

Figure 36: Women Workers Reporting Increased Usage of Mobile Phones Post Joining Platform Work



6 Collectivisation of Platform Workers

Despite the growing presence of platform work in urban labour markets, the potential for collective voice and organising among workers remains limited, particularly for women. Only 16 percent of total female sample reported to be aware about the presence of a union, and only 9 percent women are member of a union. While some degree of unionisation or collectivisation exists, particularly in ride-sharing and delivery services, it is shaped by gender divides, structural barriers, and platform-level constraints that significantly curtail women's participation.

A. Structural and Gendered Barriers to Organising

Several barriers were revealed during interviews that inhibit collective organising, especially for women:

- **Gendered Norms and Time Poverty:** The double burden of paid and unpaid work often leaves women with little time or flexibility to participate in collective activities, meetings, or protest actions. The opportunity cost of organising is high, especially when time spent attending a meeting could mean a loss of a day's earnings or missing out on ride incentives. A worker shared,

> *"There is no one here. No one has that much time. If we say that we will put up a protest for a month, the landlord will not say that we have put up a protest for a month, so we will not take the money. The school will not say that because workers have put up a protest for a month, so we will not ask for your child's school fees."* (Domestic Worker)

- **Spatial Fragmentation:** Platform work is highly individualised and dispersed, with no fixed workplace despite having common 'hubs', especially for women, making it difficult for workers to connect informally or build solidarity.

However, experts argue that the evolution of platform work challenges long-standing assumptions about its nature and role in the labour market. They mention how the formation of the first domestic workers' union in 1953 is often cited as evidence that even isolated and marginalised workers can mobilise collectively. Drawing from this, some experts observe that today's platform workers, despite having access to digital tools like WhatsApp for communication, struggle to sustain similar collectivisation efforts. The reasons are seen to lie in a lack of continuity and trust among workers, driven by the transient, individualised, and dispersed nature of gig work.

- **Legal Ambiguities:** The lack of clear employer-employee relationships in gig work undermines workers' legal right to collective bargaining, and some platforms explicitly prohibit any collective action in their terms of service.
- **Platform Control:** App-based tracking and algorithmic control also deter organising, with workers expressing fear of being penalised or de-platformed if they are seen as "troublemakers." An association organiser expressed,

> *"Their biggest issue was ID blocking. At night we are sleeping, at 11 o'clock we log out our ID. But in the morning, we don't know whether we will get work or not. So, in this way, there is a big issue of ID blocking. A person has been working for years, he doesn't even know when his ID gets blocked."*
> *(Gig Workers Organiser)*

B. Gender Gaps in Awareness and Participation

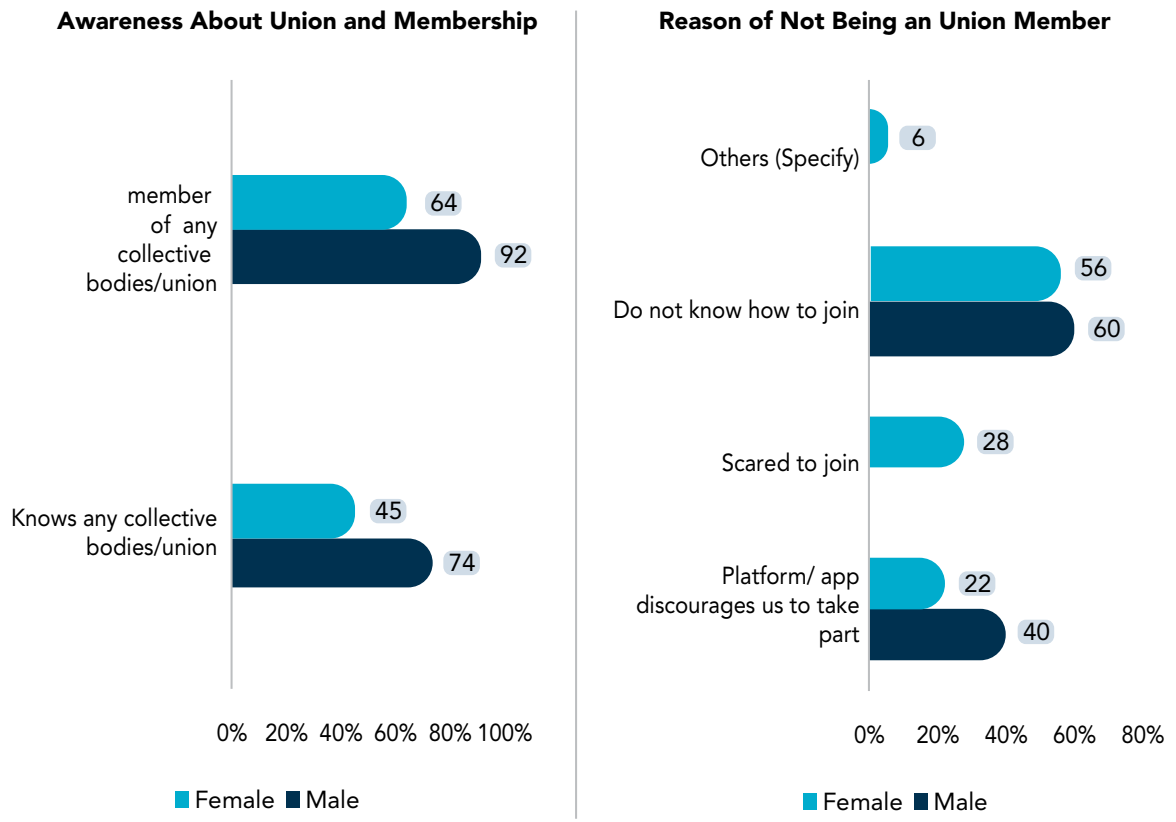
The survey revealed significant gender differences in awareness and participation in unions or worker associations:

- Among male ride-sharing workers[14], 74 percent were aware of a union's existence, and 92 percent of them were active members. In contrast, only 45 percent of women ride-sharing workers reported being aware of a union, and 64 percent of those aware were current members.

This pattern reflects not only gendered social networks, which limit women's exposure to organising efforts, but also the absence of women-specific outreach or representation in existing associations.

[14] Since the quantitative survey includes balanced male and female sample sizes only for the ride-sharing sector to provide reliable estimates of union participation and representation, the estimates are based on this sector only.

Figure 37: Ride Sharing and Delivery Services - Collectivisation



C. Sectoral Differences in Collective Association

The ride-sharing and delivery sector showed the highest levels of collectivisation among platform workers, compared to care and beauty services, where union presence is nearly absent.

- In care and domestic services, with a higher share of women working in the sectors, organising is also constrained by the private nature of the workplace (e.g., inside client homes), individualised contracts, and perceived low status of the work.
- In the beauty services sector, women workers reported being segregated within the platform based on their years of experience. Workers are often grouped into fixed cadres or levels, such as beginner, mid-level, or senior, depending on how long they have been associated with the platform or the number of services completed. While this tiered system is used to allocate tasks and determine earnings, it also creates barriers to peer interaction, knowledge-sharing, or support across levels. A beauty worker reported,

> *"They always keep the new girls' batch separate and the old ones separate – there's no real contact or interaction between them." (Beauty Service Worker)*

7 Financial Autonomy and Agency in the Household

A. Financial inclusion and autonomy

Platform work has opened up new avenues for financial inclusion and control, but women's experiences with autonomy remain varied across sectors and deeply shaped by social norms, platform structures, and working conditions.

Survey reports a notable shift in financial access after women entered platform work. While around 87 percent of women did not have a bank account prior to joining, 77 percent now report saving their earnings in a bank account. Sectoral differences are evident, bank account usage is highest among women in ride-sharing and delivery (89 percent) and beauty services (84 percent), while it is relatively lower in the care and domestic work sector (77 percent), where around 20 percent of women still keep cash at home. This is also due to the rise in UPI-based payments and online payments made available by the platform, and preferred by customers.

Financial independence is reflected in women worker's decision-making power: 67 percent said they now decide how to spend their income. A significant number mentioned increased personal spending on clothes, makeup, eating out, and other discretionary expenses, often small acts of agency in contexts where they had limited control over finances earlier.

For some women, particularly caregivers employed through more structured platforms that offer training, accommodation, or placement services, these earnings have translated into enhanced confidence, the ability to support family members, and a stronger sense of agency. Sending money home or managing their own expenses was seen as a milestone toward economic independence.

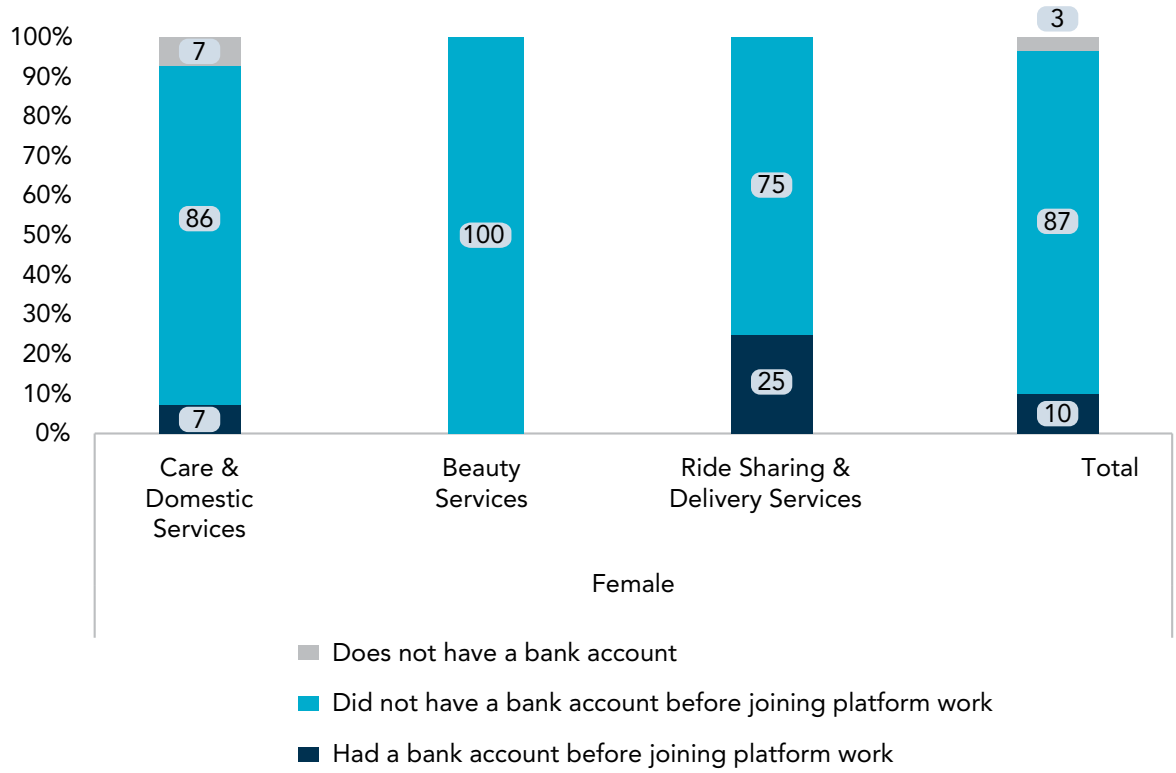
However, this transformation is not uniform. Many women, especially those in beauty services and ride-sharing services, described how their initial feelings of empowerment diminished over time. The absence of supportive systems, declining wages, long working hours, and limited bargaining power often meant that platform work did not translate into sustained autonomy or recognition at home or in the workplace. Yet, even when earnings are modest or conditions difficult, the ability to earn independently, however limited, adds value to their identity and self-worth.

One ride-sharing worker captured this contradiction starkly:

> *"They (family members) say, 'Sit at home, we'll give you ₹200 per day.' But those ₹200 kill my self-respect. I can't explain this to my mother or the company. And frankly, I don't think I need to explain it to society either. I understand it myself, that's enough."*

Despite these challenges, many women continue with platform work—not necessarily because it transforms their economic reality, but because it provides something less tangible yet deeply meaningful: a sense of dignity and self-respect.

Figure 38: Banking Inclusion after Joining Platform Work



B. Agency in the domestic space

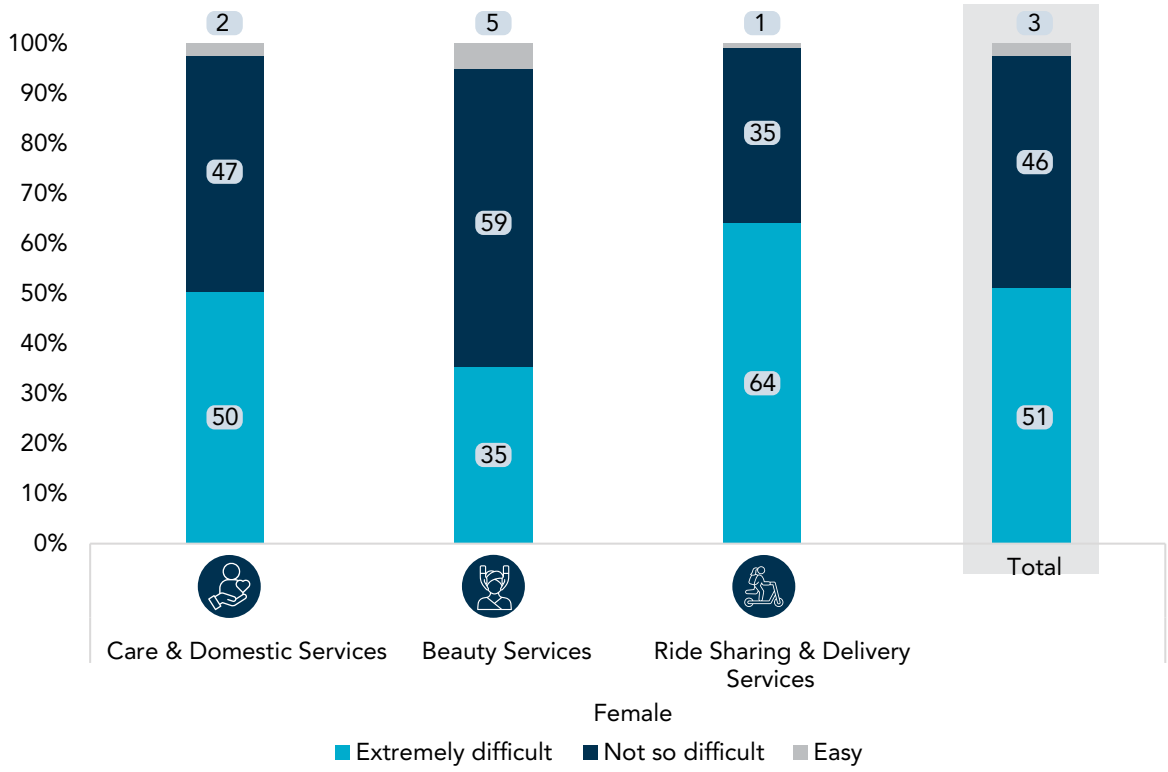
Platform participation has also increased women's decision-making power in various domestic matters. Around 83-90 percent women expressed that after they started working with the platforms, they had more say in household's major purchases, their own health-related issues, freedom to go outside and associating with people outside their family. However, when it comes to children's health and education fewer women claimed to have increased decision-making.

When asked about the difficulty of managing domestic responsibilities alongside platform work, around 51 percent found it extremely challenging. However, around 46 percent women reported that household members shared domestic responsibilities after they started platform work. Around 4 percent and 11 percent of the surveyed women revealed that they had faced sexual violence, and physical violence, respectively, in their domestic space. Additionally, around 24 percent of these women reported experiencing emotional abuse. When asked about whether the platform participation made any difference in reducing these incidents, around 41 percent of those who suffered physical violence mentioned a decline after joining the platform. Similarly, around 37 percent of those who faced emotional abuse, felt that these incidents decreased after platform participation.

However, significant probing during qualitative interview with a worker revealed that her fellow worker's employment led to insecurity among her husband, who was not accustomed to his wife having financial independence or increased mobility. The ability to earn, move freely, and engage with a broader circle, previously restricted, was seen as a disruption to traditional roles, occasionally leading to conflict or withdrawal of support. One worker detailed,

> *He (her husband) had taught her how to drive, helped her get a car, and set her up on Ola/Uber. She earned ₹30–35K per month, just like him. But eventually, he started accusing her of having affairs, just because she dressed differently, wore jeans instead of suits. That woman, broken from within, sold her ₹8 lakh car for ₹6 lakh, gave up everything, and now faces domestic violence. She's still in touch with me, but hasn't yet taken a firm decision.* *(Ride-Sharing Worker)*

Figure 39: Ease/ Difficulty in Managing Domestic Responsibility After Joining Platform Work



Where do Platform Workers Stand Today: Legally Speaking?

As we reflect on the findings and move forward, we must consider the current legal landscape. Although platform workers are commonly termed as platform 'workers'- and the report abides by the same- platform and gig workers are yet to receive the legal recognition and protection that employed workers are entitled to (see Table 3). While partial attempts to legislate on platform-based gig workers have been made in select states, questions around the quality of work especially in the absence of a binding employee-employer relationship and absence of solid regulation of wages are still not adequately answered. Legal recognition is essential as it is a step closer to absolve platform workers of their precarity by way of ensuring rights and entitlements as opposed to some 'benefits' depending on what the aggregators (platform owners) consider viable. This includes rights in relation to social protection, occupational health and safety, decent wages, decent working conditions, etc.

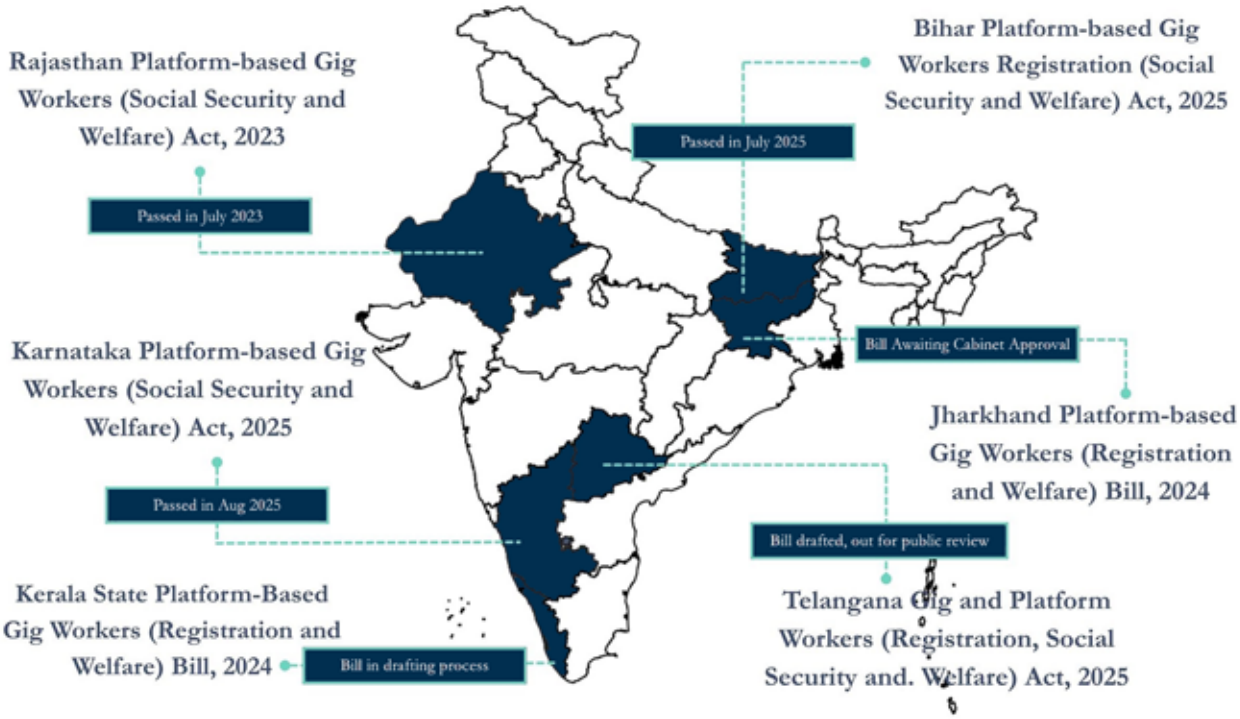
In India, we have witnessed the role played by labour legislation in facilitating industrial relations with the establishment of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, the Trade Disputes Act, 1929, etc. The vitality of labour laws can be highlighted by viewing deeply exploitative labour practices in informal sectors with unrecognised workers and the introduction of laws (on Central and State level) such as The Dock Workers' (Safety, Health and Welfare) Act, 1986, The Beedi Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1976, The Maharashtra Mathadi, Hamal and other Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare) Act, 1969, and even providing a framework for domestic workers, with its critique intact, under the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008. Legal assurance for women workers, who own the tag of a worker just as much as any other worker, have their own set of socio-economic constraints and barriers. Rights-based frameworks, such as the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace (PoSh), 2013, and so on have enabled women to challenge the unfavourable labour market conditions. These legislations have resulted from historical struggles and mobilisation, the onus of the state to regulate the labour market and the realisation or attempts to persuade the employers to view workers as equals and worthy of social protection and decent entitlements.

In 2020, four new labour codes were introduced. These codes, meant to replace many of the previously existing labour laws. In a notable stride towards providing social security, the Code on Social Security, 2020, marks the first instance where gig workers are brought within the ambit of labour laws, with provisions for certain welfare measures. It defines a gig worker as an individual who participates in a work arrangement and derives income from activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship.[15] Here, platform work is characterised by the Code as a work arrangement that operates beyond the conventional employer-employee dynamic, wherein organisations or individuals utilise an online platform to connect with other entities or individuals for the purpose of addressing specific problems, providing services, or engaging in other activities, all in exchange for payment. While these definitions serve to distinguish gig workers from both formal and informal employment categories, they do not offer a sufficiently clear articulation of the gig worker's precise identity or the fundamental nature of gig work itself. A RAISE[16] approach consisting of Recognising varied nature of work to frame benefitting schemes, Allowing expansion of social security, Incorporating sector specific interests, Support workers to avail government schemes and Ensure benefits are accessible, is adopted for operationalising the Code on Social Security, 2020. However, it is crucial to observe that the three other labour codes remain silent on policies pertaining to gig workers.[17] While these codes are yet to be implemented, considerable ambiguity persists regarding their clarity and the

[15] Narayan, D. (2025, July 3). Are Gig Workers a Part of India's Labour Data? The Hindu.
[16] NITI Aayog. (2022). India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy: Perspectives and Recommendations on the Future of Work.
[17] G, D. M., & M, M. (2022). Labour Laws for Gig Workers in the Context of Labour Law Reforms. Economic and Political Weekly, 57(30).

mechanisms for their effective implementation to achieve the intended objectives for gig workers. The International Labour Organisation is presently in negotiations with multiple-stakeholders to form their own definition of digital labour platforms, who qualifies as a gig worker and are aiming to frame new and concrete standards around just and favourable conditions of work, employment status, social security, occupational health, algorithmic management, etc. to ensure that national frameworks are obliged to legally protect workers' rights by 2026.

Table 2: Present Legislative Framework



The new legislative frameworks introduced in different states of the country are similar in design with slight variations. They offer certain assurance in terms of:

- Pproviding a definition18 of gig workers, platforms and their rights
- Establishing of a welfare board that will operate by levying a specified percentage19 of welfare cess on aggregators while assessing sector specific challenges and capacity and utilising it for the purpose of social security of gig workers
- Composing a board consisting of state representatives, gig workers' representatives, aggregators' representatives, an expert from civil society and other relevant stakeholders
- Anchoring a schedule for in-person meetings of the board enabling some consistent interactions amongst all stakeholders
- Ensuring the welfare board regulates proper registration of workers, registration of aggregators, collection of welfare fee; implements and administers social security benefits; seek data from aggregators; prepares an annual report and; be subjected to audits annually

[18] This definition varies in different states with respect to the employment relationship established between the worker and the aggregator.

[19] This varies too with the welfare cess ranging from 1 to 5 percent in Karnataka, 1 to 2 percent in Bihar, etc.

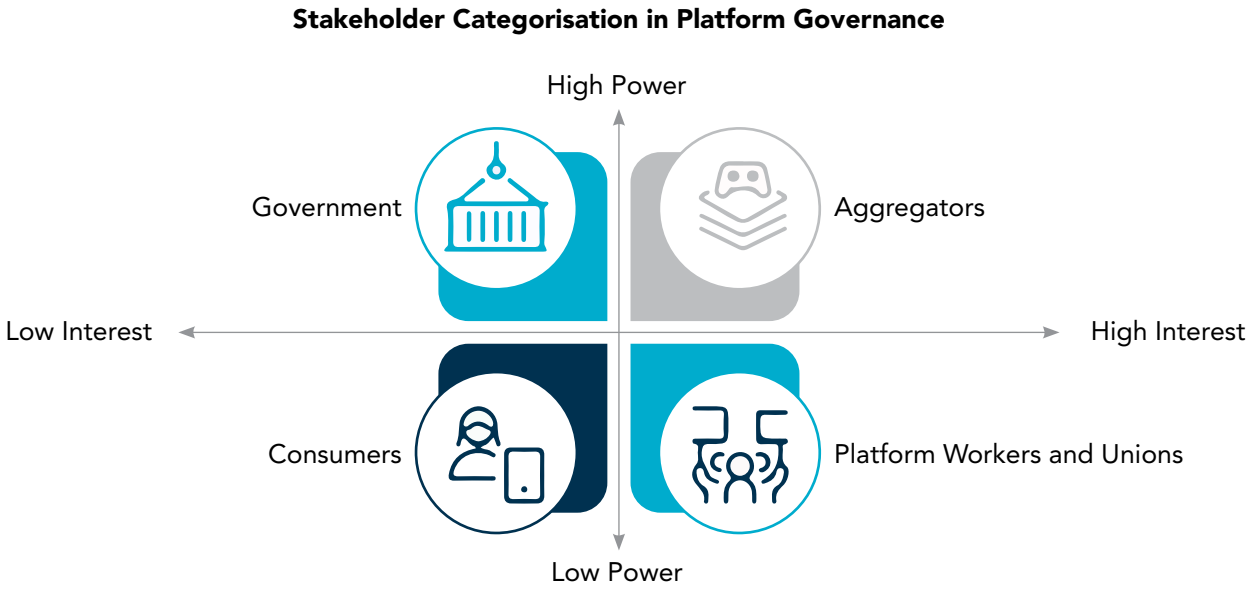
- Mentioning the obligation to enter into fair contracts, maintain transparency regarding Automated Monitoring and Making Systems, ensuring timely payments and transparency in payment deductions and states the general penalty for aggregators to fail to abide by the provisions
- Establishing a mechanism for grievance redressal, nominating a human point of contact for enquires, norms for termination of a gig worker and set up an Internal Dispute Resolution Committee

However, none of these legislations cover intrinsic elements of labour rights protection legislation. They do not mandate minimum wages or specify any regulation of wages and cost of registration; do not enable freedom of association to the workers; overlook workers' status that entitles inclusion in PoSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment), Maternity Benefits, etc. Though it is stated that the provisions of these Acts shall be in addition to, and not in derogation of, any other law for the time being in force, we must note that due to the nature of platform work, no existing legislations protect gig workers except the Code on Social Security, 2020 which places them outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship.

Notably, all the aspects that are stated in these legislations are yet to be developed such as the social security schemes and allocation/ bifurcation of welfare cess/ funds. Its success depends on further holistic stakeholder consultations, transparent disclosure of worker-related information and existing platform policies from the aggregators' end, the ability of stakeholders to encompass issues of the workers and cater to women workers' issues as primary concerns too, and to assess what role regulation of wages and freedom of association plays, as has been highlighted by academicians, organisers and legal experts. As new forms of employment shift the dynamics and definitions of what makes one a worker or an employer, the current legislative efforts mark some initial efforts by few states to bring platforms works into the framework of labour legislation. By and large however, we continue to have gig workers unrecognised and unprotected under any legal framework in most states of the country. The sample of this study also includes a substantial proportion of those presently uncovered.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE PLATFORM ECONOMY

Figure 40: Stakeholder Categorisation - Interest-Power Matrix



The visual above illustrates the distribution of power and interest among key stakeholders in platform governance. While governments and aggregators occupy the high-power quadrant, platform workers and unions, despite having high interest in shaping policy and improving work conditions, remain structurally disempowered (Woodcock, 2021).[20] Workers and unions frequently reported feeling powerless in demanding basic rights such as fair wages, rest breaks, or social security.

Our findings indicate that platforms, in turn, cite their business models and need for scale as reasons for limited flexibility in providing social protection, even when there is stated intent. Where there have been some dialogues to improve worker conditions, actual mechanisms for worker voice or representation tend to be ad hoc, fragmented, or largely symbolic.

This power asymmetry is often reinforced by opaque decision-making and a lack of formal grievance mechanisms. The emergence of platform and services provided in the modern urban landscape, driven by the logic of purely customers' convenience, has justified the demand for say, 5 to 10-minute deliveries and 10 to15-minute allocation of domestic help that one can hire on hourly basis. The presence and 'growth' of these platforms, often met through a dangerous combination- the existence of a consumer base unaware/ unbothered about the impact of their demanded and used service on workers, a currently missing national legislative framework and the availability of a surplus of disposable workers in absence of alternative employment opportunities, leads to this skewed power distribution in the current mode of operations of many of the studied platforms.

[20] Woodcock, J. (2021). The fight against platform capitalism: An inquiry into the global struggles of the gig economy (p. 127). University of Westminster Press.

Thus, consumers, shown as having low influence and low interest over platform governance, are paradoxically granted significant power over the reward structure of the workers by the platforms themselves. Through rating systems and feedback loops, customers impact worker earnings, visibility, and continued access to jobs, giving them disproportionate control over workers' outcomes without accountability. This delegated power creates a subtle but pervasive form of control that platforms distance themselves from implications their actions can intentionally or unintentionally have for workers' (Cameron & Mayberry, 2024).[21]

The regulatory landscape is beginning to recognise these imbalances, by proposing a tripartite welfare board that includes workers, aggregators, and government representatives. Such initiatives hold the potential to rebalance stakeholder interests and establish institutional avenues for worker participation. However, the persistence of fundamental power asymmetries, particularly in a context where modes of operation including digital infrastructure, means that meaningful gains will depend on the genuine empowerment and structural inclusion of worker voices at all levels of decision-making and how legal frameworks evolve

Additionally, the capacity and willingness of unions to organise platform workers remains challenged by the fragmented, often precarious nature of gig work, geographic dispersion, high rates of workforce turnover, and the threat of de-platforming for dissenting workers. As collectivisation has been reprimanded, the presence of organisers and workers overcoming the fear of surveillance and organising at a larger scale and pace has been affected. Interviews from legal experts who have been key players in drafting select states bills have underlined the imbalance in terms of representations of platform aggregators as opposed to platform collectives and unions which will have implications on the structure of legal frameworks. Aggregators have access to information about workers and their data whereas workers operate with blurry and selectively available information.

Cross-sectoral alliances between unions, civil society organisations, and legal advocates have emerged as important counterweights, but their influence remains limited without supportive policy environments and effective enforcement.

Here, we note how respondents have shared the role played by NGOs to skill and equip them as a worker who was previously in the formal sector but had to shift to ride-sharing platform work shares,

> *"At Azad Foundation, they teach driving to women free of cost, there were professional instructors for that. My role previously was to identify and connect girls from the community and link them to the organisation. Once they joined, they received driving training, and after completing it, they were helped in getting their licenses, all free of cost. Many of these women really needed the opportunity, but either their families or society didn't support them- often telling them they shouldn't drive. So, they would talk to such families, counsel them, motivate the girls, and bring them all the way to the training centre. There are many girls today who are now working, and it feels good to see them driving and becoming independent…but the companies don't treat us the way Azad does. Because companies think, "We're already running fine. We have enough men." (Ride-Sharing Worker)*

[21] Cameron, L. D., & Mayberry, K. M. (2024). How Gig Work Pits Customers Against Workers. Society and Business Relations, Harvard Business Review.https://hbr.org/2024/04/how-gig-work-pits-customers-against-workers

Another notable instance includes the help provided to a disabled worker that should ideally have been provided by the platform as the worker expresses,

> *"Many handicapped people came there from faraway places. We have become friends. He told me he worked at the same platform. I told him I also wanted to join. He used to work earlier too. I asked for a contact number. He gave it to me. There's an NGO. They asked me for documents. He told me he couldn't guarantee a vehicle. It took about a year to get me one. Then another person connected with the NGO. He has helped a lot of people in Ghaziabad. He's doing a lot of work for the handicapped. All the wheelchair-scooters are provided by the NGO." (Food Delivery Worker)*

The worker further shared how, were it not for the help that multiple organisations and her networks had provided, she would be unable to join platform work. Here, as we reiterate later in the following sections, is the scope for aggregators to take responsibilities but as fundamental power asymmetries persist, and meaningful worker participation remains limited unless structurally guaranteed and supported. Genuine progress will require reimagining governance frameworks to ensure worker agency, transparency in decision-making, accountability in consumer feedback systems, and a redistribution of power that elevates the voices and interests of those at the heart of the platform economy.

Women platform workers face a stark reality of high impact yet minimal control within platform governance structures. Nearly half (49.5 percent) report significantly increased working hours since joining, exacerbating work-life balance as 32 percent find managing domestic responsibilities more difficult. Critically, perceptions of bargaining power are alarmingly low, with less than 30 percent of women overall feeling they have any say; this plummeted to just 6 percent in beauty services and 21 percent in ride-sharing. This lack of agency coincides with serious platform governance issues. Concerns about inadequate grievance redressal mechanisms are heightened by the problem of ID blocking, experienced by 15-18 percent of women in beauty and ride-sharing. Furthermore, platforms demonstrate significant impunity towards workers when clients make false complaints: 47 percent of beauty workers and 48 percent of ride-sharing workers report platforms taking punitive action against them (including arbitrary monetary deductions or permanent ID termination) based on unverified client allegations.

A gig workers' organiser, who has been working with women from both traditional and non-traditional sector for a few years now and is a part of consultative meetings with relevant stakeholders shared a beauty sector worker's experience stating,

> *"Suppose you have received a booking and you did not see it in the app. Now, you are also getting a call from the company and at the same time, there is an emergency at home too. And you did not pay attention to the company's call. So, what will the company do in that? They will give you a penalty of ₹1000. He said, madam, the company will not give anything and will deduct ₹1000 as a penalty from our wallet to take us back. They deduct it in a second. Do you understand? It is deducted in a second and when we have to take it back, we have to plead to give us back ₹1000." (Organiser)*

This highlights the need for visiting arbitrary and algorithmically imposed penalties with seriousness as they have grave implications on workers' financial planning and anxiousness towards their future with the platform. A government official also stated the importance of fair contracts mentioned the difficulties workers face because of the inherent presence of an unequal power dynamic between workers and aggregators, the official shared the initial resistance faced when taking aggregators on board and recognised the need to have fair contracts stating,

> *"Workers' accounts are getting deactivated and they are being kept in the dark. The terms are in small letters in English. Only when they accept, you allow them to be a part of it. So, the contractual agreement is between two unequal partners and workers have to blindly accept it. You may say that they have agreed to everything before but have they fully understood (the contract) before complying? So, there has to be a fair contract and you should let them know the reasons for termination or deactivation from the platform."* *(Government Official)*

This provides a glimpse into how a holistic legal framework can potentially treat this combination of escalating demands, negligible bargaining power, vulnerability to penalties and ID blocking, and ineffective redress highlights a profound structural power imbalance favouring platforms and clients, and reduce the precarious conditions of work which currently drive platform work.

DISCUSSION

Labour market transition and flexibility in the platform economy

The platform economy is expected to play an instrumental role in enhancing women's workforce participation, by offering flexibility that enables to balance domestic and care duties with employment. This study finds that a substantial proportion of women platform workers were previously outside the labour force and entered the workforce through these platform jobs. Given that women shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care responsibilities, as evidenced by nationally representative datasets (PLFS 2024, TUS 2024), the platform economy's flexibility in terms of scheduling work, working hours, and work location, has facilitated them to join the workforce (Kasliwal, 2020; IWWAGE, 2020). As Kabeer (2012) notes, women's ability to secure family permission to work outside, often depended work arrangement that accommodate domestic duties. While interviews with women in beauty services and ride-sharing highlighted the value, they associate with platform work's flexibility, quantitative surveys revealed that a significant share of women reported having no personal time left after completing platform work, and rejected tasks due to domestic duties. Again, rejecting tasks not only reduces immediate earnings, but also their future earning potential since platforms penalise lower acceptance rates by assigning fewer gigs or, in extreme cases blocking IDs. Thus, our findings reveal that the actual flexibility in platform work, deviates from the promised flexibility in the platform economy because of many factors like compulsory login hours, penalties for rejecting tasks, incentive structure rewarding higher acceptance rate of the gigs irrespective of personal inconvenience or safety concerns. The findings resonate with the concerns raised by other studies as well that the work arrangement in platforms, instead of providing much flexibility, is rather imposed on the workers (Peetz, 2019; Ellignson, Gruys, and Sackett, 1998). However, the persistent lack of formal employment opportunities, is a primary driver of people joining the platform economy. Often people are turning to the platform economy as a temporary stop gap for income generation, rather than a preferred choice. Thus, taking up the platform work is less about the allure of flexibility and more about the limited alternatives (Rani & Singh, 2019; Singh & Awasthi, 2025).

Additionally, women, previously employed in some non-platform work, are found to transition into similar roles within the platform economy, reinforcing the gender-based segregation of the traditional labour market in the digitally-driven sector as well, corroborating findings from other studies as well (Hunt and Samman, 2019; Rawal and Pla, 2019, Chaudhury, 2020). Only, in case of ride-sharing and delivery workers, a significant share of women reported a sectoral shift, facilitated by the skilling initiatives from CSOs, NGOs. However, in non-traditional sectors like ride-sharing and delivery, the absence of platform-provided training, with entry and skill development often dependent on third-party actors, can lead to unequal access to these sectors. Beyond structural barriers like limited skilling opportunities and restrictive social norms, our findings also highlight customer-side biases, which further hinder women's participation in these sectors.

Earnings

While platform work initially appeared to offer women workers higher and more flexible earnings, our findings highlight a growing disconnect between expectations and realities. However, this trend is not uniform across all sectors; workers in the beauty and personal care segment have experienced a significant

increase in earnings. Despite initial income gains during the early stages of platform engagement, workers have experienced a decline in real income over time, as earning growth has lagged behind inflation and rising living costs in urban spaces. The Fairwork India Report, 2024 also echoes the same in non-traditional sectors specifically (Parthasarathy et al., 2024).[22] The deterioration in earnings is compounded by multiple structural factors like an influx of surplus labour leading to fewer number of gigs per worker, frequent upward revisions in commission structures, and escalating operational expenses, contributing to shrinking net earnings. Adding to these challenges, many platforms have introduced regular subscription fees that workers must pay simply to access or accept job assignments. These fees, deducted on a monthly or annual basis regardless of actual earnings, further erode net take-home pay, particularly for those in low-demand or working in lower-paying segments.

A stark illustration of this dynamic can be found in Urban Company's 2024 earnings index, which shows that partners retain only 52.6 percent of their gross earnings after accounting for platform deductions, meaning that nearly half is lost to platform fees and work-related expenses. As interactions with workers clarify, the figures are still not fully reflective of the total costs borne by workers. Furthermore, workers' limited bargaining power prevents them from negotiating improvements in pay or conditions, amplifying frustration and financial insecurity. Collectively, these trends raise critical questions about the sustainability and quality of platform work as a pathway to economic empowerment, especially for women who may already face additional structural barriers in the labour market.

Urban Company Earnings Index
April - December 2024

	All partners	Partners delivering >30 services in a month	Top 20% partners by services delivered	Top 10% partners by services delivered	Top 5% partners by services delivered
%age of partners	100%	63%	20%	10%	5%
Gross partner earnings*	50,392	62,541	77,211	86,546	92,619
UC Fee	28%	27%	27%	27%	27%
Indirect taxes borne by partners	479	644	651	721	785
Travel costs	1,852	2,417	2,848	3,211	3,541
Product costs + Helper cost**	7,490	8,451	11,267	12,489	13,504
Net earnings (in hand) per month	**26,489**	**33,962**	**41,292**	**46,815**	**49,719**
Total hours spent on the platform per month	87	109	134	148	160
Net earnings per hour	304	312	308	316	311

** This represents the sum of the amounts paid by the consumer and incentives earned by the partner on the platform*
***This includes costs borne by the partner towards the cost of consumables used during service delivery, cost of tools amortised over estimated useful life and payouts by the partner to helpers on the job in certain categories*
All figures in INR unless otherwise specified

Source: Urban Company

[22] Parthasarathy, B., Srinivasan, J....Graham, M. (2024). Labour Standards in the Platform Economy: Fairwork India Ratings 2024.

Skill Training and Upward Mobility

The prevailing orientation of training across most platforms appears to be closely tailored to the operational requirements and brand consistency of the platforms themselves, rather than fostering comprehensive professional development for workers (Dewan & Sanyal, 2023; B, 2025).[23] While this approach ensures standardised service delivery and familiarises workers with platform-specific products and processes, it may not fully recognise or build upon workers' existing skills. In cases such as domestic services, the emphasis on online assessments over comprehensive, in-person upskilling opportunities suggests that training serves more as a filter than a catalyst for advancement.

The case of an elderly care platform demonstrates that more holistic, worker-centred training can result in enhanced confidence and a sense of professional growth. However, such outcomes remain atypical within the broader platform economy. These patterns indicate that, while platform work offers critical entry points for women into new employment avenues, its capacity to facilitate sustained upward mobility or the systematic expansion of workers' skills over time, remains constrained. Adopting a more balanced approach, one that harmonises operational efficiency with the long-term aspirations of workers, could unlock the fuller potential of platform-mediated employment as a meaningful pathway for women's empowerment and career growth.

Rating-linked reward structure

This rating mechanism, to monitor and evaluate workers' performances, often lacks gender-responsiveness, attention to the unique challenges faced by women workers, and prioritises customer experience and feedback over the workers' feedback and well-being. The overreliance on numeric customer rating, which are inherently subjective, has significant consequences since the ratings determine critical outcomes including gig allocation, social security coverage, even the continued platform access. Evidence indicates that if worker do not consistently meet exceptionally high rating standards, their accounts may be blocked. Also, our findings reveal that lower ratings lead to mandatory platform-enforced training sessions, which are often associated with compulsory product purchases from the platforms, imposing an additional financial burden on workers. Several critical findings expose the biased and worker-insensitive nature of the rating-linked reward structure (Sehgal & Yatharth, 2022; Ghosh et al., 2021).[24] Firstly, customers are frequently unaware of the profound significance and impact that their seemingly simple ratings can have on a worker's livelihood. Secondly, the platform's design, in soliciting these ratings, often fails to clearly differentiate whether the customer is evaluating the overall services provided by the platform or the specific performance of the individual worker. Thirdly, customers, in spite of positive written feedback, often assign a numeric rating below platform standards, reflecting their subjectivity in numeric scale interpretation. Fourthly, customer ratings often depend on their mood and personal circumstances rather than objective service quality, with little accountability mechanisms. These structural flaws highlight the urgent need for platform designs that are transparent, fair, and genuinely supportive of the workers.

Social security and care infrastructure

A comprehensive platform ecosystem must prioritise seamless access to social security benefits. Currently, many platforms offer health insurance and related benefits with unclear terms and conditions, compounded by opaque medical claims reimbursement processes and language barrier that create additional hurdles

[23] Dewan, S., & Sanyal, K. (Eds.). (2023). Empowerment or Exploitation: Global Perspectives on Women's Work in the Platform Economy. JustJobs Network.
B, D. M. (2025). Gig and Platform Workers: Vision 2047. V. V. Giri National Labour Institute, (NLI Research Studies Series No. 173).

[24] Sehgal, D. & Yatharth. (2022). Designing Domestic Work Platforms: A Case Study of Urban Company. Centre for Internet & Society.

for workers. Furthermore, in some instances, access to these benefits is contingent on performance ratings. This is a fundamentally flawed approach given the subjective nature of these ratings, the inherent precarity of gig work, and elevated risk of occupational injuries due to high mobility requirement in these jobs. Such social protections should be accessible independent of ratings, educational literacy, language proficiency or similar factors (Ghosh et al., 2021).[25]Acknowledging that many women are primary breadwinners who have overcome significant social barriers to engage in platform work, platforms have a profound opportunity to enhance these women's lives by expanding social security beyond health benefits to include provident fund (PF), gratuity (Kasliwal, 2020; B, 2025)[26], and, ambitiously, even pension benefits. In addition to comprehensive social security benefits, provision of care infrastructure and care leave policy by the platforms is essential to sustain women's participation in platform work and their ability to earn sufficient earnings from their platform job.

Grievance redressal mechanism

Grievance redressal mechanisms, when intentionally designed, hold significant potential to influence women workers' platform engagement. However, findings from the study reveal that currently these systems are critically deficient in several aspects including lack of transparency regarding ratings, customer feedback processes, access to social security benefits and in the case of certain platforms, clear breakdown of the workers' earnings versus platforms' share. The effectiveness of grievance redressal mechanisms is evident in their (in)ability to alter worker's experience when met with safety issues, sexual harassment, and discrimination based on gender, class, caste, and other factors on the job. Our study documents widespread frustration among women regarding inadequate platform support systems, characterised by unresponsive supervisors, and algorithmically-driven chatbots severely restricting their ability to articulate complex concerns. This systemic failure to provide meaningful human interaction, as also noted by Kasliwal (2020), undermines their capacity to seek redress. Conversely, workers on few platforms offering accessible communication channels and empathetic human support consistently report significantly improved experiences, exhibiting a critical design flaw in most of the platforms' grievance redressal system.

Women's Collectivisation and Networks in the Platform Economy

The current policy landscape reveals unions and collective bodies (examples IFAT, AGWU, TGPWU) as critical players advocating for workers' rights and improved regulations. Several state governments-including Rajasthan, Karnataka, Telangana, and Jharkhand-have proposed legislation in response to collective pressure from stakeholders, with workers' organised efforts serving as a pivotal force in these policy discussions. However, these bills specifically avoid terms like "union" or "collectivisation," implying that worker-led collectives lack the same legal recognition as traditional trade unions in formal governance structures.

A noteworthy finding in the study is the disproportionately low awareness and participation of women in existing unions or collective bodies within the platform economy. As a result, gender-specific concerns such as maternal benefits, menstrual leave policies, safe resting spaces for women, and implementation of the PoSH Act, are systematically excluded from labour negotiations.

[25] Ghosh, A., Ramachandran, R., & Zaidi, M. (2021). Women workers in the gig economy in India: An exploratory study. ISST.

[26] Kasliwal, R. (2020). Gender and the gig economy: A qualitative study of gig platforms for women workers. ORF issue brief, 359, 1-14.
B, D. M. (2025). Platform Employment: Role in the Labour Market and Problems of Platform Workers' Labour Regulation. V. V. Giri National Labour Institute.

The very structure of platform-based gig work, which lacks a physical "shop floor," inherently limits opportunities for worker solidarity (De Stefano, 2015; NITI Aayog, 2022). While interviews with union leaders reveal that some male-dominated sectors, such as delivery and ride-sharing, have informal urban hubs where workers interact, women remain largely absent from these spaces (Ghosh et al, 2021). The gender-based sectoral segregation exacerbates their structural disadvantage and isolates them. Multiple intersecting factors constrain women's ability to organise. These are prevailing gender norms restricting their mobility and networking opportunities, and solidarity-building beyond domestic spheres; platform companies compounding this exclusion by classifying workers as independent "partners" rather than employees, thereby denying them right to collectivise; digital surveillance mechanisms including location tracking and algorithmic management, as workers risk deactivation or reduced work allocation if they participate in organising efforts; and platforms further undermining solidarity through divisive labour practices like conducting segregated training sessions depending on the length of association with the platforms (Ledwith, 2012)

Ultimately, these barriers demonstrate how platform capitalism reinforces patriarchal structures (Fuchs, 2017). The challenges facing women gig-workers stem not only from persistent gender norms but also from new forms of algorithmic labour control that fragment the workforce. Without formal recognition of worker collectives and targeted protections for women, the platform economy will continue to entrench gendered inequalities in digital labour markets.

Our findings and interactions with women platform workers and stakeholders reveal a nuanced understanding of their agency, resources, and achievements. Platform work, by the virtue of its intentional design, mode of operations and a lack of regulatory legislative framework (Dua, 2023)[27], shares deep ties with the precarity and vulnerability that informal work has consistently had in terms of restricted or absent social security and no regulation of wages. While a degree of agency within household dynamics may have increased, their ability to fully utilise this remains limited. For instance, despite increased agency to influence children's health and education, their overall ability to enhance it based on their earnings and social security provided by the platform remains stagnant. Similarly, we observe how their daily choices link inevitably to their workplace agency. Their diminished agency at work, due to a lack of freedom of association, reliable social networks, and bargaining power leads to a restricted set of choices. Restricted bargaining power also connotes limited influence over algorithmic ratings, mobility, time management, discrimination, harassment, and safety (Tandon & Sekharan, 2022).[28] These issues remain unresolved and are heightened by the absence or ineffectiveness of present grievance redressal mechanisms. Inconsistent earnings further complicate household financial planning and thus, control over decision-making does not necessarily translate to a broader category of better options to choose from. The double burden of household responsibilities persists, and the perceived flexibility often reinforces the expectation that time saved should be allocated to domestic chores, even with similar earnings. The limited upward mobility and skilling opportunities add to this dilemma and women's overall discontentment. The initial decision to join platform work by women may be marked by individual conscious choice but the reasons to continue this work reveal that this choice to stay is either out of necessity or driven by high inflation and a scarcity of other decent employment opportunities. **Therefore, claiming women's participation in platform work is an inherently empowered choice, leading to economic empowerment, may not fully align with their lived experiences.** For now, as Ghosh et al., have summarised their findings from interactions with women in the platform economy, we adhere to the same, it seems to be the same old wine in a new bottle.[29] After changing the bottle, the first amend, in realising that platforms, with all its slips and misses, works in tandem with overall patriarchal relations that govern the market, the state

[27] Dua, A. (2023). Protecting Female Gig Workers in India: Bridging the Legal Void. Politics, Policy and Governance Foundation.

[28] Tandon, A., & Sekharan, A. (2022). Labouring (on) the app: agency and organisation of work in the platform economy. Gender & development, 30(3), 687-706.

[29] Ghosh, A., Zaidi, M., & Ramachandran, R. (2022). Locating women workers in the platform economy in India–old wine in a new bottle? Gender & Development, 30(3), 765-784.

and most importantly, social norms. Despite the improvements that platforms can and should make in altering rigid structures, women's realities are shaped by the agency, resources and outcomes that are also heavily dependent on larger ecosystems as a respondent who was continuously denied opportunities in terms of education, denied agency in terms of decisions around matrimony and further, denied decent employment opportunities and recognition as a worker articulately states,

> *"I've spent all my life doing this only (inhi sab mein zindagi katt gayi). I didn't even know when I got married. I didn't even remember when I had children. I had children, but that's okay. But life still has the same circumstances (par zindagi aaj bhi vahin khadi hai) Some is to be blamed on the company and some is to be blamed on me. I did something by myself. If the company is giving us 10 rupees, we don't even ask them why are you only giving me 10 rupees for so many hours. We're leaving our whole family, working so hard for so many hours, give me at least 15 rupees, so that I can have a little more. I agreed to whatever they said. Why? Because if I don't go someone else will go. That will be my loss. So, I'll go. But still, life is still the same."* *(Domestic Worker)*

If the state and the aggregators truly want to alter women's position and make platform work an empowered choice, platforms must evolve to meet worker expectations, as the mere presence of mechanisms is insufficient. It is intentional, regulated, responsive, functional and effective systems that are paramount and can truly reveal if platform work has the potential to translate to an empowered choice.

WAY FORWARD/ RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings we suggest a few mechanisms to be considered for improving women workers conditions as well as agency within these structures. They are as follows,

A

Transparency on earnings, commission structures, and algorithmic work management

i. **Platform action on transparency:** Platforms must begin with maintaining complete transparency to the workers regarding the algorithmic work allocation and earnings by providing clear breakdowns of commissions and other charges while eliminating arbitrary deductions.

ii. **Platform action on gender-responsive reward mechanism:** Platforms should implement gender-responsive reward mechanisms that guarantee fair access to work opportunities and equitable earnings for all workers.]

iii. **State action:** There should be state-level legislation mandating the platform companies to maintain complete transparency on earnings and commission structure, and the algorithmic work management.

B

Establish Sector-specific minimum earnings and commission structures

i. **Platform action:** It is recommended that the platform companies should adhere to the sector-specific minimum wages with regular wage inflation adjustments.

ii. **State legislation:** The state-level legislative framework should have provisions for the minimum wage standards, mandating that the platform companies follow that. The state-level legislation should mention legally-binding caps on the platform fees like subscription charges, commissions, fines and ban arbitrary deductions to prevent the platform's exploitative practices.

C

Access to work and working conditions

i. **Platform action on guaranteeing availability of gigs:** Based on workers' time commitments, platforms must guarantee gigs without requiring additional subscription plans, and decouple this guarantee from workers' gig acceptance rates.

ii. **Platform action on ensuring flexibility:** By eliminating mandatory login hours and removing penalties for task rejection, platforms can ensure flexibility.

iii. **Platform action on building robust and gender-sensitive infrastructure:** Platforms must develop gender-sensitive infrastructure including rest stops/shelters equipped with toilets, drinking water, and sanitary napkins.

iv. **Platform action on gender-sensitive grievance redressal mechanism:** The platform companies should replace the chatbot-driven grievance redressal mechanism with human-supported system and the grievance redressal system should be staffed by trained and sensitised personnel. The Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act should be implemented across the platforms.

v. **Platform action on ID-blocking:** The platforms should conduct mandatory human review, provide multiple warnings communicated through human channels and be accountable for explaining any ID-blocking.

vi. **Platform action on reducing weightage on performance ratings:** The platforms should decouple access to work opportunities, social security benefits, and mandatory training sessions from performance ratings.

vii. **Platforms action on strengthening Social Security Benefits:** Platforms must provide comprehensive social security benefit packages and ensure clear communication about benefit availability and claims processes, including translations into vernacular languages as needed.

viii. **State action on ensuring access to work and decent working conditions:** The State must mandate platforms to provide comprehensive social security benefits that are accessible regardless of performance ratings. The State should also institutionalise gender-sensitive infrastructure provisions across all sectors in platform work, and ensure suitable gender-sensitive public infrastructure like buiding public toilets, safe parking, lighting in urban areas, simultaneously. The State should establish legal requirements for human-supported grievance redressal systems that replace automated chatbot systems, including proper implementation of PoSH Act provisions with clear accountability and reporting structures. The state must implement regulations requiring human oversight for account suspension and establish proper grievance redressal mechanisms post-ID blocking with reasons that must be unaffiliated with freedom of association.

D

Upward mobility in career progression

i. **Platform action:** The platforms should strengthen the initial training programmes and create genuine upskilling opportunities tied to workers' tenure with the platform facilitating upward mobility. In addition, the platforms should be conducting mandatory skill training initiatives in non-traditional sectors to promote gender diversity within the workforce, potentially through collaborations with government or NGO training programs.

ii. **State action:** The Ministry of Skill Development and Employment can actively support these initiatives by regulating, developing a standardised framework, sector-specific curriculum aligned with the emerging requirements, quality-assurance mechanisms for skill certification, facilitating public-private partnerships to enhance training accessibility.

E

Fostering collectivisation of workers and institutionalise tripartite engagement to regulate important aspects of work

i. **Platform action:** The platforms must create women-centric networking hubs to foster solidarity and promoting freedom to collectivise and associate and ensure that the gender-specific concerns are represented in collective bargaining efforts.

ii. **State action:** The State should develop policies that protect workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining in the platform economy and provide legal recognition to the Gig Workers' Unions. The state should also ensure establishing the tripartite bodies, comprising representatives from the government, platform companies, and the workers' unions with the mandate to monitor and determine the crucial aspects like access to work, earnings, social security benefits, platform charges etc.

Data disclosure policies and data collection efforts

i. **Platform action on data disclosure:** The platform companies should be mandated to disclose the worker-related information like their earnings, social security benefits, algorithmic practices, performance evaluation criteria etc publicly.

ii. **State action on data disclosure:** The state should mandate the platform companies to disclose the worker-related information on the crucial aspects at regular intervals publicly.

iii. **Data collection efforts:** Large-scale nationally representative primary surveys, focussed particularly on platform workers, capturing information on workers' socio-economic, demographic profile, their earnings from platform work, social security coverage etc, should be undertaken for informed policy-making. Also, a new category of worker for the platform workers should be introduced in the national labourforce surveys to enable evidence-based policy-making.

iv. **Future research areas:** Future research on platform work should be focussed on algorithmic work management and its impact on well-being of different cohorts of workers like women and other marginalised workers, evaluation of grievance redressal mechanism, impact of the rating-related reward structure on economic and psychosocial well-being of the workers etc.

IWWAGE
Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality

LEAD
LEVERAGING EVIDENCE FOR ACCESS AND DEVELOPMENT
KREA UNIVERSITY

IWWAGE – An Initiative of LEAD at Krea University
M 6, Second Floor, Kharera, Hauz Khas, New Delhi - 110016
+91 11 49403983 | www.iwwage.org