

# **Work life and Challenges of Platform Workers in Kerala(Case of App-Based Food Delivery & Transport Workers)**

**Research Report 2024**



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
App	Application
CCI	Competition Commission of India
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CSS	Code on Social Security
CTIMS	Central Transaction Information and Management System
GoK	Government of Kerala
GPS	Global Positioning System
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications Association
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITI	Industrial Training Institute
KHRA	Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association
KMTA	Kochi Metropolitan Transport Authority
KOMN	Kochi Open Mobility Network
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
OBC	Other Backward Class
ONDC	Open Network for Digital Commerce
QR code	Quick-response code
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes

## Executive Summary

Platform, app-based or gig workers are those outside traditional employer-employee arrangements for whom work is mediated via software apps or digital platforms. While there are a few attempts at the national level to understand platform work, limited attempts have been made to explore platform workers' work and working conditions in regional contexts. The current research contextualised platform work within the human development achievements and distinct labour market conditions prevailing in Kerala. Apart from examining the work and working conditions of platform workers in Kerala, the research also examined the response of key stakeholders in the platform economy – aggregators, service providers, customers of platforms, trade unions/associations of platform workers and the State. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were adopted to achieve the study objectives, including a survey among platform workers in Kerala, in-depth interviews, case studies and focus group discussions with workers and interview aggregators, representatives of platform workers' unions/ associations, labour officials, restaurant owners, and customers of platforms. Key findings and recommendations of the research are presented below.

### Key Findings

The study's findings are presented thematically in three subsections – characteristics of platform workers, work and working conditions in the platform and stakeholder responses.

#### 1.1 Characteristics of Platform Workers

1. Platform workers, especially food delivery and transport workers, are predominantly males. Those engaged in platform work are relatively young, with an average age of 32. Nearly two-thirds of the food delivery workers are below 30 years old; the average age of workers in the sample was 29 years. With respect to transport workers, nearly three-fourths are aged between 30 and 50 years; the average age of workers was 38 years.
2. Platform workers have impressive educational attainment; three-fourths have qualified plus two or above, and more than one-fourth have graduated.
3. Three-fourths of the platform workers were engaged in wage or self-employment while joining the platforms. Only one-tenth were engaged in permanent jobs.

Noticeably, one-fifth of the platform workers are studying while doing platform work.

4. Flexibility is a key factor that motivates young workers, particularly those below 30 years old, to join platform work.
5. Close to one-fourth of workers who participated in the survey and were employed before joining platforms were working outside Kerala or other countries; nearly three-fourths were employed in Gulf countries.
6. While 93 per cent of food delivery workers own the vehicle used for platform work, the corresponding figure for transport workers is 79 per cent. Two-thirds of the transport and one-third of the food delivery workers bought the assets (vehicles/mobile phones) to join the platform work. The average outstanding debt for transport workers is Rs. 3.13 lakhs compared with Rs. 66,207 for food delivery workers.
7. Almost half of the platform workers did not need help joining the platform.
8. Transport workers have spent more years in platform work than food delivery workers. Higher investment required to join the transport sector may be a reason for workers' choice to continue in the sector for longer compared to food delivery workers.

## **1.2 Work and Working Conditions in the Platform**

1. Among platform workers who participated in the survey, 92 per cent reported they could engage in the platform work according to will. Similarly, more than half of the respondents noted that they could maintain a work-life balance, and more than two-thirds of workers stated they could find free time to engage in leisure activities.
2. On average, a platform worker worked 11 hours daily for 25 days a month. Notably, one-fourth of the workers work all days a month without taking leave for more than 12 hours daily. Transport workers spend more time a day and more days a month for work than food delivery workers. Though platforms offer flexibility to workers in choosing their desired time slot, it is evident that workers need to give up this flexibility to secure decent earnings.

3. Data from the primary survey indicate that the distance a platform worker travels daily is high. The average distance platform workers travel is 164.15 kilometres (161 kilometres for food delivery and 171 kilometres for transport workers).
4. The average distance (mean) travelled by a transport worker to secure their first order is 8 kilometres, which is one kilometre more than the average distance travelled by a food delivery worker.
5. It is found that workers' earnings have not improved over the years while the expenses associated with work (such as fuel charges, mobile recharge, rent, vehicle maintenance charges) and other basic living expenses increased.
6. The average monthly revenue of platform workers without deducting expenses is Rs.28,321 (Rs. 21,800 for food delivery workers and 4,1363 for transport workers). Platform workers' average monthly work-related expenses (fuel charges and mobile recharge) come to Rs.10,928 (Rs.7,647 for food delivery workers and Rs.17,489 for transport workers). After deducting the work-related expenses, their average monthly earnings is Rs. 17,393 (Rs.14,152 for food delivery workers and Rs.23,873 for transport workers). Platform workers' average take-home monthly income will be much lower if one considers vehicle rent, vehicle maintenance expenses, monthly loan repayment and depreciation.
7. While only one-tenth of food delivery workers work on multiple platforms, two-thirds of transport workers choose to work on multiple platforms.
8. More than one-fourth of the platform workers reported encountering accidents while at work.
9. Among platform workers, 42 per cent reported recurring health issues (44 per cent for food delivery workers and 36 per cent for transport) after starting working for platforms.
10. The majority (84 per cent) of the platform workers are reported to have contacted the aggregator at some point primarily to report grievances and general queries.
11. More than half of the platform workers stated that they experience long delays in receiving orders/rides as they are about to achieve daily targets.
12. It is reported that 45 per cent of platform workers experience difficulties communicating with the aggregator.

13. A major challenge in platform work is related to workplace facilities; three-fourths of the platform workers reported a lack of parking spaces, and 70 per cent reported a lack of toilet facilities.

### **1.3 Other Stakeholder Responses**

#### **1.3.1 Response of Aggregators**

1. Aggregators did not agree to workers' demand for 'employee status'. They maintained that they could not extend social protection beyond accident insurance and loss of pay wages when met with an accident, as workers are independent contractors.
2. Aggregators strategically avoid direct engagement with labour unions. When workers resort to strikes or protests, they agree to discussions in the presence of the labour commissioner or labour officers to resolve issues raised by workers.
3. Food delivery and transport platform startups are more worker-friendly, charging low commissions.

#### **1.3.2 Response of Restaurant Owners/Managers**

1. The majority of restaurant managers who work with platforms are content with how online platforms have positively impacted their businesses. According to them, platform companies provide efficient grievance resolution, with many restaurant managers noting that concerns are addressed in real-time.
2. Although restaurants unanimously acknowledge increased sales after joining platforms, there is also shared concern about the high commission charged by aggregators (20 to 30 per cent per order).
3. Aggregator policies regarding remuneration and support vary according to the value of the restaurant's brand. Top-branded restaurants reported receiving better support from platforms.
4. The primary concern of restaurant owners regarding platform workers revolves around their inappropriate behaviour. Many restaurant managers and owners expressed that delivery workers lack discipline and create inconvenience for their staff and customers.

### **1.3.3 Response of Customers**

1. While more than three-fourths of the respondents who participated in the online survey have used e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, etc., in the last three months, little less than three-fourths reported using food delivery platforms, and nearly half used transport platforms.
2. Three-fourths of the food delivery and transport users who participated in the online survey reported using it only five times or less monthly. More than half of the users of food delivery platforms reported that they could enjoy different cuisines and quality food at their convenience because of food delivery platforms. Similarly, transport users consider the possibility of travelling without haggling to be the most significant positive change.
3. Two-thirds of the users of food delivery apps and three-fifths of the transport app users reported at least one problem on the platform.
4. One-third of users in the food delivery and transport apps reported at least one issue with platform workers. While delay in food delivery is the central issue reported by food delivery users, the frequent cancelling of rides by drivers is noted by transport users.

### **1.3.4 Response of Unions/Associations**

1. As platform workers represent a diverse group, only a subset of workers, those committed to longer-term engagement, show interest in collective bargaining.
2. In contrast to the online transport sector, there are notably fewer registered associations among food delivery workers.
3. Members of labour unions assert that platforms employ algorithms in a discriminatory manner to crush protests, and algorithms are made to act in a discriminatory manner, affecting workers' earnings.
4. The competitive nature of the work, limited opportunities for building relationships among workers, lack of enthusiasm from part-time workers, and a lack of solidarity within the union pose increasing challenges for establishing both formal and informal avenues for unionisation and collective bargaining.

### **1.3.5 Response of the Government**

1. For the first time, the Code on Social Security 2020 has included platform workers within the purview of Indian labour laws. The provisions within the Code encompass various welfare policies, ensuring social security benefits for these workers.
2. The Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020, issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways under the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019, serve as a framework for State governments to issue licenses to transport aggregators and regulate their business operations.
3. The government of Rajasthan enacted the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act in July 2023, establishing the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers Welfare Board. The Board is endowed with specific powers to address the welfare needs of platform workers.
4. Diverging from the approaches of many other Indian states, Kerala has taken a proactive stance in the platform sector. A notable illustration is the introduction of Yatri in Kochi in 2021 as part of the Kochi Open Mobility Network (KOMN), effectively broadening the scope of the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) initiative. Additionally, in August 2022, the Kerala government launched the Kerala Savaari app, marking the inception of India's first state government-owned online taxi service. Kerala Savaari is planning to expand its operation all over the State.
5. The Kerala government is contemplating bringing a comprehensive act for the welfare of platform workers.

### **Recommendations**

Several mechanisms could support platform workers and improve their working conditions. Top-down approaches like recognising employer-employee relationship regulations and enforcing employment standards could be practical ways to improve work and working conditions in the platforms. Major recommendations to improve work and working conditions of platform workers are noted below:

- **Strengthen Statutory Provision to Ensure Rights of Platform Workers**

Considering positive developments in other countries to improve platform workers' work and working conditions, the Central and state governments must strengthen legal provisions to bring platform workers under existing labour laws and actively engage with aggregators through informal negotiations. A significant impediment preventing legal and welfare measures for platform workers is the inability to establish an employer-employee relationship. However, that should not impede negotiation with aggregators to ensure a minimum remuneration for workers. This is important considering that, unlike developed countries, those engaged in platform work in India are predominantly full-time workers.

Currently, major aggregators provide accident insurance benefits to all platform workers in India. However, there are good practices from other countries that could be followed. For instance, in 2018, Deliveroo announced a sick-pay policy for all UK riders. Riders who have completed at least 30 orders in the previous eight weeks are eligible for earnings support while unwell.

It is strongly suggested that the Kerala government develop a legislative framework to protect those in the platform work and regulate the operation of aggregators. It would be beneficial to constitute a Welfare Board comprising State officials, representatives from platform workers, aggregators, and civil society to devise schemes for the welfare of platform workers and set up a welfare fund with contributions from aggregators, customers, workers and government.

- **Transparency in Terms of Employment**

The terms and conditions governing platform work are not always clear and accessible to workers. There is a need to improve transparency in algorithmic management to help workers understand how tasks are allocated, terms of engagement with platforms and remuneration. This would enable workers to contest decisions that affect working conditions if needed. As remuneration for workers is constantly revised, many are clueless about how much they could earn. Transparent algorithmic management will ensure that workers can understand the terms of work and remuneration and take legal recourse if the platform breaches those conditions. It is crucial to notify workers of any changes in the terms of employment within a reasonable timeframe before changes come

into effect. Options like an ombudsman or a forum with workers' representatives could be explored.

- **Strengthen Social Dialogue**

Coordinated and collaborative action by various stakeholders (trade unions, labour associations, service providers, consumers and the State) is essential to improve the working conditions of platform workers. There should be forums to facilitate stakeholder dialogues, build trust, and better understand each other's perspectives. Deliveroo has established Rider Forums in several European countries, allowing workers to share their ideas and feedback directly with Deliveroo. In France, for example, 25 Rider Advisors are elected to the Forum by their fellow riders and meet every three months to discuss various issues affecting riders, including safety, kit design and benefits. Uber has set up Driver Appeals Panels in several countries to appeal for reversing the deactivation of the driver's account.

Clearly, collective bargaining can take different shapes and forms. The government may constitute a dedicated grievance redressal cell exclusive to the platform workers to deal with matters not resolved satisfactorily by the platform companies. It could also be a forum to discuss and resolve platform workers' issues. The KILE could take a lead role in grievance redressal and strengthening social dialogue. It is important to note that despite the magnitude of platform workers in the State, few aggregators have an office where workers can go and register or clarify their grievances.

- **Access to Basic Facilities for Platform Workers**

Platform workers, particularly in food delivery and transport, face immense challenges due to a lack of parking space and toilet facilities. Rather than pinning all responsibilities on the aggregator, it would be appropriate for all stakeholders to take responsibility for providing parking space and toilet facilities for platform workers. For instance, the government could play a crucial role in identifying parking spaces, ensuring functioning public toilets and making cities safe for women to improve the plight of platform workers. Similarly, wherever possible, restaurants could provide basic facilities for food delivery workers while waiting to collect their orders. Efforts should also be made to create awareness among flat/resident associations on how regulations on delivery of food/other

e-commerce orders to residents, access of platform workers to lift, and facilities to park platform workers' vehicles create immense difficulties for platform workers.

- **Protect the Rights of Consumers of Platform Economy**

The legal framework to protect consumer rights concerning the platform economy needs to be revisited to enquire about the extent to which the existing provisions are equipped to protect customers. Regarding transport platforms, it is also essential to examine how fare is set and if the aggregators follow the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020 as per the requirements and provisions of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019.

- **Making Platform Work Inclusive**

A positive aspect of employment in the platform is how it offers work opportunities for those willing to work. This is particularly important for women, persons with disabilities and other marginalised sections of society. Considering the low share of women, persons with disabilities and other marginalised sections of society in the platform economy, aggregators must review their policy to make the platform work-inclusive.

Aggregators should review policies to understand what prevents women from joining non-traditional location-based jobs and ensure their fair remuneration, not penalising by algorithms that are gender blind, not taking into account the caring responsibilities of women or preventing women from working at night. Women find accessing devices like smartphones or vehicles essential to joining platform work challenging. Further, digital skills and literacy also play a role in restricting access to platform work.

Considering the scope of platform work in employment generation and the evidence of gulf returnees venturing into platform work, it would be helpful if NORKA could provide financial support in terms of buying vehicles, mobile and also training, say driving, to help reintegrate returned migrant workers in Kerala.

- **Alternative Platforms Under State Initiatives**

Considering the increasing popularity of platform services and the control imposed by aggregators on platform workers and consumers, the State should strengthen initiatives to offer alternative platforms for food delivery and transport. Efforts should be made to make Kerala Savaari attractive to workers and consumers and expand its operation to at least the major cities of Kerala. The platforms under the aegis of the government should demonstrate a model where workers are not exploited, and fair remuneration is ensured to them.

- **Strengthen Knowledge Base on Platform Work and Workers**

Studies and surveys at multiple levels are required to understand how platforms operate, how they engage workers, and terms of engagement. Researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds should be encouraged to study platform work to

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introductions

Platform, app-based or gig workers are those outside traditional employer-employee arrangements for whom work is mediated via software apps or digital platforms. Platform workers are a heterogeneous category consisting of those with different skill sets, including lawyers, designers, software developers, translators, domestic workers, professional home service providers, passenger mobility drivers, and delivery workers. This study will specifically focus on two categories of platform workers, food delivery and transport (passenger transport), which constitute the predominant share of platform workers in Kerala, India.

While online web-based platforms have existed since the 2000s, the platforms have gained popularity among clients and customers since 2012 (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021a). Lately, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the growth of the platform economy, where e-commerce, e-services, and online freelance work have become the 'new normal'. Within the digital economy, labour platforms are bringing rapid changes to work and work practices, which have significant implications for the world of work. While platform work offers employment opportunities and provides competitive prices for customers, it is often critiqued that workers are compelled to accept ambiguously and constantly changing rules of engagement with platform companies/aggregators and have no power to negotiate their working conditions or pay, creating jobs in a completely unfair environment (ILO, 2021b).

While there are a few attempts at the national level to understand platform work (National Council of Applied Economic Research [NCAER], 2023; NITI Aayog, 2022), limited attempts have been made to explore platform workers' work and working conditions in regional contexts. This study will focus on the case of food delivery and transport workers engaged in platform work in Kerala. The study will attempt to contextualise platform work within the human development achievements and distinct labour market conditions prevailing in the State, which is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, Kerala's labour market is marked by high educational attainment and low workforce participation, particularly among women (Government of Kerala [GoK], 2022). Given the high unemployment among educated youth in Kerala, it would be important to explore whether platform work

have become an option for job seekers for easy entry and exit, as often portrayed about platform work. More importantly, whether platforms have made jobs accessible for different categories of job seekers, including women and other disadvantaged sections of society, say persons with disabilities. Secondly, as noted in several studies, youth entry into the labour market in Kerala is often delayed due to continuing education until securing an 'appropriate job' (*ibid*). As there is a strong preference for white-collar jobs in Kerala, it would be appropriate to explore how platform work is perceived by Kerala society and to what extent engaging in platform work is an attractive option for job seekers, particularly youth and women. Thirdly, considering the social and political milieu of the State, which attributes high value to workers' rights and welfare, it would be critical to explore how aggregators, trade unions, and government machinery respond to demands made by platform workers to ensure better work and working conditions. Lastly, given the high out-migration and in-migration experienced in Kerala, it would also be appropriate to look if there is a significant presence of interstate migrants in platform work. The research will focus on understanding who constitutes platform workers, examining their working conditions, and identifying issues they encounter in the platform work. It is also critical to understand the perspectives of key stakeholders in the platform work, like aggregators, government officials, trade union leaders, worker associations, and restaurant owners, to suggest recommendations to improve worker's welfare in the platform sector.

The rest of the Chapter is organised as follows: Section 1.2 presents an overview of different types of platforms in India. Section 1.3 provides the objectives, approach, and methodology of the study. The chapterisation scheme of the Report is presented in Section 1.4.

## **1.2 Platforms in India**

Over the last decade, expansion in broadband connectivity, cloud computing, and advancements in information and communications technologies have made it possible to exchange massive volumes of data between individuals, businesses, and devices, contributing to the platform economy's growth. Platforms provide cutting-edge solutions in various industries, including passenger mobility and hyperlocal delivery, retail, and personal and home care, and have opened employment opportunities for those willing to work, including students and homemakers. Digital labour platforms bring significant

benefits to businesses. The 'new platform model' allows businesses to organise work without investing in capital assets or hiring employees (ILO, 2021b). Digital labour platforms connect workers and employers in virtual marketplaces, allowing the sourcing of talent globally. They heavily rely on data to match skills with opportunities and to manage the work processes, reducing costs and improving productivity (Corporaal & Lehdonvirta, 2017).

### **1.2.1 Types of Platforms**

Digital labour platforms are broadly classified into online web-based and location-based platforms. Online web-based platforms consisting of tasks or work assignments are completed online or remotely by workers. These tasks may include carrying out translation, legal, financial and patent services; designing and developing software; solving complex programming or data analytics problems within a designated time on competitive programming platforms; or finishing quick tasks, such as annotating images, moderating content, or transcribing videos etc., Tasks like ride-hailing, delivery services, home services, care services etc. require workers to be geographically close to the demand. They are called location-based platforms (ILO, 2021b). The individuals who are merely armed with an internet-enabled smartphone and tangible assets such as a vehicle (motorised or even non-motorised) or intangible assets such as skills for driving, beautician, plumbing, electrical repairing, cleaning and other home services can monetise their assets at will, to become location-based platform worker (Sundararajan, 2016). According to the NITI Aayog (2022), around 300 cities in India of varying sizes are served by numerous platforms that operate ride-hailing, home-based services, food/grocery/medicine delivery, logistics fulfilment, and e-commerce. The major location based platforms operating in Kerala that deliver food, transport, e-commerce e-home services and logistics aggregators are noted in the rest of the Sections.

#### **1.2.1.1. Food Delivery Platforms**

Food delivery platforms connect customers with restaurants and ensure food delivery right to customers' doorsteps. Customers can browse the menu, place orders, and track their deliveries in real-time. One of the strengths of these platforms lies in their robust logistics infrastructure. The delivery persons have an app that provides order details, navigation assistance, and feedback options. Furthermore, food delivery platforms have

features to enhance the overall user experience, like options for scheduled deliveries, in-app chat support, and live order tracking, which makes the platform popular. Food delivery platforms lure customers with loyalty programs and other offers that have contributed to their growing customer base and retention rates. Major food delivery platforms operating in Kerala are noted below:

*(i) Swiggy*

Swiggy is an Indian online food ordering and delivery platform that has gained significant popularity over the years. Established in 2014, Swiggy is headquartered in Bengaluru and operates in over 500 Indian cities. More than 1,50,000 restaurants and 2,60,000 delivery executives are partnering with Swiggy in India (Swiggy, 2023). Besides food delivery, the platform provides on-demand grocery deliveries under the name Instamart and a parcel delivery service called Swiggy Genie.

*(ii) Zomato*

Zomato is an online food delivery platform founded in 2010. Zomato operates in 24 countries with an average of 14.7 million monthly transacting customers. Zomato delivery services were active in more than 1,000 cities in India, with 1,80,000 active restaurant partners and 2,85,000 active delivery persons (Zomato, 2022). The platform received 535.2 million food orders in the 2021-22 financial year.

**Box 1.1 Food Delivery Platforms Based in Kerala**

Potafo is a Kozhikode based online food delivery company that started in 2018. Currently, Potafo offers its services only in Kozhikode, and they are in the process of extending operations to Kochi. There are about 4,000 persons registered in Potafo as delivery workers and active partners between 300 and 400. Whakaaro in Kannur, Fuddo in Palakkad, Eatsure in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Thrissur are other major regional food delivery platforms currently active in Kerala. Eatsure operates in 35 Indian cities.

**1.2.1.2. Ride-hailing platforms**

The ride-hailing/transport platforms provide convenient and on-demand transportation services through user-friendly mobile applications. Ride-hailing platforms depend on networks of driver-partners who use their vehicles to provide rides. Driver-partners earn a portion of the fare for each completed ride, while the platforms retain a commission. Passengers can book rides using an app specifying their pickup and drop-off locations. The apps provide estimated fares, and passengers can choose from various ride options

based on their preferences and budget. The platform has implemented safety measures such as driver background checks, Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking of rides, two-way rating systems, emergency assistance features, etc., to ensure a secure ride experience. Major travel platforms operating in Kerala are as follows:

*(i) Uber*

Uber is a globally recognised American ride-hailing platform launched in 2009. Uber has expanded its operations to over 10,000 cities in 70 countries, including India (Uber, 2023). Uber started operating in India in 2013 and is active in 123 cities. Uber has 60,000 active drivers in India with 8.2 million monthly rides (The Economic Times, 2022).

*(ii) Ola*

Ola is a ride-hailing platform launched in 2010 and headquartered in Bengaluru. Ola covers over 250 cities in India, Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Ola has 1.5 million active drivers in India and serves up to a billion rides annually (Ola, 2022).

*(iii) Yatri*

Yatri is the first app on the Kochi Open Mobility Network (KOMN) that allows customers to choose from various taxi services in the city. Passengers can access multiple cab service providers across the city and book the appropriate one. Similarly, local drivers can use the Yatri Partner app to enrol through an aggregator or agency (Kochi Metropolitan Transport Authority [KMTA], 2023). It is announced that Yatri will provide multiple modes of transportation in Kochi, including auto-rickshaws and buses; instead of competing, its operation will bring together various modes of transport to strengthen the public transport network. Over 1,000 taxi drivers across five transport unions in the city have come together to be a part of KOMN (KMTA, 2023).

*(iv) Kerala Savaari*

Kerala Savaari, launched in 2022, is an online taxi service owned by the government of Kerala, with a fleet of 500 taxis and autos. Kerala Savaari is presently active in Thiruvananthapuram city and is about to extend its services to Kochi, Kozhikode, and Thrissur municipal corporations. Indian Telephone Industries unit in Palakkad provides technical support for Kerala Savaari. The Motor Workers Welfare Fund Board, under the aegis of the Labour Department (The News Minute, 2022), supervises the operation of Kerala Savaari.

### **Box 1.2 Travel Platforms Based in Kerala**

Tukxi is an online travel platform startup that came into existence in November 2020 in Kochi and later expanded its operation to Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur. The startup's initial motivation was to support the auto drivers during COVID-19. Other active travel platforms in Kerala are LaBa Cabs in Thrissur, Rapido in Kochi and PickMe in Thiruvananthapuram.

#### **1.2.1.3. E-commerce Delivery Platforms**

E-commerce platforms have transformed how people shop, offering a broad range of products at a competitive price. These platforms employ a marketplace model, allowing independent vendors to list and sell their products on the platform alongside their inventory. E-commerce platforms have transformed the retail landscape in India, even at the regional level, providing users access to a vast selection of products. Customers can browse through diverse categories of products, including electronics, fashion, home essentials, books, and more. The platform's customer-centric approach, competitive pricing, and robust seller ecosystem have made e-commerce services popular. While there are numerous e-commerce websites in India, two major players in the market are Amazon and Flipkart, details of which are mentioned below.

##### *(i) Amazon*

Amazon is an American multinational company founded in 1993. Amazon started its operations in India in 2013. Amazon has developed a robust logistics network to ensure efficient last-mile delivery and established numerous fulfilment centres, distribution hubs, and delivery operations worldwide. This network includes a combination of delivery partners, including major logistics companies, local couriers, and Amazon's delivery fleet. This enables fast and reliable shipping, including options like Amazon Prime's two-day delivery service. More than 2.5 million micro, small, and medium enterprises work with Amazon in India.

##### *(ii) Flipkart*

Flipkart is an Indian e-commerce company founded in 2007 and headquartered in Bengaluru. Instakart is the logistics arm of Flipkart, responsible for managing the warehousing, packaging, and delivery of products purchased on the Flipkart platform. Instakart operates a network of fulfilment centres and partners with third-party logistics providers to ensure efficient and timely delivery to customers across India.

#### **1.2.1.4 Grocery Delivery Platforms**

Grocery delivery platforms provide a convenient and efficient way for consumers to order groceries and have them delivered directly to their doorstep. It offers various products, including fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, pantry essentials, snacks, beverages, personal care items, and more. With its user-friendly website and mobile app, customers can easily browse through the extensive product catalogue, add items to their cart, and schedule delivery at their preferred time slot. JioMart and BigBasket are two major grocery delivery platforms in Kerala.

##### **(i) BigBasket**

BigBasket, one of India's largest grocery delivery platforms, was launched in 2011. The company operates in more than 30 cities in India and processes around 15 million orders per month (BigBasket, 2023).

##### **(ii) JioMart**

JioMart is part of Reliance Retail, a subsidiary of Reliance Industries, which provides a seamless online grocery shopping experience. JioMart services are available in more than 200 cities in India (JioMart, 2023).

#### **1.2.1.5. E-home Service Platforms**

E-home services have emerged as a convenient and efficient solution for individuals seeking professional services at their homes. E-home service platforms cover various service categories catering to home maintenance, repair, and improvement aspects. Some common categories include home cleaning, plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, painting, appliance repair, and pest control. E-home services also offer beauty and wellness services. E-home service platforms connect customers with skilled service providers offering different services. The booking process typically involves selecting the desired service, specifying service requirements, providing necessary details like address and contact information, and choosing a convenient date and time for the service.

Urban Company is a popular e-home services platform in India that connects users with trusted and professional service providers for various home-related services. The Urban Company was launched in 2014 and is headquartered in Bengaluru. It is currently

operating in 62 cities across five countries. More than 45,000 trained professionals are partnering with Urban Company (Urban Company, 2023).

#### **1.2.1.6. Logistic Aggregators**

The companies that supply delivery persons to businesses for last-mile logistics are collectively referred to as "logistics aggregators" or third-party logistics (3PL) providers. They collaborate with many clients, including e-commerce companies, local retailers, grocery stores, restaurants, pharmacies, etc. These companies play a crucial role in the delivery ecosystem by bridging the gap between businesses and independent delivery personnel, enabling efficient and cost-effective last-mile deliveries and helping businesses meet customer expectations. Although customers do not directly book their services, they are designated by businesses or platform companies to deliver services to customers. Two major logistic aggregators operating in Kerala are Shadowfax and LoadShare Networks.

##### *(i) Shadowfax*

Shadowfax is a major on-demand delivery platform that has made significant strides in Kerala. Founded in 2015, Shadowfax is headquartered in Bengaluru and operates as a technology-driven logistics provider, connecting businesses and individuals with a network of delivery personnel. Shadowfax offers delivery services to other location-based platforms in Kerala, such as Swiggy, Zomato, Amazon, Flipkart, Bigbasket, etc. Shadowfax is active in more than 900 cities in India, with more than 1,50,000 active delivery persons delivering over 1500000 orders daily (Shadowfax, 2023).

##### *(ii) LoadShare Networks*

LoadShare Networks, founded in 2017, is headquartered in Bengaluru. They provide last-mile services to e-commerce, retail, and food and grocery stores. LoadShare is active in more than 500 cities in India, with more than 10,000 active delivery persons delivering over 1,00,000 orders daily (Loadshare, 2023).

### **1.3 Research Approach and Methods**

This study mainly focuses on two categories of location-based platform workers, those engaged in food delivery and transport, as these platforms engage the largest share of platform workers in Kerala. In addition to food and transport workers engaged in

platform work, the study will also attempt to capture issues of other location-based platform workers like those involved in e-commerce delivery, grocery delivery and e-home services.

### **1.3.1 Objectives**

The broad objective of the study is to understand the work and working conditions of app-based food delivery and transport workers. The study will also make suggestions to frame policies and schemes for their welfare. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- (i) To understand who constitutes app-based food delivery and transport workers (demographic and social characteristics, education, etc)? What motivates them to engage in platform work (food delivery and transport)?
- (ii) To examine the working conditions and work relations of app-based food delivery and transport workers.
- (iii) To understand workers' grievances with aggregators, restaurants, and customers? What are the redressal mechanisms? To what extent are existing arrangements friendly to workers?
- (iv) To develop an understanding of the employment conditions in other app-based work like those engaged in e-commerce deliveries, grocery deliveries, and home-based services such as grooming, cleaning, repairing, cooking, etc.
- (v) To provide policy recommendations to improve the working conditions of app-based workers.

### **1.3.2 Research Methodology**

The study employed qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to accomplish the above mentioned objectives. Detailed research methods are noted below:

#### *(i) Desk Research*

During the first stage of the study, specific problems of platform workers in general and app-based food delivery and transport workers in particular were explored. An effort was also made to understand the operation and employment conditions in other types of platform-based work in Kerala: e-commerce deliveries, grocery deliveries, home-based services, etc. In addition, interventions and strategies employed in other contexts were also identified.

*(ii) Sample Survey of app-based food delivery and transport Workers*

A sample survey conducted among the app-based food delivery and transport workers forms the major component of the study. The survey was conducted using a standardised pretested questionnaire. Separate sampling plans were followed for food delivery and transport workers because food delivery workers form the major category among the platform workers in Kerala. A sample size of 400 was fixed for the survey among app-based food delivery workers. To compensate for any non-response or partial response, the sample is inflated by 5 per cent. Thus, the sample size for the survey of food delivery workers is 420. The survey was conducted in three major cities and six other cities/towns. A sample of 100 food delivery workers from each major city were interviewed, and twenty workers from other cities/towns were also interviewed. To ensure geographical spread, cities/towns are selected from north, central and south Kerala. In each selected city/town, locations where food delivery workers concentrate were identified, and interviews were held.

**Table 1.1: Sample Selection of Food Delivery and Transport Workers**

Zone	Location	Food Delivery Workers	Transport Workers	Total
Central Zone	Ernakulam	100	100	200
	Thrissur	20	20	40
	Kottayam	20	-	20
South Zone	Thiruvananthapuram	100	60	160
	Kollam	20	-	20
	Alappuzha	20	-	20
North Zone	Kozhikode	100	30	130
	Malappuram	20	-	20
	Kannur	20	-	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

The online taxi service is currently available only in metro cities of Kerala. A sample size of 200 was fixed for the survey among online taxi drivers. The sample size was inflated by 5 per cent to compensate for any partial/incomplete response. While the initial plan was to conduct the survey in six cities/towns, when the fieldwork was started, it was clear that the number of people engaged in travel apps was mainly in urban areas of a few

districts of Kerala – Ernakulam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kozhikode, and Thrissur. Further, there was also a lot of variation in the pattern of using travel apps in these districts. For instance, most drivers engaged in travel platforms in Kozhikode get their ride for airport pick up and drop off. However, as the Kozhikode airport was closed for renovation during the survey, it was challenging to find drivers engaged in travel platforms. The final sample frame for travel-based platform work is provided in Table 1.1. Care was taken to ensure the representation of both car and auto-rickshaw drivers in the sample. The total sample size of the study is 630. The primary survey was conducted during July-August 2023.

### *(iii) Online Customer Survey*

As part of the study, an online survey was conducted among customers of food delivery and travel platforms to understand the perception of customers and issues they encounter while using platforms. The online survey was conducted from September to October 2023.

### *(iv) Qualitative Data Collection*

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with the app-based food delivery and transport workers, staff of aggregators, and managers and owners of restaurants. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted: 15 with platform workers, 10 with restaurant managers and 5 with aggregators. In addition, five in-depth interviews were conducted with those who have left the job as platform workers to understand what prompted them to leave app-based food delivery and transport work. Representatives of platform workers' unions, associations and members of informal networks of platform workers were interviewed to understand the problems faced by the workers, their demands and the response of the state government and the aggregators to their demands. The in-depth interviews were conducted using checklists. All respondents' names and places were changed to ensure anonymity.

The case study method was employed to document the issues faced by platform workers. Apart from the case studies on app-based food and transport workers, case studies were conducted on other forms of platform workers who are involved in the delivery of groceries and e-home services. The selection of interviewees and case studies are done in such a way that males and females of different profiles are represented.

## **1.4 Chapterisation Scheme**

The rest of the Report is organised as follows: Chapter 2 will examine who constitutes platform workers in Kerala. Chapter 3 will explore in detail the working conditions of platform workers, followed by Chapter 4, which will examine stakeholders' responses to platform work and suggestions to improve working conditions. Chapter 5 will conclude the study by presenting the main findings of the study and suggestions to improve platform workers' work and working conditions.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PLATFORM WORKERS

## 2.1 Introduction

Digital labour platforms have immense potential to benefit workers and society. With access to internet-connected smartphones and vehicles, any interested individual can become a platform worker. By connecting businesses and clients to workers in novel ways, they are transforming labour processes in the evolving world of work. This Chapter presents an overview of platform work and the condition of platform workers. The rest of the Chapter is organised as follows: Section 2.2 narrates the work and working conditions of platform workers based on a secondary literature review, while the profile of platform workers in Kerala is presented in Section 2.3. Section 2.4 concludes the Chapter.

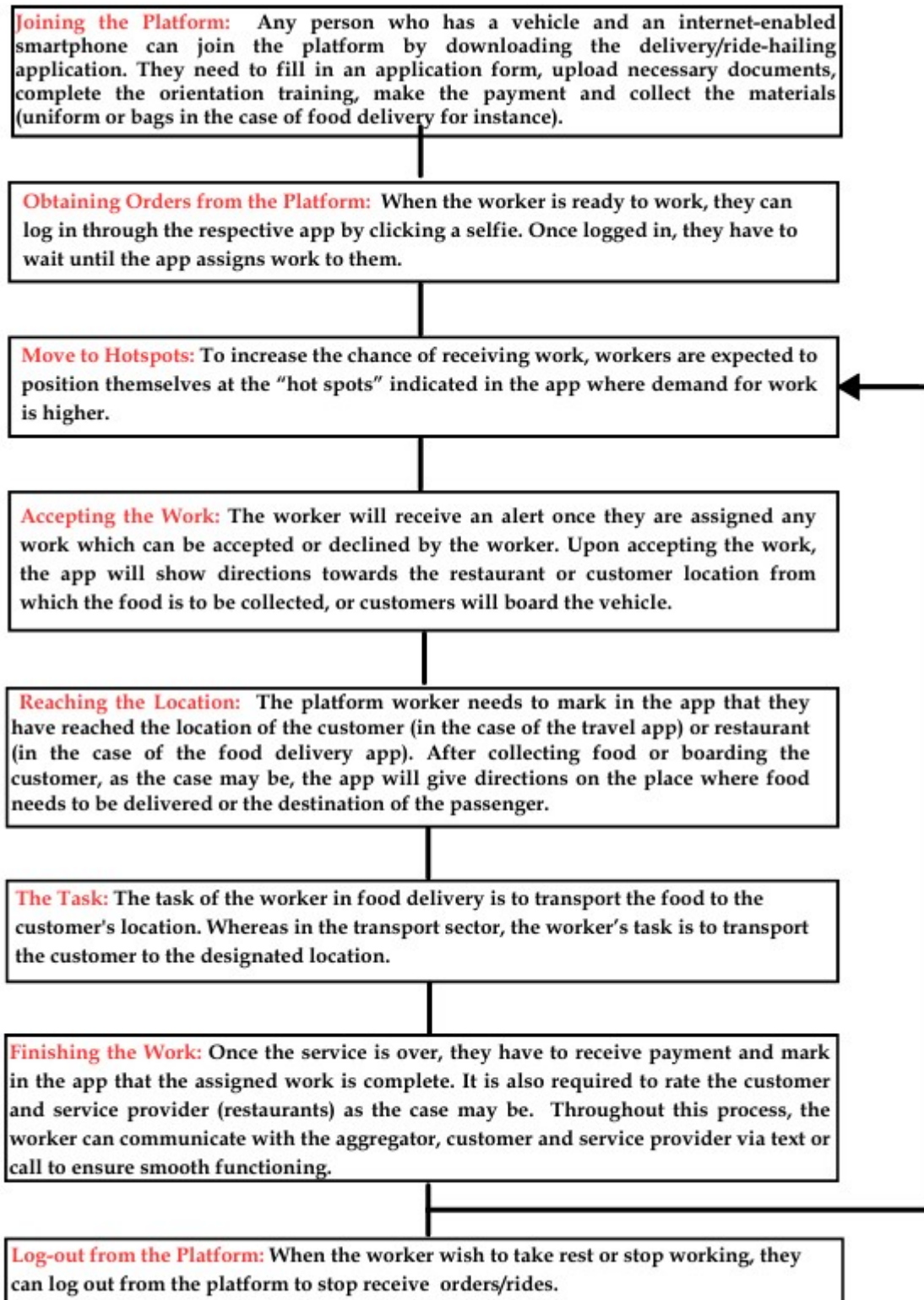
## 2.2 Understanding Platform Work

The platform economy has introduced flexible and transient labour conditions for employees in contrast to the traditional employment relationship of full-time, protected, and continuous employment (Kelleberg, 2015). Some have portrayed this development as liberating employees from organisational hierarchies, enabling them to plan their own time and engage in creative activities outside of their full-time work (Surie & Koduganti, 2016). Platform work allows individuals to have greater control over their working hours and location, enabling them to adapt their work schedule to their personal needs and obligations in a way that may be more convenient for women, persons with disabilities, and students (Eurofound & ILO, 2017). The platforms also have the potential to provide opportunities for those marginalised in traditional labour markets, such as migrants and refugees.

In contrast to the platform workers in developed countries who are primarily part-timers, an overwhelming majority of platform workers in India are engaged in full-time roles. The lack of alternative urban work opportunities, combined with the low entry barrier to joining app-based work, is causing market saturation for such work (Bharadkar et al., 2021). Data on workers employed in platform-based work in India is patchy. Excluding

the small and medium-sized platforms across India that provide passenger mobility and delivery services, it is estimated that major platforms like Uber, Ola, Swiggy and Zomato employ more than 3.3 million people in the country (Raman, Ramachandran, Sasikumar, 2021). As per the NCAER study (NCAER, 2023), the majority of platform workers were previously employed as temporary/casual workers before joining the platform. They work only on platforms or continue working in temporary/casual jobs alongside platform work. Reasons for switching to platform work were underpayment in the previous job, flexible work timings, and independence offered in platform work. Most workers engaged in platform work are unprotected by laws that guarantee minimal working conditions, including remuneration, safe working conditions, and social and accident insurance (Sharma, 2019).

Figure 2.1 Work Processes in Food and Transport Platforms



## *Work Arrangements*

Algorithmic management of workers is central to the platform business model, referred to as "algorithmic governmentality" by Rouvroy and Stiegler (2016). Platforms use algorithms to match workers with customers, a process that heavily relies on worker ratings. Algorithms play a pivotal role in assessing, evaluating and rating the performance of platform workers using several metrics such as work acceptance rate, on-time completions and customer feedback (ILO, 2021b). Based on ratings, the app algorithm categorises platform workers into various tiers. For instance, Zomato and Swiggy classify delivery workers into Diamond, Silver, Bronze, and Blue categories and prioritise order assignments or ride requests for those in the higher tiers. Therefore, a worker with higher ratings has a better chance of higher earnings in a day. Even minor errors can lower workers' ratings, followed by the company blocking their ID and virtually not being in a position to do platform work. Thus, platforms' assertions that workers have autonomy to set their working schedules and accept or refuse work are highly inconsistent because rejection of work assignments can have a profound impact on workers' ratings and, by extension, the volume of work they will be assigned in future (ILO, 2021b). The rating system strategically empowers customers at the expense of workers. Customer ratings put workers in a vulnerable position and add to the emotional strain on their daily tasks (Masiero, 2021). The outcomes are races, shortcuts, shrill voices on roads, and accidents, particularly among food delivery workers. Fatigue and risky riding behaviour go together, leading to accidents involving platform workers (Naniseti, 2021).

Platforms also rely on normative tactics in the form of games, symbolic rewards, and other inducements that foster worker's attachment to the app (Cameron, 2018). The terminologies such as 'target', 'incentives', 'bonus points', and so on – collectively referred to as 'gamification techniques' by Rosenblatt (2018) work quite effectively in making the workers feel like they control and shape how much they earn. The quantum of the incentive is always present in workers' minds as they look forward to their next order, pushing them to work for long hours without a break. Platforms also use various nudges to make workers compete with each other, such as ranking the best performing workers in a zone<sup>1</sup> and rewarding them with gifts for reaching certain performance milestones. All

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<sup>1</sup> A geographical locality defined by aggregators to manage platform workers.

these strategies cement the discourse of platforms that "hard-working" people find economic mobility (Baradkar et al., 2020). However, as the company grows and captures more market share, the algorithmic governmentality becomes more and more stringent, necessitating the employees to put in more hours to maintain the same pay (ILO, 2019). In principle, companies often reduce or discontinue incentives if incentives attract more workers, resulting in a larger supply than demand for a service in a given geographic area. For instance, Uber and Ola have eliminated the incentive component of their pay structure (Fairwork India, 2021). Most platforms lack a fixed pricing model (price varies based on demand-supply dynamics), so workers can never know how much they could earn daily.

### *Working Conditions*

A delivery worker is responsible for safely picking up, transporting, and dropping off packages and coordinating with customers to ensure optimum satisfaction. Catering to customers' demands means that food delivery workers remain hungry while ensuring customers receive their food on time. As a result, food delivery workers commonly experience fatigue, stomach problems, piles, backaches, muscle aches, sleep deprivation, etc. In addition to the adverse impacts on physical health, the target and incentive model cause anxiety among them. Preoccupied with the worry of reaching targets, workers referred to this work as tension-causing (Bharadkar et al., 2020). A study by Behera et al. (2021) conducted in the Delhi-NCR found that 47 per cent of full-time delivery workers work more than 12 hours daily. Furthermore, 42 per cent of the part-time delivery partners work 12 hours daily and 39 per cent work 5 to 8 hours daily. A study on the frequency of road accidents among food delivery workers in southern Chennai by Vijayasankari (2020) and others found that among 173 food delivery workers studied, 56 had experienced an accident.

Despite an overall increase in demand for services across most platforms, workers' net earnings declined, partially due to rising work-related costs like fuel expenses and platform commissions (Fairwork India, 2021). Wood et al. (2023), in their study among Uber drivers in the UK, reported that workers' real gross hourly rate of pay (i.e. what they earned on average per hour, including waiting times before tax and other deductions) was low and often below minimum wage. Platform workers find it hard to make a minimum wage, which only highlights how participating in increasingly flexible labour markets can lead to working poverty (Fairwork India, 2021). To illustrate, in 2016, Uber and Ola

collaborated with different banks and finance companies in India to facilitate drivers to get collateral-free loans and easy documentation processes. This changed in 2017 when banks pulled back these offers on the observation that incomes had declined and non-payment of instalments was on the rise (Sharma, 2018). However, poor pay in the platform economy is often justified by aggregators stating that platform work is conceptualised as a part-time job.

The notion that platform work is akin to self-employment seems partly rooted in a platform labour process that grants workers the autonomy and discretion to perceive themselves as "their own boss" (Wood et al., 2023). However, platforms enforce strict log-in hours for workers, which are the primary condition for workers to be eligible for receiving incentives. The expectation of earning incentives pushes workers to remain logged in for longer hours to reach their targets (Baradkar et al., 2020). Apart from mandatory log-in shifts, a cursory examination of various earnings-related conditions reveals that platforms impose stringent requirements not only on the number of hours worked but also on other factors such as having to work on weekends, number of orders delivered, penalising for declining orders and poor customer ratings.

The working conditions also make it challenging for platform workers. For instance, as parking space is limited in cities, platform workers' vehicles often obstruct pedestrian passage and are parked all over the roads, causing traffic jams. Delivery workers do not have a designated waiting facility or proper toilets and are treated poorly by restaurants. In a study by ILO (2021c), about 83 per cent of workers in the app-based transport sector and 89 per cent in the app-based delivery sector indicated safety concerns about their jobs, most related to road safety, theft, and physical assault. Apart from the food delivery and transport workers, there are also other categories of platform-based workers, like those delivering medicines, parcels and various services like repairs, cleaning and care work that are increasingly becoming popular. However, limited information is available on who constitutes these workers and working conditions on such platforms.

Most digital platforms position themselves as a 'marketplace' that brings together the service providers, delivery partners, and the client. The projection of platforms as a technology company and marketplace creates a perceived distance from platform workers who serve as delivery partners. It avoids being held accountable for their actions and legal duties arising from the employment of such persons. These platforms make

great efforts to use the terms 'partners', 'delivery partners, and 'self-employed entrepreneurs' while referring to their 'workers'. This does not ensure the independence of workers but has narrowed the scope of benefits or the ability to access redressal systems simply because platforms might not be obliged to do so as per labour laws. For instance, in India, platform workers are denied protection under the Employees Compensation Act 1923, which guarantees workers compensation and medical claims if they incur injuries, illness, disablement, or death in connection with their work. Women workers in the platforms are also denied benefits and protection under the Maternity Benefit Act 1961 (Bharadkar et al., 2020). The Code on Social Security (CSS), 2020, was the first statute to recognise gig workers in India, which is yet to be implemented.

It is challenging to collectivise or unionise the transient labour force. Hence, cases of mistreatment of workers by platforms or customers often appear to be isolated incidents. ILO (2021c) reports that workers on location-based platforms are witnessing discrimination or harassment. App-based transport drivers often encounter discourteous behaviour from customers, traditional taxi drivers, and law enforcement officers while on the job. Similarly, app-based delivery workers have experienced discrimination based on their occupation, with instances involving customers, restaurants, and law enforcement officers. However, the platform workers hardly have any space to report such discrimination. On the other hand, platforms took strict action against workers if any complaints were raised against them. The platform workers experience arbitrary deactivation, are debarred from accessing the platform without explanation, and lose their income. Workers may be subject to other penalties or disciplinary decisions without the ability to contact the platform to challenge or appeal them if they believe they are unfair (Fairwork India, 2021).

Lately, there has been an increasing incidence of delivery and passenger mobility workers seeking public protests to air their grievances against harassment by aggregators, deceptive recruiting advertisements, diminishing pay, and unilateral and overnight changes in payment and incentive terms without consulting workers. Large-scale protests against Uber and Ola were staged for the first time in Hyderabad (The News Minute, 2017), Delhi (The Indian Express, 2017) and Bengaluru (The Hindu, 2017). Following this, similar protests were initiated in 2018 in Chennai (The New Indian Express, 2018), Mumbai (Hindustan Times, 2018), and Kochi (The New Indian Express, 2018). In Kochi,

protests were organised against food delivery aggregators such as Zomato and Swiggy (The News Minute, 2019). The protests were extended to other major cities such as Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad (News Click, 2020) in the subsequent years. Platforms to curb protests resorted to suspending workers without notice as a disciplining measure against aggrieved workers (Bharadkar, 2021).

### *Inclusion in Platform Work*

A significant feature highlighted in the case of platform work is inclusiveness, which offers flexibility and the freedom to choose one's work without being subject to discriminatory biases based on factors like gender, caste, class, disability, and so on (Ramachandran & Raman, 2021). For instance, the platform economy provides women various work options and flexible arrangements, allowing them to earn income while managing their normative caregiving responsibilities. However, participation of women is estimated to comprise only four out of ten workers on online web-based platforms and one out of ten workers on location-based platforms (NITI Aayog, 2022).

A major reason for the low participation of women in platform work is the digital gender gap (Mawii, 2019). Research conducted by Oxfam India in 2022 revealed that women are less likely to own digital devices and have access to internet services than men, primarily due to economic and structural barriers. According to the Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023 by Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), females lag behind males in mobile ownership by 11 per cent and internet connectivity by 40 per cent. The inequality in access to smartphones, the internet, and vehicles restricts women's ability to engage in platform work. Further, women's employment choices in the platform economy may still be shaped mainly by their normative household and care work responsibilities, with women prioritising the latter. While working in the gig economy allows them to combine paid work with unpaid care work, women may perceive an added burden because they continue to bear the primary responsibility for the majority of household chores (Hunt et al. 2016). Additionally, women's ability to access more work opportunities may be limited, as they are often cautious and less inclined to work during nighttime hours due to concerns about potential discrimination, harassment, or violence (ILO, 2021b). In a survey, one-third of the women hesitated to join the gig economy due to concerns about job security and the uncertain nature of employment (Kasliwal, 2020). Opportunities available for women are also highly gendered, allowing women to

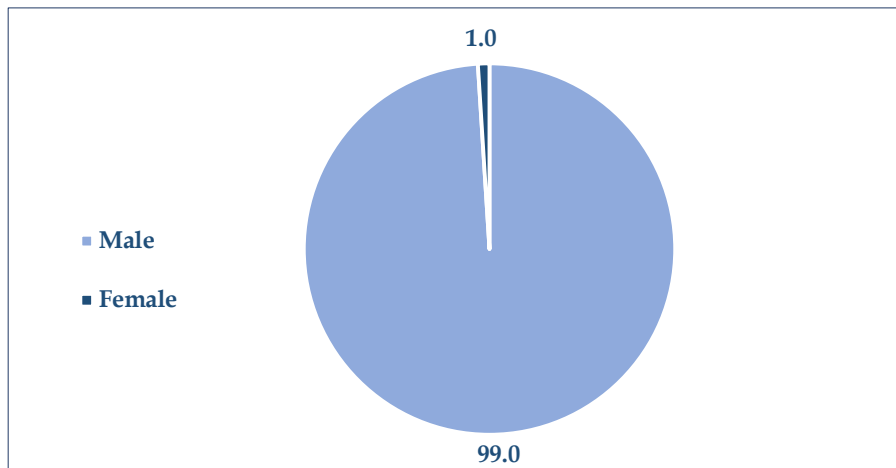
'professionally' take up work that is either highly stigmatised (beauty services, massage services, etc.) or formalised care work (nannies, nursing, etc.) (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018).

There are also some changes happening to make the platform economy more inclusive. For instance, recently, Zomato initiated certain changes to ensure the "safety" of the women delivery partners, which includes access to safety-related education and tools, contactless deliveries by default, extended support from restaurant partners, safety handy emergency call button (SOS) and dedicated support to use washrooms in public spaces (Das & Rajeesh, 2023). Further, Zomato and Swiggy have implemented measures to increase the participation of people with disabilities through active onboarding and facilitation. They also inform customers through the app when a disabled delivery person is assigned to their order. However, these initiatives have not yet reached the necessary scale to establish a substantial job market for people with disabilities in online food delivery.

### **2.3 Characteristics of Platform Workers in Kerala**

This section provides the socio-economic characteristics of platform workers covered in the sample survey. The primary survey covered 630 individuals employed in platform work – 420 in food delivery and 210 in transport-based platforms (60 autorickshaws and 150 taxis). Among the platform workers covered in the survey, 624 are males (99 per cent), and the remaining are women, as presented in Figure 2.2. All the women workers covered in the sample were engaged in food delivery.

**Figure 2.2: Platform Workers by Gender (in per cent)**



Source: Primary Survey

Data from the field survey indicated that all women in platform work are married with school-going children. The average age of women in online food delivery is 38 years. They reported previously working in private jobs and joined platform work due to financial emergencies. Women cited flexibility and comparatively better remuneration as motivation to choose online food delivery. They all had vehicles and mobile phones, assets required to work in platforms before joining platform work.

A clear distinction is visible in the age distribution of those engaged in food delivery and transport platforms. The workers engaged in food delivery are relatively young compared to transport workers, as presented in Table 2.1. Nearly two-thirds of the food delivery workers are 30 years old or below, as opposed to just one-fifth of the transport workers in this age group. The average age of food delivery workers is 29 years, while that of transport workers is 38 years. It is found that only one per cent of food delivery workers and 7 per cent of transport workers are above 50 years old.

**Table 2.1: Age Group of Workers by Type of Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Age Category (in yrs)	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Less than 20	2.9	-	1.9
20 - 30	62.6	21.4	48.9
31 - 40	25.2	44.3	31.6
41 - 50	7.9	27.6	14.4
Above 50	1.4	6.7	3.2
Average age	29.2	37.7	32.0
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

The educational status of the platform workers is provided in Table 2.2. Platform workers in the survey achieved impressive educational attainment; 28 per cent of food delivery workers and 21 per cent of transport workers are graduates. Among the platform workers, those who have completed plus two or above come to 63 per cent. Platform workers with a post-graduation or a professional degree come to 2 per cent.

**Table 2.2: Educational Status of Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Qualification	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Primary/Upper Primary	1.0	2.3	1.4
High School	2.1	4.3	2.9
SSLC Pass	12.1	31.9	18.7
Pre-degree /Plus Two	37.9	31.4	35.7
Diploma/ITI/Certificate Course	17.4	8.1	14.3
Graduation	28.0	20.5	25.5
Post-Graduation	1.0	1.0	1.0
Professional Course	0.5	0.5	0.5
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

It is found that 19 per cent of the food delivery workers are currently pursuing education or attending exam coaching, indicating that platform work offers flexible options to earn income for individuals. The asset requirement in transport work is observed to be the barrier for students to enter this sector. Data from the primary survey indicates that one-third of those pursuing educational courses are in undergraduate courses, followed by 31 per cent pursuing a Diploma/ITI/Certificate course. There are also respondents who are pursuing professional courses (12.5 per cent) and postgraduate courses (10 per cent) along with food delivery.

**Table 2.3: Educational Course Pursued by Food Delivery Workers (in per cent)**

Course	Per cent
Degree	35
Diploma/ITI/	31.3
Professional Course	12.5
Post-Graduation	10
Exam coaching	7.5
Pre-degree/ Plus Two	1.2
Others	2.5

Note: Base is 80 food delivery workers reported pursuing an educational course.

Source: Primary Survey

With respect to marital status, a little more than three-fifths of the food delivery workers are unmarried, while in the case of transport workers, three-fourths are married. This is not surprising considering the age composition of those involved in food delivery and transport platforms. All women workers in the sample are married.

**Table 2.4: Marital Status of Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Status	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Married	37.6	76.7	50.6
Unmarried	61.7	22.3	48.6
Divorced	0.5	1.0	0.6
Widowed	0.2	-	0.2
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

More than half of the platform workers engaged in food delivery and transport follow the Hindu religion, followed by Muslim (29 per cent) and Christian (19 per cent) religions (Table 2.5). The religious composition of platform workers in the sample is not much different from that of the Kerala population.

**Table 2.5: Distribution of Platform Workers by Religion (in per cent)**

Religion	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Hindu	50.5	52.9	51.3
Muslim	31.0	25.2	29.0
Christian	17.9	20.5	18.7
No religion	0.6	1.4	1.0
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

Similar to the religious composition of platform workers, the composition by social category also aligns with the composition by social category of the state.

**Table 2.6: Distribution of Platform Workers by Social Groups (in per cent)**

Social Group	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
OBC	71.0	71.0	71.0
General	16.4	17.6	16.8
SC	8.1	3.3	6.5
ST	0.5	0.5	0.5
Do not wish to disclose	4.0	7.6	5.2
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

More than one-third of the respondents' households hold Pink ration cards who are below the poverty line. Only a small share of workers who possess Yellow ration cards (most economically vulnerable people identified by the Government of Kerala) are engaged in platform work. The share of workers holding Blue and White ration cards is 31 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively.

**Table 2.7: Colour of the Ration Card of Platform Workers Household (in per cent)**

Colour of Ration Card	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Pink	37.9	36.2	37.3
Blue	31.4	30.0	31.0
White	20.5	21.9	21.0
Yellow	3.1	4.3	3.5
No ration card	2.1	1.4	1.9
Do not know	5.0	6.2	5.3
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

The residential arrangement of platform workers is presented in Table 2.8. Three-fifths of the respondents own a house, and another 39 per cent live in rented accommodation. Notably, one respondent engaged as a transport worker reportedly stayed in the vehicle.

**Table 2.8 Residential Arrangement of Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Residential Arrangement	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Own house	62.4	55.7	60.2
Rented accommodation	37.4	42.4	39.0
<i>Rented/leased house</i>	31.0	36.2	32.6
<i>Single room accommodation</i>	0.5	0.5	0.5
<i>Hostel</i>	1.2	1.4	1.2
<i>Paying guest</i>	4.0	2.9	3.7
<i>Lodge</i>	0.7	1.4	1.0
Rent free	0.2	1.4	0.6
Staying in vehicle	-	0.5	0.2
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

Table 2.9 presents the distribution of platform workers by their household monthly income. A significant share of those engaged in food delivery and transport falls in the household category, with an average monthly income below Rs. 50,000. The household

monthly income of two-thirds of the food delivery workers and nearly half of the transport workers is Rs. 25,000 and below. However, it is important to note that among the transport workers engaged in platform work, 13 per cent reported average monthly earnings above Rs. 50, 000.

**Table 2.9: Household Monthly Income of the Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Income (in Rs)	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Below 10,000	6.9	5.3	6.4
10,000 to 25,000	60.7	41.9	54.4
25,000 to 50,000	30.5	40.0	33.7
Above 50,000	1.9	12.8	5.5
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

About one-fourth of the respondents are natives of places outside the district where they are currently engaged in platform work, as presented in Table 2.10. The share of respondents from districts other than their current place of work is higher in the case of transport work compared to food delivery. Merely one per cent of respondents are reported as hailing from outside Kerala.

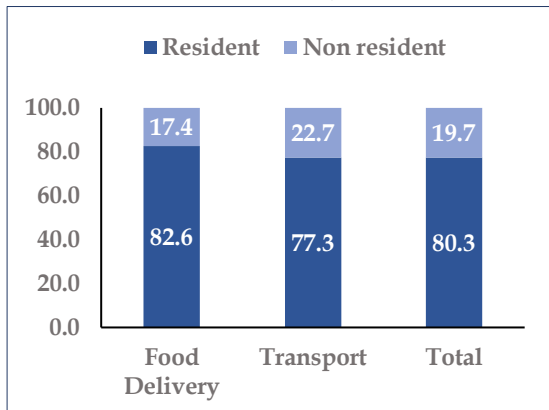
**Table 2.10: Native Place of Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Native	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Within the survey district	79.5	68.5	75.9
Other districts in Kerala	19.3	30.5	23.0
Other State	1.2	1.0	1.1
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

Most respondents reside in the district where they are engaged as platform workers. As evident from Figure 2.3, 80.3 per cent of the non-native respondents (respondents who are not residents of the district they are currently working in) have shifted residence to the district where they are engaging in platform work. The share of respondents who have not shifted residence is less than one-fifth. Most of them reported living in border regions of the neighbouring districts. It is also important to note that 61.5 per cent of those who reported having shifted to the city where they currently work did it at least one year before.

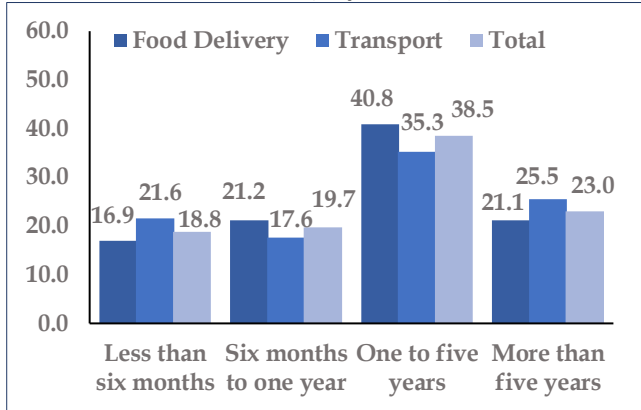
**Figure 2.3: Non-Native Platform Workers who are Residing in Districts of their Work (in per cent)**



**Note:** Base of 152 consists of 86 food delivery and 66 transport workers who are not natives of the district where they are currently working.

**Source:** Primary Survey

**Figure 2.4: Time Frame During which Non-Native Platform Workers Shifted to Place of Work (in per cent)**

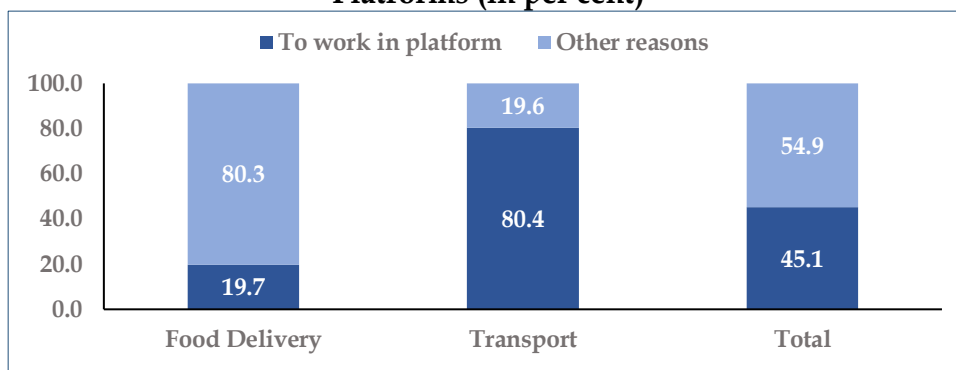


**Note:** Base is 122, which consists of 71 food delivery and 51 transport workers who are non-natives of the district where they are currently working but have shifted their residence.

**Source:** Primary Survey

Among the respondents who said they are not residents of the district where they are currently working, 45 per cent moved to the district to engage in platform work. The share of those who shifted residence to engage in platform work is higher among the transport sector, four-fifths of the respondents, as presented in Figure 2.5. As transport work on platforms is currently popular only in major cities, more people are forced to shift residence if they want to work on transport-related platforms. Among those who have reported shifting residence, 55 per cent cited reasons such as searching for jobs, seeking education and family-related issues as the primary reasons for shifting their residence.

**Figure 2.5: Platform Workers who Shifted their Residence Exclusively to Work in Platforms (in per cent)**



**Note:** Base is 122, including 71 food delivery workers and 51 transport workers who reported having shifted residence.

**Source:** Primary Survey

Having a vehicle is essential to work on a location-based platform. Data from the primary survey indicates that the predominant share of food delivery workers use two-wheelers to deliver food, as presented in Table 2.11. In the case of transport workers, 71 per cent use cars and the rest use auto rickshaws to ride passengers.

**Table 2.11: Type of Vehicle Used by Platform Workers for Work (in per cent)**

Type of Vehicle	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Cycle	0.2	-	0.2
Two-wheeler	99.8	-	66.5
Three-wheeler	-	28.6	9.5
Four-wheeler	-	71.4	23.8
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

The majority of respondents, 88 per cent, owned the vehicle used for platform work (Table 2.12). The percentage of respondents who use their vehicle is higher in the food delivery sector than in the transport sector. Apart from using their vehicle, the respondents also used vehicles owned by family members and taken on rent to work in the platform sector. Nearly one-fifth of the respondents in transport use rented vehicles.

**Table 2.12: Nature of Ownership of Vehicle by Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Vehicle Ownership	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Owned by self	92.9	78.5	88.1
Rented	0.2	18.6	6.3
Owned by family member	6.2	1.4	4.6
Rent free	0.7	1.5	1.0
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

## 2.4 Conclusion

This Chapter presented working conditions in platforms based on a review of secondary literature and characteristics of platform workers in Kerala. Data indicates that the majority of platform workers are young and educated. Close to one-fifth of food delivery workers pursue education, indicating that platform work offers flexible options for individuals to earn income. Most respondents reside in the district where they are engaged as platform workers, and the share of respondents who have shifted residence for platform work is less than one-fourth. Chapter 3 will examine platform workers' work and working conditions in Kerala.

# WORK AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF PLATFORM WORKERS

## 3.1 Introduction

This Chapter examines the work and working conditions of platform workers in Kerala. The focus will be to understand two types of location-based platform workers—food delivery and transport, who constitute the major share of platform workers in the State. The Chapter relies on data from the primary survey and qualitative information collected through in-depth interviews and case studies conducted among platform workers. The rest of the Chapter is divided as follows: Section 3.2 will try to understand motivation and process of joining platform work. Section 3.3 presents employment conditions in platform work, and Section 3.4 assesses income earned and expenditure incurred by workers in relation to their employment in platforms. Section 3.5 narrates the safety and health issues of those in platform work. Section 3.6 will present relations between platform workers and aggregators. Section 3.7 narrates workers' attitudes and their challenges in platform work. Section 3.8 will present the work and working conditions of those in platforms other than food delivery and transport. Section 3.9 concludes the Chapter by summarising major observations.

## 3.2 Joining Platform Work

As noted in the previous Chapter, data from the primary survey revealed that 82 per cent of platform workers are relatively young, below 40 years old. There are also 12 per cent of workers pursuing educational courses/training along with platform work. In this context, it would be appropriate to understand the reasons for joining platform work, their activity status before joining it and the nature of engagement.

### 3.2.1 Reasons for Joining Platform Work

During the survey, an attempt was made to understand why individuals join platform work. An important reason noted by workers to join platform work is flexibility associated with the job—the reason noted by about one-third of workers, as presented in

Table 3.1. More than one-fourth of the workers cited a lack of job opportunities or business loss as the reason for joining. One-fifth of the workers are engaged in the platform work to earn an additional income. It is important to note that a higher share of food delivery workers cited flexible working hours as a reason for choosing platform work compared to transport workers in platforms.

**Table 3.1: Reasons for Joining Platform Work (in per cent)**

Reasons	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Flexible working hours	41.0	24.3	35.4
Lack of other income source	28.8	26.2	27.9
To earn additional income	20.5	22.4	21.1
Better payment	13.8	17.1	14.9
Possibility of obtaining regular work	9.3	24.3	14.3
Interest in platform work	1.9	6.7	3.5
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

**Note:** Multiple Response.

**Source:** Primary Survey

Mini, working in a food delivery platform in Kochi, noted her experience as follows:

*"Earlier, I used to work in a bakery as a helper. My earnings from the bakery job used to be low, and it wasn't easy to take care of my school-going children. One day, a woman working as a delivery partner with a prominent food platform came to the bakery to pick up an order. I asked her about the nature of work and earnings from platform work. After a few months, I quit my job and became a food delivery partner. Now I earn much better than my previous job and have flexible working time."*

When platform companies started operating in Kerala<sup>2</sup>, they offered high remuneration and incentives to lure individuals to join platform work. To illustrate, Uber was launched in Kochi with the tagline "Join Uber and Earn Monthly Salary up to 1.5 lakhs!" The advertisement was not completely unfounded as several respondents we met during the study recollected that during their initial days working in the transport platforms, they could earn more than Rs.1 lakh per month by working 10 hours daily. Food delivery workers also shared that they used to earn about Rs.50,000 monthly by completing 10 to

<sup>2</sup> Ola and Uber started operation in Kerala during 2014 and Zomato and Swiggy in 2016 and 2018 respectively.

12 daily deliveries. The President of the trade union for online transport workers in Kozhikode noted:

*"We could earn between Rs. 4,000 to 5,000 daily by working 10 to 12 hours. As we used to get high remuneration, we encouraged our friends to join the platform."*

Omsivam, an experienced food delivery worker in Kochi, said:

*"I have been diagnosed with cancer and struggling with chemotherapy. When I started working in platforms, earnings were quite high, which helped me manage my medical expenses without seeking much help from others."*

Reasons for opting for platform work vary for individuals. For instance, flexibility in work figures is a top reason that motivates young workers (below 30 years) to join platform work. Lack of other employment opportunities and the notion of 'not working under anybody' motivate several workers (not presented in Table). Manoj, who works as a food delivery worker in Kozhikode, shares his story as follows:

*"A year ago, I started working for Zomato while pursuing my diploma. Given my enthusiasm for cycling, I opted to deliver orders using a bicycle to earn some pocket money. My family will not permit me to do the delivery job, so I haven't informed them yet. I keep the bag and T-shirt in a friend's shop two streets away from my home. I used to cover my face using a mask so that my family and relatives wouldn't identify me when I was at work. I genuinely enjoy my job."*

**Box 3.1: Elderly in Online Food Delivery Platforms**

Jacob, 60 years old, worked with a marketing firm until recently. He quit his job when it became difficult for him to undertake long travel for work. At the suggestion of a friend, Jacob joined Uber Eats in 2018. He was happy with the work as no one told him what to do or how to do the job. Later, he worked as a delivery partner with Zomato, Swiggy and Shadowfax. Jacob usually works from 7:30 am to 8:30 pm and rarely takes days off. Although he would like to work till 11 pm, difficulties driving at night prevent him from doing so. According to Jacob, working as a delivery partner keeps him active all day.

Aggregators used their strategies to attract workers. While launching travel platforms, aggregators offered high remuneration to attract those in traditional taxi services into the sector. Recognising that merely depending on those from traditional taxi services will not be sustainable, aggregators devised plans to attract more individuals to the sector,

facilitating those who want to join platform work but do not have a vehicle or smartphone. For instance, when Ola was launched in Kochi, they introduced a scheme called "Ola Fleet", a tie-up with Hyundai Motors. Under the scheme, individuals willing to work with Ola could procure a car from Hyundai without any down payment on the condition that each day, Rs. 525 is paid as equated daily instalments. Similarly, those working with Uber could purchase a smartphone without any down payment, for which Rs.1200 was deducted from the weekly earnings of workers as equated weekly instalments. These plans successfully brought unemployed and underemployed individuals without vehicles and smartphones into platform work.

### 3.2.2 Activity Status Before Joining Platform Work

As per data from the primary survey, a large majority of the platform workers were engaged in wage or self-employment while joining the platforms. Only one-tenths were engaged in permanent jobs. One-fifth of the food delivery workers are students, as presented in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Activity Status of Respondent before Joining Platform Work (in per cent)**

Sector	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Temporary job in private sector	26.4	21.9	24.9
Daily manual wage labour	21.0	31.0	24.3
Self-employed	19.3	31.8	23.5
Permanent job in private sector	9.0	11.4	9.8
Temporary job in government	1.2	2.4	1.6
Permanent job in government	0.5	0.5	0.5
Unemployed	1.9	0.5	1.4
Student	20.7	0.5	14.0
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

Compared with food delivery workers, a higher share of those in transport reported as employed as manual labour or self-employed. What is noticeable is the high share of respondents who reported their status as students before joining food delivery work. Evidence of unemployed people joining platform work is weak from the primary survey data. Even women in platform work worked in the private sector or were self-employed before joining platform work (data not presented in the Table).

It is also important to look at the workplace before joining the platform. Table 3.3 presents the place of work of those who reported being employed before joining the platform. The share of those working outside Kerala before joining platform work was 22 per cent. Interestingly, 17 per cent were working in the Gulf before joining platform work. It is important to note that several respondents noted how they ended up as platform workers after returning from the Gulf during COVID-19 in 2020. Similarly, cases of their business running into loss during the COVID-19 lockdown were also narrated by respondents, explaining the high share of respondents stating their status as self-employed before joining platform work. Irshad, a Gulf returnee working for Uber and Ola, stated:

*"I returned to Kerala in 2020, when I lost my job in the Gulf. I planned to start a business in Kerala. During that time, I noticed the advertisements of Uber and Ola, which I found appealing. So, rather than starting a business, I invested all my savings to buy a car to work as an online taxi driver."*

**Table 3.3: Place of Employment of Respondents Before Joining Platform Work (in per cent)**

Location	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Within Kerala	77.2	78.4	77.7
Other India states	6.8	3.8	5.6
Gulf countries	15.7	17.8	16.5
Countries other than Gulf	0.3	-	0.2
<b>Base*</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>533</b>

**Note:** \* those who were employed before joining the platform work.

**Source:** Primary Survey

**Box 3.2: Migrant from Tamil Nadu as Food Delivery Worker in Kerala**

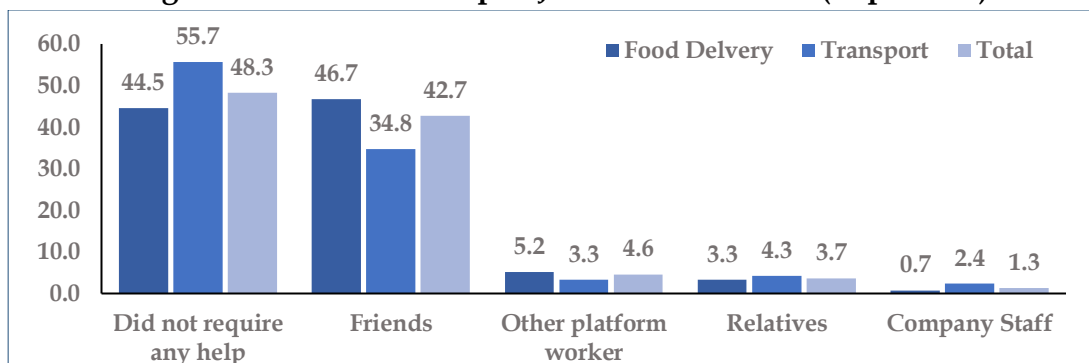
Karmegham moved to Thiruvananthapuram from Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, in 2019. Initially, he worked as a cook in local hotels but was finding it too hard to make ends meet due to poor wages. He could not find another job as he had limited social ties in Thiruvananthapuram. During that time, he learned about an opportunity to work at Swiggy as a food delivery partner. Karmegham is satisfied with his job, and so far, he has not experienced any discrimination from customers, restaurants, other platform workers or aggregator staff. He has also helped many people from Tamil Nadu to join online food delivery platforms. However, almost all of them have returned after a short period due to the physically demanding nature of the job. Karmegham continues to work as a platform worker as he could not find any other better source of livelihood.

### 3.2.3 Process of Joining Platform Work

The process of joining location-based platforms is relatively straightforward. Once the app is installed, the prospective platform worker must update their identification details and that of the vehicle. While registering, workers must also indicate a zone (a geographical area) where they prefer to work. Platforms usually require formal identification, such as a driving licence, PAN card, vehicle registration details and insurance. Subsequently, the individual must undergo an online orientation on platform work. The orientation involves watching multiple instructional videos on features of the app, which they will use for work (steps before starting work each day, steps to be followed when accepting an order/ride or order/ride completion process), dealing with service providers and customers, grievance support, insurance, strategies to earn more etc. To complete the training, the potential platform worker must take a test online and qualify. After completing the training, the individual should pay the joining fee (if any) and collect uniforms and/or bags, which will complete onboarding as a platform worker.

Data from the survey reveals that nearly half of the respondents did not require any help joining platform work, as presented in Figure 3.1. Compared to food delivery workers, a higher share of transport workers reported not requiring help from any source to join platform work. Among those who required help, more than two-fifths of the respondents approached their friends to resolve their queries. Notably, 5 per cent of workers sought the help of other platform workers to complete the joining procedures. Most platform companies offer workers a referral bonus, so they will likely refer and help new joiners complete the procedures.

**Figure 3.1: Source of Help to Join Platform Work (in per cent)**



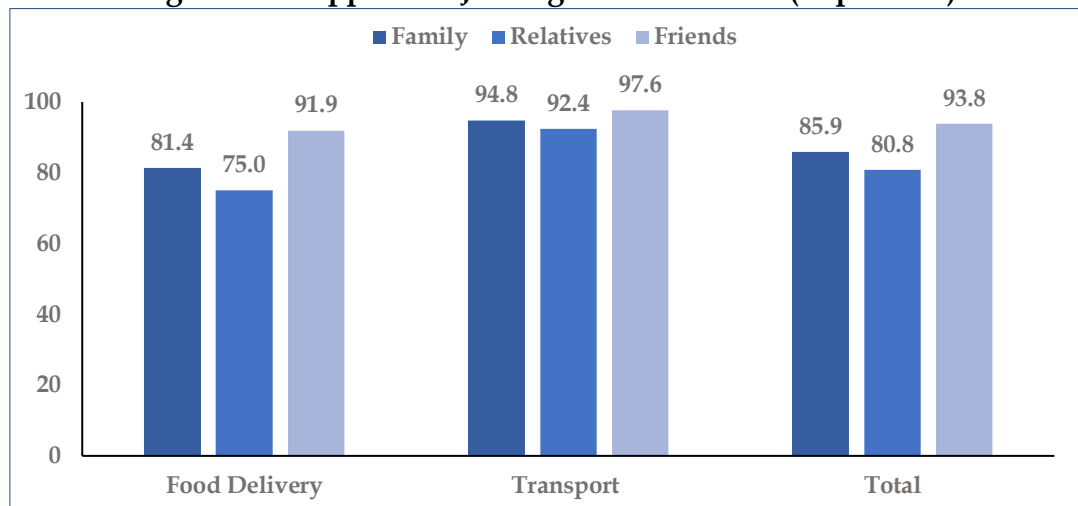
**Note:** Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers; Multiple Responses.

**Source:** Primary Survey

Workers hardly faced any difficulties completing the orientation training provided by platforms, as 97 per cent of respondents noted. However, a few respondents found it difficult to follow the training as the Malayalam option was unavailable. On further probe, it was found that, at least in food delivery platforms, there are now options to have orientation in multiple languages, including Malayalam. Although some workers noted difficulties in following the app for navigation, they added that such difficulties were resolved later.

Figure 3.2 presents the support received by workers from family, friends, and relatives when joining the platform work. Friends were more supportive when respondents joined platform work than family and relatives. Food delivery workers received less support from family, relatives, and friends than transport workers.

**Figure 3.2: Support for Joining Platform Work (in per cent)**



**Note:** Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers; Multiple Responses.

**Source:** Primary Survey

The notion of platform work as a mean job was a primary concern shared by family, relatives, and friends to discourage respondents. A young food delivery worker noted:

*"My father said it is better to stay home unemployed than go for delivery work. Even now, if someone enquires, my family members do not tell anyone that I am a delivery worker; rather, they say I am searching for a job."*

### **Box 3.3: Working on Platform without Family's Approval**

It has been a year since Arun graduated, and he has been struggling to secure a job. Fed up with his lack of success in securing a job last year, Arun decided to work as a delivery partner for Swiggy. Arun was apprehensive of the family's reaction to taking up the platform worker job, so he informed his family that he secured an office job in Ernakulam. Every day, Arun would leave home dressed formally and change into his uniform after reaching Kochi. One day, a relative discovered Arun in uniform, celebrating a co-worker's birthday. However, Arun managed the situation by cooking up a story that the uniform belonged to his friend who works at Swiggy, which he playfully wore as part of a birthday celebration. Since that day, Arun fears his family discovering his secret of working on the platform.

Other reasons cited to discourage respondents from joining platform work were unsafe working conditions, including the risk of accidents, low earnings, jobs not matching respondents' educational qualifications and the physically strenuous nature of platform work.

#### **3.2.4 Expenses Incurred for Assets to Work in Platform**

Respondents incur expenses to join the platform to purchase vehicles or mobiles. Half the transport and almost one-fourth of the food delivery workers purchased only vehicles to join platform work. However, a group also purchased both mobile and vehicle to join the platform work, as presented in Table 3.4. The share of those who purchased a vehicle to engage as a platform worker is 43 per cent (32 per cent of food delivery workers and 69 per cent of transport workers). A higher share of workers has purchased vehicles rather than mobiles to engage in platform work.

**Table 3.4: Purchase of Mobile and Vehicle for Joining Platform Work (in per cent)**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Food Delivery</b>	<b>Transport</b>	<b>Total</b>
None	66.8	31.0	56.5
Vehicle only	24.0	50.0	31.5
Both vehicle & mobile	8.2	18.5	11.1
Mobile only	1.0	0.5	0.9
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

### Box 3.4: Other Expenses Incurred to Join Platform Work

The food delivery platforms provide food delivery workers uniforms, bags, raincoats, mobile covers, mobile holders, helmets, face masks, etc., to ensure a hassle-free delivery experience. Usually, workers are directed to purchase these items from designated stores by ordering them online via an app. It is important to note that workers need to make full payment at the time of purchase, and they are reimbursed on fulfilling conditions such as completing a fixed number of orders within a stipulated time, completing a fixed number of peak time orders, etc. Saji, a food delivery worker from Kottayam, shared his experience as follows:

*"The amount I paid, 500 rupees, for the raincoat was refunded when I completed a minimum of six orders during the peak time, working four Sundays within 40 days of joining."*

When the question on assets required for platform work was probed, a food delivery worker's response was as follows:

*"It is true that only mobile phones and motorbikes are required for delivering food. But what makes our delivery experience hassle-free is accessories such as good earphones, power banks, water-proof mobile pouches, and mobile holders. Due to extreme weather conditions, these accessories often get damaged. It would be great if the company provides them for free."*

A large majority of those who purchased vehicles/mobile phones to engage in platform work brought it by taking loans. Little more than one-fourth of food delivery workers who purchased vehicles or mobile phones did not take a loan. The corresponding proportion is much lower among transport works, just 11.6 per cent. Discussions with respondents indicated that securing a loan is hassle-free for platform workers. As noted by an online taxi driver from Kozhikode:

*"It is easier to avail loans from banks if we submit a letter from the aggregator that I'm registered in Ola or Uber."*

**Table 3.5: Incurred Loan to Purchase Vehicle and Mobile for Platform Work (in per cent)**

Response	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
For vehicles only	55.1	67.2	60.6
For vehicle & mobile	13.8	20.7	16.9
For mobile only	4.3	0.9	2.8
No Loan	26.8	11.2	19.7
<b>Base*</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>254</b>

**Note:** \* those who reported purchasing vehicles, mobile, or both to join platform work.

**Source:** Primary Survey

Incurring a loan to purchase a vehicle and mobile phone burdens platform workers. As presented in Table 3.6, transport workers have a larger burden from purchasing assets to work in platforms; the average outstanding debt for transport workers is Rs. 3.11 lakhs compared with Rs. 66,207 for food delivery workers. In the case of food delivery workers, the average debt incurred is lower as they have taken loans mainly to procure two-wheelers.

**Table 3.6: Average Outstanding Debt on Mobile and Vehicle (In Rs)**

Asset Type	Food Delivery	Transport
Mobile	10,929.41	7,570.71
Vehicle	69,635.56	3,13719.53
Average Outstanding	66,207.72	3,11532.91

**Note:** Base is those with outstanding loans from purchasing a vehicle, mobile or both (N=183).

**Source:** Primary Survey

While some workers could quit platform work when their expectations were unmet, those who joined platform work by incurring loans find it challenging to quit as they have to repay the debt. Paul, an online taxi driver from Thrissur who purchased a car on loan, explained:

*"To settle five lakh rupees that I have taken as a loan to purchase a car, I have paid around eight lakh rupees during the last five years. I used to work long hours, and most of my earnings were spent to repay the debt. I have been stuck in the debt spiral for years and can't find an alternative. By the time I settle the debt, my vehicle will become completely damaged."*

### 3.2.5 Time Spend in Platform Work

As presented in Table 3.7, 54 per cent of workers are relatively new and have completed only one year or less in the platform work. Compared to food delivery workers, one-fourth of the transport workers have more than five years of experience in platform work. Among food delivery workers, 62 per cent have joined platforms within one year or less than one year. Differences in the time spent in platform work by food delivery and transport workers could also be related to workers' characteristics. Food delivery workers are younger, better educated, and have other work or study engagements than transport workers.

It is important to note that while the percentage of people who joined food delivery has steadily increased over the years, there is a significant drop in the number of people who joined transport work in 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic when people restrained from travel. Due to restrictions on population movements, online taxi services were not permitted to operate during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even after restrictions were eased, people were reluctant to use public transport due to the fear of COVID-19 infection. This has caused a severe downfall to both platform companies and workers.<sup>3</sup> A trade union leader from Kozhikode who works among platform workers noted:

*"It took two years for the sector to return to normal. By the time the situation was back to normal, the indebted online transport workers had fallen into colossal debt traps."*

**Table 3.7: Number of Years in Platform Work (in per cent)**

Duration	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Less than one year	30.5	19.5	26.8
One year	31.9	17.6	27.1
Two years	16.7	5.2	12.9
Three years	8.1	5.7	7.3
Four years	9.2	12.9	10.5
Five years	3.1	13.3	6.5
Six years	0.5	11.0	4.0
Seven years	-	11.0	3.7
More than seven years	-	3.8	1.2
<b>Base</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

The food delivery sector witnessed exponential growth during COVID-19. Firstly, the food delivery platform companies could expand their customer base, particularly in metros, as people developed a habit of ordering food online due to lockdown restrictions. Secondly, urban youth from lower middle-income households who were unemployed during COVID-19 took up delivery work as a source of income to survive the pandemic.

<sup>3</sup>. A study by Flourish Ventures (2020) based on an online survey among platform workers titled '*The Digital Hustle: Gig Worker Financial Lives Under Pressure*', noted that while most Indian gig workers earned over ₹25,000 per month before the pandemic, by August nearly nine in 10 were making less than ₹15,000 per month. Moreover, 44 per cent borrowed, 45 per cent have to cut consumption and 83 per cent have used their savings, to cope up with reduction in income during COVID-19.

Evidently, 79 per cent of food delivery workers covered during the survey have joined between 2021 and 2023. However, the availability of surplus labour made the sector prone to profiteering by platform companies.

*"Before COVID-19, hardly 500 food delivery workers were employed in Thiruvananthapuram, and everyone knew each other. During that period, we used to get Rs. 200 as an incentive after attaining an order pay<sup>4</sup> of Rs. 600. However, during the pandemic, the company changed their plan into providing Rs.230 as an incentive for an order pay of Rs. 750, making the target unreachable for delivery workers. Because of the pandemic, we could not organise any strike then. Later, it became impossible to bargain as it was difficult to bring together around ten thousand workers in the district who joined the sector during the pandemic."*

The above response of a food delivery worker from Thiruvananthapuram demonstrates how platforms could change remuneration policies when individuals are desperate for work and when it is challenging to develop solidarity among platform workers.

The free-wheeling recruitment system of platforms allows them to accommodate as many individuals as possible to maintain a reserve of workers ready to work on the platform. The reserve of excess workers creates stiff competition among platform workers as, at a point in time, the supply of workers exceeds the demand. The excess supply of workers gives an upper hand to aggregators to change rules of engagement and remuneration at short notice, thereby limiting workers' power to negotiate employment conditions. Reducing remuneration due to an excess supply of platform workers results in poor earnings and long working hours, ultimately resulting in workers quitting platform work. Still, some may be forced to continue due to a lack of other options.

Among online transport workers, the traditional ride-hailers are the first to quit platform work and try to get back to their previous job profile. Returning to their previous employment seems easy for those with contacts with their earlier acquaintances, but others find it challenging to quit platform work. Nevertheless, traditional ride-hailers moving out of platform work do not create any shortage of workers in the sector. Bharadkar et al. (2021) state that the lack of alternative work opportunities in urban areas

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<sup>4</sup> Base for calculating remuneration, which is the payment calculated based on distance travelled by the platform workers. Please refer Box 3.5 for details.

and low entry barriers are causing market saturation for platform works. The void created by traditional ride-hailers was immediately filled by an influx of workers entering the online platforms irrespective of the demand. In Ernakulam alone, close to one-fifth of the sample respondents working in online transport platforms either do not reside in Ernakulam or shifted their residence to Ernakulam less than six months ago. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many working in online transport platforms in Ernakulam are from northern districts of Kerala. Akbar, who returned to traditional ride-hailing after quitting an online transport platform, noted:

*"...they drastically reduced our benefits, and many of us decided to quit the platform, thinking they would fail due to the shortage of drivers. But the taxi and auto drivers from neighbouring districts have filled the gap. At the same time as people prefer platforms over traditional ride-hailing, the earning of those who returned to traditional ride-hailing was significantly affected."*

Unlike other platform workers, the food delivery workers are not service providers but act as intermediaries connecting service providers (restaurants) and customers. Food delivery workers occupy the fourth position outside platform models' triangular power relationship (aggregator-service providers-customer). Due to the dependence on food delivery workers, controls exhibited by platforms on work conditions differ from those of the transport sector. Over the years, online food delivery platforms have not made any major changes to the remuneration, leading to food delivery workers quitting platform work. However, aggregators introduce new offers to workers when demand for additional food delivery workers emerges, say during festive seasons. Additionally, aggregators provide a "referral bonus" to workers for referring new workers, which also helps them maintain a threshold of delivery workers in the zone.

### **3.3 Employment Conditions in Platform Work**

This section will examine the extent to which platform work is flexible, the number of platforms workers are engaged in simultaneously, and reasons for choosing to work with certain platforms.

#### **3.3.1 Flexibility in Work**

As platform work promises to offer flexible work, during the survey, it was enquired how much flexibility workers could avail. Interaction with platform workers revealed that they

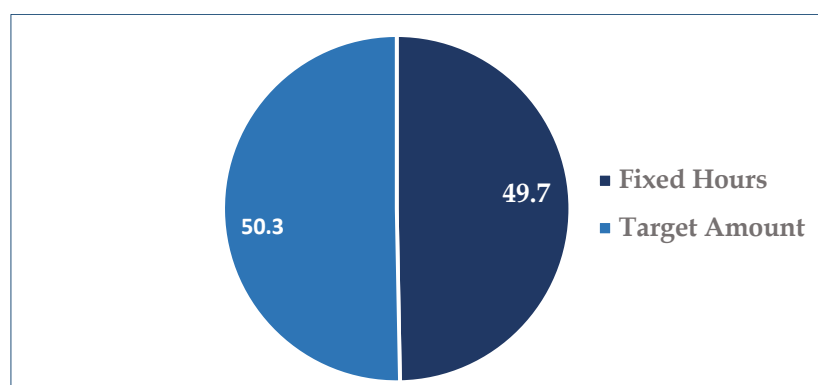
follow different work schedules to maximise their earnings and to balance their personal responsibilities and platform work. Here, the focus is to understand platform work flexibility from platform workers' perspective—how workers plan their workday, work time, distance travelled, etc.

### 3.3.1.1 Planning the Workday

Generally, it is up to an individual worker to choose any time of the day or night and put in as many hours as they wish. However, these choices imply how much they could earn each day. Platform workers seem to follow two approaches to managing their working day; either they work towards achieving a target amount or work for fixed hours. Platform workers call it a day when they achieve their target, be it the number of working hours or the target amount.

Data from the primary survey reveal that half of the platform workers covered in the survey work by setting a target amount, while the other half work only for fixed hours in a day, as presented in Figure 3.3. In-depth interviews with workers revealed that part-time workers, persons with other sources of income, women and individuals who cannot work for long hours, such as aged workers or persons with health issues, are the ones who choose to work for fixed hours in a day. There is no difference in the pattern of choosing amount versus duration between food delivery and transport workers in the platform sector (not presented in the Figure).

**Figure 3.3: Pattern of Working in Platforms (in per cent)**



**Note:** Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.

**Source:** Primary Survey

As presented in Table 3.8, the majority of platform workers could afford to take a break from platform work, either for personal reasons or to pursue other income-generating activities. Clearly, this indicates flexibility associated with platform work, particularly

those who could afford to work for less than 20 days in a month: close to one-fourth reported so. However, an equal share, close to one-fourth of workers worked all days a month. The share of respondents who reported working all days a month is higher for transport workers, 36 per cent. The average number of days transport workers work in a month is higher than that of food delivery workers.

**Table 3.8: Number of Days Engaged in Platform Work in a Month (in per cent)**

Days	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
<= 15 days	11.0	3.8	8.5
16 - 20	16.0	10.0	14.0
21 - 25	34.0	20.5	29.5
26 - 29	21.1	29.5	24.0
30 days	17.9	36.2	24.0
Average days worked	23.9	26.4	24.7
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

### 3.3.1.2 Duration of Work

Regarding hours of employment, 42 per cent of platform workers spend between 8 to 11 hours a day (Table 3.9). Among transport workers, 7 per cent reported spending more than 20 hours daily. Two factors could explain the higher average time transport workers spend: the higher investment made to work in the platform (to rent or purchase a vehicle on loan) and a pattern of staying online during sleeping hours, expecting a ride, which is recorded as waiting for work. Compared with transport workers, food delivery workers have more flexible working options, working only during peak times (say lunch or dinner), resulting in fewer working hours. Compared to food delivery workers, transport workers spend more time on average on platform work, 12.3 hours for transport workers versus 10.1 hours for food delivery workers.

**Table 3.9: Time Spend in a Day for Platform Work (in per cent)**

Hours	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Less than 8 hours	17.6	6.2	13.8
8 - 11 hours	45.0	34.8	41.6
12 hours	16.0	27.1	19.7
12.1 - 15 hours	18.6	16.7	17.9
15.1 - 20 hours	2.8	8.1	4.6
Above 20 hours	-	7.1	2.4
Average hours worked	10.1	12.3	10.9
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

Table 3.10 presents the maximum time spent on any day by a platform worker covered in the survey. Regarding food delivery workers, more than one-third have reported spending a maximum time between 12 to 15 hours at work. But in the case of transport workers, a little more than one-fifth have spent between 15 to 22 hours, while 17 per cent reported having spent more than 22 hours. Compared with food delivery workers, transport workers have spent more hours; on average, the maximum time they spent was 15.2 hours versus 12.3 hours for transport workers. A food delivery worker in Thiruvananthapuram said:

*"I joined Swiggy when petrol cost was Rs. 63 per litre. Swiggy used to provide Rs.5 per Km for delivering an order. Now the petrol costs are almost double, but no changes were made to the rate card. Also, Swiggy introduced the My Shift System during COVID-19, where workers must book their preferred work slots in advance. Further, incentives were also linked to the number of hours someone works in Swiggy. These changes forced us to work 11 to 12 hours daily to ensure incentives. It is extremely tiring."*

**Table 3.10: Maximum Time Spent in a Day for Platform Work (in per cent)**

Hours	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Less than 8 hours	6.2	3.3	5.3
8 - 11.5 hours	28.2	17.2	24.4
12 hours	18.3	16.7	17.8
12.1 - 15 hours	34.0	23.8	30.6
15.1 - 22 hours	12.6	21.9	15.7
Above 22 hours	0.7	17.1	6.2
<b>Maximum hours spent (average)</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>13.3</b>
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Source: Primary Survey

### 3.3.1.3 Choosing the Working Time

During the survey, an effort was made to determine the time slots chosen by workers, given the flexible work options provided by platforms. Table 3.11 presents the time slots chosen by workers in food delivery and transport. Clearly, the majority of food delivery workers work between 12 pm to 9 pm, including lunch and dinner peaks. However, the transport workers are observed to start their day in the early morning, aligning themselves with the timings of trains and buses.

**Table 3.11: Time Slot Opted by Platform Workers to Work (in per cent)**

Time Slot	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
12 am - 5.59 am	12.1	23.3	15.9
6 am - 11.59 am	72.1	96.7	80.3
12 pm - 2.59 pm	86.9	94.8	89.5
3 pm - 5.59 pm	78.8	92.4	83.3
6 pm - 8.59 pm	86.2	89.0	87.1
9 pm - 11.59 pm	69.8	57.1	65.6
<b>Base</b>	<b>420.0</b>	<b>210.0</b>	<b>630.0</b>

Note: Multiple Responses.

Source: Primary Survey

Table 3.12 presents data on reasons platform workers choose different time slots. The opportunity to earn more tops the reasons stated by both food delivery and transport workers to choose a particular time slot. This is understandable because aggregators provide higher remuneration and incentives to workers ready to work during peak times and late nights. Apart from the possibility of earning a higher income, domestic

responsibilities were cited by 9 per cent of workers, and attending educational courses was cited by 8 per cent of workers as reasons for choosing a particular time slot. It is important to note that relatively young food delivery workers cited the above two reasons more prominently than transport workers. Other prominent reasons workers cite include their engagements in other income-generating activities, safety concerns and health reasons.

**Table 3.12: Reasons for Choosing Particular Time Slot for Work (in per cent)**

Reasons	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Secure better earnings	72.5	87.0	77.4
Responsibilities at home	10.1	5.8	8.7
To pursue education	11.8	0.5	8.0
Engaged in other income-generating activities	8.4	2.4	6.4
Safety concerns	2.4	1.9	2.2
Health concerns	2.2	3.8	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

**Note:** Multiple Responses.

**Source:** Primary Survey

### 3.3.1.4 Distance Travelled in Platform Work

Kilometres travelled for an order/ride is a criterion that decides remuneration; generally, workers are not averse to travelling more distance for work. Data from the primary survey indicate that the distance a platform worker travels daily is high. As presented in Table 3.13, close to one-fourth of transport workers travelled between 151 to 200 on a normal day. One-fifth of transport workers travel more than 200 kilometres every day. Due to the difference in the nature of work, the transport workers travel slightly more than the food delivery workers. In the case of food delivery workers, the majority travel below 200 kilometres a day. Further, distance travelled is directly correlated with time workers spend in a day for platform work; as they spend long hours at work, the distance travelled to deliver orders/rides increases proportionately.

**Table 3.13: Distance Travelled on a Normal Day for Platform Work (in per cent)**

Distance (in Km)	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Up to 50	4.5	4.8	4.6
51 - 100	21.4	27.6	23.5
101 - 150	28.8	21.9	26.5
151 - 200	28.6	23.8	27.0
201 - 250	11.2	12.9	11.7
Above 250	5.5	9.0	6.7
Average distance travelled	160.91	170.62	164.15
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

To secure their first order, 23 per cent of workers travelled less than one kilometre on a normal day, as presented in Table 3.14. At the same time, a small percentage of platform workers also travelled more than 15 kilometres to secure their first order, indicating the presence of people from urban fringes and rural areas in platform work. The average distance (mean) travelled by a transport worker to secure their first order is 8 kilometres, which is one kilometre more than the average distance travelled by a food delivery worker. Discussions with platform workers indicated that over the years, the distance travelled by workers to get their first order has reduced as the platform companies expanded their operations to multiple zones.

**Table 3.14: Distance Travelled on Normal Day by Platform Worker to Secure First Order (in per cent)**

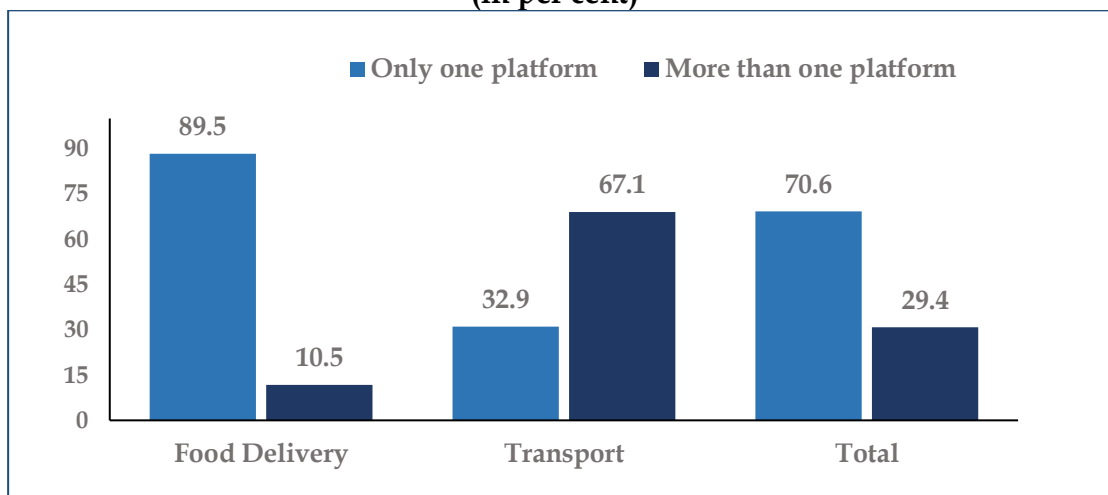
Distance (in Km)	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Less than 1	20.3	27.6	22.7
1 - 5	37.4	32.4	35.7
5 - 10	20.0	15.8	18.6
10 - 15	10.2	9.0	9.8
15 - 20	6.9	3.3	5.7
Above 20 Km	5.2	11.9	7.5
Average distance travelled	7.1	8.0	7.4
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

*Source:* Primary Survey

### 3.3.2 Working in Multiple Platforms

Workers report working on multiple platforms as a major strategy to improve their earnings. Data from the survey found that nearly 30 per cent of workers are simultaneously working on multiple platforms, as presented in Figure 3.4. The percentage of people engaged in multiple platforms is higher in transport than food delivery. While only one-tenth of food delivery workers work on multiple platforms, two-thirds of transport workers choose to work on multiple platforms. Compared to transport platforms, food delivery platforms are stringent. Food delivery workers face punitive actions like lowering their rating, loss of incentives and consequently, reduction in earnings if they cancel/decline orders or fail to deliver an order on time. On the other hand, as transport platforms like Uber and Ola have discontinued the incentive system, workers are not worried if they decline or cancel a ride, which gives them the flexibility to work on multiple platforms. Customer ratings in transport platforms are said to make little impact on the number of rides assigned to transport workers. Further, for a transport worker, it is costly to wait to receive a ride from one platform. So, transport workers log in to multiple platforms, often simultaneously.

**Figure 3.4: Pattern of Engaging with Platforms During Last Three Months (in per cent)**



**Note:** Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.

**Source:** Primary Survey

People who opt to work for multiple platforms (98 per cent) opined that they do so to ensure sufficient work and improve their earnings. Working on multiple platforms helps workers choose between platforms that give special offers and incentives to workers. The reasoning given by Jithu, a food delivery worker in Malappuram, for registering on multiple platforms was as follows:

*"Working only for one platform is risky. If one gets good earnings in two consecutive days, the algorithm automatically assigns fewer rides in the following days. Hence, workers tend to shift between the platforms irrespective of their earnings."*

Interestingly, the workers prefer to work under multiple aggregators in the same sector. For instance, a food delivery person in Swiggy might opt to work in Zomato rather than as a transport worker in Uber or Ola. Although there are instances in which workers completely switch their employment from food delivery to transport and vice versa, they rarely work simultaneously in both sectors.

Respondents were also probed on reasons for choosing a particular platform. As presented in Table 3.15, the possibility of receiving higher orders/rides is a crucial factor determining the choice of working in a platform. Other important reasons are flexibility in work, better remuneration per order/ride, and platforms others recommend. There also seems to be a difference between food delivery and transport workers regarding reasons for choosing one platform over another. In the case of food delivery workers, flexibility in work is the topmost reason, while for transport workers, it is possible to receive a higher number of rides.

**Table 3.15: Factors that Determine Choice of Platform (in per cent)**

Reasons	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
More orders/rides	27.0	75.6	43.2
Better flexibility	40.4	10.2	30.4
Better payment per order	24.3	10.7	19.8
Recommended by others	13.4	4.9	10.6
Attractive offers to Workers	5.1	2.4	4.2
Relatively less grievances	3.6	0.0	2.4
Good grievance redressal	1.5	0.5	1.1
<b>Base*</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>616</b>

**Note:** \* excluding non-responses; Multiple Responses.

**Source:** Primary Survey

Lack of adequate payment, inability to secure adequate income, and lack of job satisfaction are the top reasons cited by platform workers to discontinue working and shift to other platforms. Compared with food delivery workers, a higher share of transport workers has cited 'unable to make adequate earnings' as a reason to shift from one platform to another.

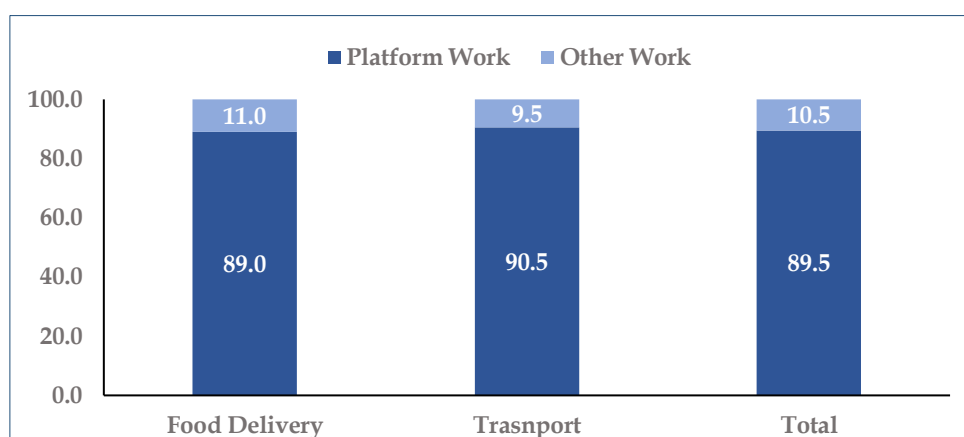
### 3.4 Income and Expenditure

This subsection will examine the expenditure incurred by workers on work-related expenditures on platforms. During the survey, it was also noted that several workers find it difficult to calculate their earnings and work-related expenditures as they do not note down details. Further, it is more difficult for those who also work outside the platform, such as transport workers engaged in a travel agency fleet or autorickshaw drivers hired by passengers outside the platform app. To overcome these challenges, the research team probed the income and expenditure figures reported by respondents and cross-checked them to ensure they were not inconsistent.

#### 3.4.1 Dependency on Platform Work

For the majority of respondents, platform work is the primary source of income, as presented in Figure 3.5. Even minor changes in the remuneration policies of aggregators have a severe impact on their earnings.

**Figure 3.5: Main Source of Income for Platform Workers (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.  
Source: Primary Survey

It was found that about one-fifth of workers were engaged in income-generating activities outside platform work, which serve as their primary or secondary source of income. As presented in Table 3.16, among those who reported income other than from platform work, 43 per cent were self-employed, followed by one-third per cent engaged in manual labour and another one-fifth working in contract/temporary jobs in the private sector. Compared to food delivery workers, a higher share of transport workers are engaged in self-employment or business. Because many of the traditional auto/taxi drivers who turned to online platforms still use their local ties to earn secondary income outside

platform work. Also, it is common in Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur for the traditional auto/taxi workers to register on ride-hailing platforms to avail trips during idle time, such as waiting in stands or returning after dropping passengers.

**Table 3.16: Alternative Income Source of Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Income Source	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Self-employed	35.6	53.1	42.6
Daily manual wage labour	28.8	38.8	32.8
Temporary job in private sector	27.4	8.2	19.7
Temporary job in government	4.1	2.0	3.3
Permanent job in private sector	2.7	-	1.6
Permanent job in government	1.4	-	0.8
<b>Base*</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>122</b>

**Note:** \* who reported as having alternative sources of income; Multiple Responses.

**Source:** Primary Survey

### Box 3.5: Workers' Remuneration in Platforms

#### a. Food Delivery

Online food delivery platforms have changed their payment structure (known as *rate card*) multiple times. Until 2018, food delivery platforms offered Rs. 60 for the worker as a minimum charge for a distance travelled up to four kilometres and for any distance above four kilometres, an additional Rs.8 per kilometre. Post-2018, the amount paid to the worker per kilometre travelled was revised several times. According to the latest recent rate card, a food delivery person earns Rs. 20 for up to four kilometres and an additional charge of Rs.5.50 per kilometre for a distance travelled above four kilometres. These earnings corresponding to the distance travelled are termed *order pay*. Apart from *order pay*, a *surge pay* of Rs.10 is provided for working during peak time between 12 pm to 3 pm (lunch peak) and 6 pm to 9 pm (dinner peak) and during poor weather, say when it is raining. Apart from these payments, workers may receive tips from customers.

Food delivery platforms also set 'targets', which could be daily or weekly. Targets are the minimum number of orders a worker should complete to become eligible for *incentives*. The workers can obtain daily or weekly incentives set by the company once they complete the target. Until 2021, incentives were given proportionate to the *order pay* or the number of orders completed by workers in a day. During festive seasons, aggregators also offer 'special incentives' to attract more workers on conditions that they meet targets. Apart from completing the target, workers must comply with specific conditions to qualify for incentives. A model of daily incentives offered by a prominent food delivery platform before 2021 is given below:

Order Pay	Incentive	Conditions
Rs. 400	Rs. 150	a. Should be logged in the system from 8 am till 10 pm b. Must complete lunch and dinner peaks c. Maximum number of denials refusing to accept an order should be one
Rs. 600	Rs. 300	d. There should be no cancellation (declining after accepting the order) by the food delivery partner
Rs. 700	Rs. 450	

The food delivery companies changed the payment structure after 2021 by introducing a *shift system*. Zomato introduced the "GIGS" system in March 2022, and Swiggy introduced the "My Shift" system. After the introduction of GIGS and My Shift, workers no longer enjoy the freedom to work whenever they want to. Instead, they must book the slot in advance (of one to two hours) when they will be available for work. While Swiggy maintained its fixed rate card system, Zomato initiated an artificial intelligence (AI) equipped payment system, which also considers customer demand. Unlike the previous system, workers cannot estimate their remuneration as they receive different amounts for the same distance travelled during different times of the day. Similarly, they revised the incentive system by replacing the order pay with the number of hours worked. For instance, Zomato provides incentives based on the number of gigs completed (a day is divided into gigs of one-hour duration, except for peak lunch and dinner, where gigs duration is two hours). While certain provisions, such as a waiting charge of one rupee per minute, were removed, platforms introduced new options, such as *return pay* for travelling long distances (above 7 km) to deliver an order. A weekly incentive offered by a prominent food delivery platform in 2023 is given below:

<i>Completed Gigs</i>	<i>Incentive</i>	<i>Conditions</i>
45	Rs. 1200	a. Should be logged in the system from 8 am till 10 pm b. Must complete lunch and dinner peaks
60	Rs. 2300	c. Maximum number of denials (refusing to accept the order) and cancellations (declining after accepting) by the food delivery partner should not be more than one d. No incomplete gig (going offline before completing the booked work shift)

#### **b. Transport**

Unlike food delivery, transport platforms do not follow a fixed rate card or the rate fixed by the government of Kerala for rental charges for hiring auto or taxi services. Instead, the rate for each ride is algorithmically determined based on customer demand. From the amount charged to the customer for each ride, roughly 36 per cent is taken as commission by online travel platforms. However, the rate is not fixed; sometimes, they extend their commission to 50 per cent, and sometimes they do not take any commission. So, online taxi drivers cannot predict their earnings before the ride, nor can they issue a complaint if their payment is low.

Discussions with those working for transport platforms indicated that they receive (without deducting commission and work-related expenses) they receive Rs.11 to Rs.12 per kilometre for local trips and Rs.13 to Rs.14 for intercity trips. These rates may vary during festivals or holidays when the demand is high. Earlier online transport platforms used to provide fixed incentives for each ride completed. Later, it was changed to daily/weekly incentives and eventually stopped in 2018. Lately, startups on online travel platforms have introduced innovations in the payment structure, such as no commission, monthly salary, negotiation, etc.

### 3.4.2 Revenue from Platform Work

Compared to food delivery workers, those involved in transport reported higher monthly revenue, as presented in Table 3.17. A little more than three fourths of those involved in transport service reported earning more than Rs. 25,000 per month. The share of transport workers who earn above Rs. 30,000 is 57 per cent. Among the transport workers, the difference in the earnings between auto and taxi drivers is striking. In comparison with autorickshaws, taxi drivers earn better income. Regarding food delivery workers, 44 per cent reported earning between Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 25,000 per month. It is important to note that these figures are their total revenue, which includes basic pay, incentives, surge charges and tips.

**Table 3.17: Monthly Revenue of Platform Workers (in per cent)**

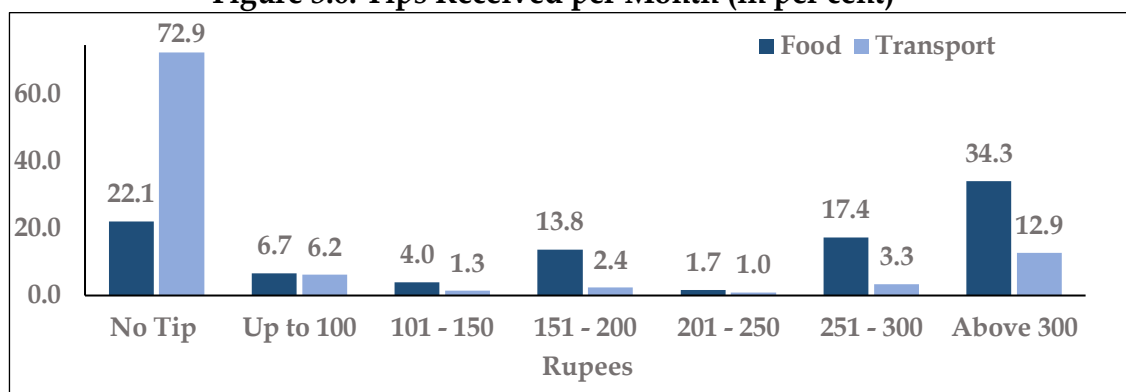
Income (In Rupees)	Food Delivery	Transport		
		Auto	Taxi	Total
<= 10,000	12.1	3.3	0.6	1.4
10,001 - 15,000	13.8	8.3	2.7	4.3
15,001 - 20,000	23.1	10.0	2.7	4.8
20,001 - 25,000	20.5	15.0	13.3	13.8
25,001 - 30,000	14.3	31.7	14.0	19.0
Above 30,000	16.2	31.7	66.7	56.7
Average Income	21,800.79	29,957.50	45,925.33	41,363.10
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>210</b>

**Note:** Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.

**Source:** Primary Survey

There is a general perception that platform workers tend to receive tips from the customer, contributing a major share of their earnings. We found no evidence from the primary survey data (Figure 3.6). On the contrary, 22 per cent of food delivery workers and 73 per cent of transport workers did not receive tips. In general, food delivery workers received more tips than transport workers; 34 per cent of food delivery workers received above Rs. 300 on average a month as tips.

**Figure 3.6: Tips Received per Month (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.

Source: Primary Survey

### 3.4.3 Expenditure Incurred to Work in Platforms

Platform workers spend a considerable share of revenue to meet work-related expenditures. As part of the survey, an effort was made to determine how much platform workers spend on work-related expenses. The average expenditure incurred by platform workers in a month is presented in Table 3.18. The monthly expenditure to work on platforms is higher for transport workers, particularly those riding car.

**Table 3.18: Monthly Work Related Expenditure Incurred by Platform Workers (in Rs)**

Average monthly expenditure	Food Delivery	Transport		
		Auto	Taxi	Total
	7,647.86	10,897.47	20,126.80	17,489.85
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>210</b>

Source: Primary Survey

Fuel charges are a major component of expenses for both food delivery and transport workers in platforms. It is important to note that the distance travelled by workers is an important component in calculating remuneration for each order/ride. A point of contention between workers and aggregators is that remuneration for workers has not been revised despite increasing fuel prices. Other than fuel prices, vehicle rent and other vehicle-related expenses are also higher for transport workers than food delivery workers. The President of an independent online taxi driver's union explained the situation as follows:

*"I started working in Uber when diesel price was Rs. 54 per litre, now the diesel price is Rs.97. The tyre price increased from Rs.3,800 to Rs.5,400. However, there has been no change in our earnings over the years."*

### Box 3.6: Hiring Vehicles on Rent to Work in Platforms

Those engaged as drivers in online transport platforms can avail themselves of rented vehicles in two ways: either avail vehicles from the fleet of respective platform companies or rent vehicles from outside. Major transport platforms like Uber and Ola allow interested individuals to rent from their fleet of vehicles by registering with them. Once registered, the person becomes a fleet owner under the platform and can sublet their vehicles to drivers. In this case, the driver will have to pay a commission to the fleet owner, roughly 30 per cent, in addition to the commission to be provided to the online travel company. The fleet owners are provided with designated applications to access the vehicle's location, distance travelled by the vehicle, number of trips completed, and earnings from each trip. There are also options to engage as an online taxi driver by renting vehicles from individuals or travel agencies. It is also observed that some travel agencies have attached their vehicles with platforms and become fleet owners to earn money when the vehicles are idle.

#### 3.4.4 Net Income from Platform Work

Table 3.19 presents a breakdown of the net monthly income of platform workers. As is evident, there are significant variations in platform workers' net income. Earnings above Rs. 20,000 are obtained by 23 per cent of food delivery workers and 51 per cent of transport workers. But a significant share of workers, 33 per cent of food delivery workers and 18 per cent of transport workers, only make below Rs. 10,000 per month. Within the transport workers, earnings vary for auto and taxi workers in the platforms.

**Table 3.19: Net Monthly Income of Platform Workers (in per cent)**

Amount (In Rs)	Food Delivery	Transport		
		Auto	Taxi	Total
Up to 5,000	9.7	1.7	7.3	5.6
5,001 - 10,000	22.8	15.0	10.6	11.8
10,001 - 15,000	26.2	26.7	11.3	15.7
15,001 - 20,000	15.5	18.3	10.7	12.9
20,001 - 25,000	11.7	16.7	8.7	11.0
25,001 - 30,000	6.2	8.3	14.7	12.9
30,001 - 35,000	3.1	6.6	6.0	6.2
Above 35,000	1.9	6.7	26.7	21.0
Zero net income	2.9	-	4.0	2.9
<b>Average net income</b>	14,152.92	19,060.03	25,798.53	23,873.25
<b>Base*</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>210</b>

Source: Primary Survey

The data indicates that transport workers, particularly online taxi drivers, earn more than food delivery workers. If vehicle rent is accounted for, the net income will

decrease significantly. There are 39 transport workers who work for platforms by taking vehicles on rent. On average, they incur Rs. 17,332 as vehicle rent. Moreover, it must be noted that monthly vehicle loan repayment is not included here. If that is included, it will further reduce the earnings of transport workers, as a high share of them have taken loans to purchase a vehicle to work in the platform.

As presented in Table 3.20, a clear link exists between how much one earns from platform work and hours spent on the job. While it was clear from Table 3.19 that a little more than one-fifth of the food delivery workers can earn Rs 20,000 or more in a month, 90 per cent are working 8 hours or more daily. Among those working less than 8 hrs in the food delivery sector, more than half earn Rs 10,000 or below. In the case of the transport sector, the share of those individuals who work 8 hrs or more and earn above Rs. 20,000 is much higher.

**Table 3.20: Link between Net Monthly Income and Hours of Engagement in Platform Work (in per cent)**

Amount (In Rs)	Food Delivery		Auto		Taxi		Transport	
	Less than 8 hrs	8 hrs & more	Less than 8 hrs	8 hrs & more	Less than 8 hrs	8 hrs & more	Less than 8 hrs	8 hrs & more
Up to 5,000	31.1	5.2	-		-	7.7	-	6.1
5,001 - 10,000	25.7	22.3	20.0	14.5	25.0	9.9	23.1	11.2
10,001 - 15,000	20.3	27.5	40.0	25.5	50.0	9.2	46.2	13.7
15,001 - 20,000	8.1	17.1	20.0	18.2	-	11.3	7.7	13.2
20,001 - 25,000	9.5	12.1	20.0	16.4	-	9.2	7.7	11.2
25,001 - 30,000	1.4	7.2	-	9.1	-	15.5	-	13.7
30,001 - 35,000	-	3.8	-	7.3	-	6.3	-	6.6
Above 35,000	2.7	1.7	-	7.3	12.5	27.5	7.7	21.8
Zero net income	1.4	3.2	-	-	12.5	3.5	7.7	2.5
Average Net Income	10965.96	14834.53	16064.40	19332.36	15456.50	26381.18	15690.31	24413.24
Base	74	346	5	55	6	142	13	197

Source: Primary Survey

*"At the beginning, both Uber and Ola provided an incentive of Rs.100 to 200 for each trip. However, they have cut down incentives once the demand for drivers has been met. Later, they discontinued payments provided for distance travelled to pick up a customer and travel back after dropping a customer. After some time, they increased their commission rate, and our earnings almost halved within months for the same amount of work. Uber is charging a customer Rs.11 to Rs.12 for one kilometre. After deducting the commission, they provide 7 to 9 rupees to the driver. Considering fuel and maintenance charges, a minimum of 5 rupees is required for a taxi to travel one kilometre. We may not get any return trip several times, so our earning is limited to two or three rupees per kilometre."*

The above response is from the Secretary of an online transport workers union on why they are dissatisfied with the earnings. Unlike formal employment, assets required for platform work are invested solely by workers hoping for secured work. However, with drastic increases experienced in fuel prices and livelihood expenses, workers cannot make a proportional increase in their earnings. Thus, people who invested in assets to work in platforms cannot quit the sector. Using the situation, platform companies make the working conditions more stringent, forcing workers to work more hours.

**Box: 3.7 Other Methods for Remunerating Workers**

The platforms introduce games and rewards from time to time to instil a competitive spirit among workers. The games were designed in such a way that the winners of the games are primarily workers who deliver the maximum number of orders in a zone or those who work for more hours in a week or month. For instance, the top 10 riders in each zone (those who delivered the maximum number of orders within the ideal time set by the app) were given family dinner from the restaurant where they collected the highest number of orders. Similarly, they introduce simple games such as spinning wheels, offering gifts, scratch and win, coupon codes, etc. However, access to these games was only limited to workers who satisfied certain conditions, such as completing 20 'rain orders' in a given week, working 25 hours between 12 am and 6 am a week, etc. The rewards of the games mainly include household appliances like TV, refrigerator, air conditioner, mixer grinder, bike, etc.

### **3.5 Workers Safety and Health**

#### **3.5.1 Accidents at Work**

Due to the nature of work – long work hours, travelling long distances, often late at night and early morning, platform workers are prone to accidents at work. Customer ratings are central in determining workers' earnings, so timely delivery is crucial. From the perspective of platform workers, factors beyond their control could affect their delivery time, like delays in receiving food for delivery from restaurants, heavy traffic, extreme

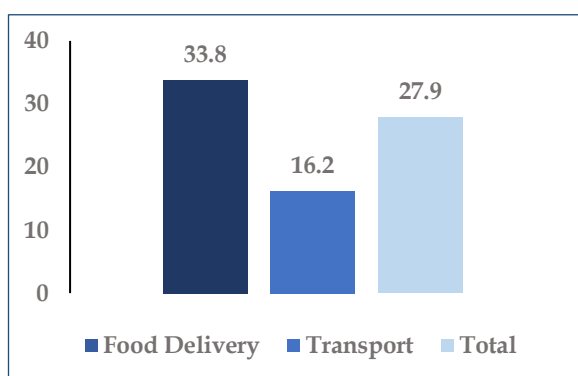
weather, and even poor directions to the delivery location given by the customers. It is not surprising that 28 per cent of respondents have met with an accident during work, as presented in Figure 3.7. Kamalan, a food and grocery delivery person in Kollam, said:

*"I met with several accidents while at work. Sometimes it is my fault and sometimes of others. Accidents are very common in the life of a food delivery worker".*

**Box 3.8: Case of Aggregator Assisting Workers to Meet Health Care Needs**  
 Vishnu was one of the first few delivery workers of Swiggy in Thiruvananthapuram. He met with an accident while delivering food during COVID-19. His right leg kneecap was broken in the accident, and he was hospitalised for two months. As the accident occurred while Vishnu was driving to deliver an order, Swiggy reimbursed the amount spent on treatment. However, Vishnu was unable to work for over a year. As provision for paid leave was unavailable during that time, Vishnu faced financial difficulties. Even now, Vishnu cannot climb stairs and find it difficult to work even short distances. As Vishnu did not have any income, the staff at Swiggy encouraged him to work as a food delivery worker. Swiggy converted his registration with the aggregator to that of a person with a disability. This feature will alert customers that the person delivering food is a person with a disability; customers become more accommodating and will not lower ratings, say if Vishnu refuses to climb stairs.

Food delivery workers are more prone to accidents than transport workers. One-third of food delivery workers and 16 per cent of the transport workers met with accidents while at work. However, the majority of them shared that they did not report the issue to the aggregator (59 per cent of food delivery workers and 71 per cent of transport workers).

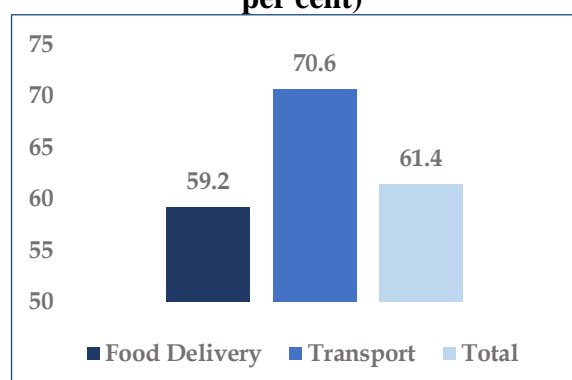
**Figure 3.7: Platform Workers Who Met with Accidents at Work (in per cent)**



**Note:** Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.

**Source:** Primary Survey

**Figure 3.8: Platform Workers Who did not Report Accidents at Work to Aggregator (in per cent)**



**Note:** Base is 176, including 142 food delivery workers and 34 transport workers who had accidents during work.

**Source:** Primary Survey

**Box 3.9: Assistance to Workers from Aggregators**  
 Swiggy and Zomato have partnered with insurance companies to cover health insurance, personal accident and accidental death, and mobile phone damages of delivery workers (The Economic Times, 2023; Acko General Insurance Limited, 2023). Both Swiggy and Zomato offer an accidental death benefit or permanent disability benefit of Rs. 10,00,000. The only condition they mention is that the worker should have logged in to the app when the accident occurred. For temporary disability, Zomato provides a loss of pay of Rs. 525 per day, maximum up to Rs. 50,000. In addition to the above, Zomato also cover the cost of hiring an ambulance, transporting mortal remains and funeral expenses. These

food delivery platforms offer hospitalisation and outpatient medical expense cover (up to Rs. 5,000 in Zomato and Rs. 8,000 in Swiggy), which is extendable to dependent family members. Electronic equipment cover is fixed at Rs. 2500 in Zomato and Rs. 5000 in Swiggy. Food delivery aggregators also provided special benefits during COVID-19, such as reimbursing the cost of the COVID-19 vaccine, providing special loss of pay for workers who test positive for COVID- 19 etc. Swiggy reportedly disbursed more than Rs. 31 crore in claim amounts to its delivery partners in India during the 2022-2023 fiscal year, with 96 per cent of the claims settled within seven days (The Economic Times, 2023). On the other hand, Zomato reported that it had disbursed Rs. 15.98 crore on medical insurance cover for 9210 delivery workers in India (*ibid*).

Regarding online transport platforms, Uber and Ola provide accidental death or permanent disability benefits of Rs. 5,00,000 (Uber, 2022; Ola, 2023). They also cover accident medical expenses up to Rs. 2,00,000, including outpatient and other hospitalisation expenses. In addition to the above benefits, Ola offers a loss of pay of Rs. 750 per day for three months in the case of temporary disability. Ola also provided workers an advance of Rs.2000 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The income protection benefits are extended to certain vector borne & viral illnesses like Dengue, Japanese encephalitis, Chikungunya, Zika and Viral Flu. Notably, the driver should be active at least once in the last three days from the last login date to avail of the hospitalisation benefits, loss of pay or other income protection benefits (Ola, 2023). In addition to the benefits provided by aggregators, platform workers can avail Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (accidental insurance cover of Rs. 2,00,000) by registering in the e-SHRAM portal.

Reasons provided by respondents for not reporting accidents with the aggregators are presented in Table 3.20. Most respondents who chose not to report accidents noted that it was minor. However, it is important to note that one-tenth of workers choose not to report an accident as they have heard from their co-workers about poor responses from aggregators who reported accidents in the past. The share of respondents unaware of insurance coverage for platform work was 6.5 per cent. At least a few could not register the complaint due to communication problems. This is despite the fact that all platform workers must attend an orientation when joining platform work. Several workers shared their difficulties using the automated messaging system, making contacting aggregators' staff challenging in an emergency. A food delivery worker in Kochi, Mariya, shared her ordeal as follows:

*"During the orientation training, the company briefed us on financial support workers can claim when they meet with an accident. Although accidents are common among platform workers, none of us have ever availed it till now as it is not in general practice."*

**Table 3.21: Reasons for not Reporting Accident with Aggregator (in per cent)**

Reasons	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Minor accident	82.1	75.0	80.6
Poor response from the company	8.3	12.5	9.3
Unaware about insurance	7.1	4.2	6.5

Did not know how to report	1.2	4.2	1.9
Language issues to report	-	8.3	1.9
<b>Base*</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>108</b>

**Note:** \* those who met with accidents during work and did not report to the aggregator; Multiple Response.

**Source:** Primary Survey

### **Box 3.10: Hurdles in Receiving Health Care Assistance**

Raju is originally from Madurai, Tamil Nadu. He moved to Thiruvananthapuram in 2017, where he currently stays with his wife and one-year-old daughter. Initially, he used to work in local hotels as a cook. However, he started working with a prominent online food delivery platform due to low wages. In 2020, the online platform he was working on offered a big incentive for completing 20 orders on New Year's Night. Raju completed 19 orders by 12:15 am and waited for the last one to become eligible for the incentive. He waited until 2:00 am to receive his next order, despite his wife, who was pregnant then, was alone at home. While driving to deliver the last order for the day, Raju fell asleep and had an accident. As he could not afford medical expenses, he did not seek medical care. By the next day, as the pain was unbearable, he had to seek medical care. At the hospital, Raju found out that he had broken his left knee and dislocated two fingers in the accident. When Raju realised the extent of the injury, he reported the incident to the aggregator. However, the aggregator denied his insurance claim due to a delay in reporting the incident.

Three-fourths of the respondents who reported the accidents did not get any financial assistance from the aggregators, even though the accident occurred while they were at work (Table 3.21). Only one-fourth of the respondents who reported the accident received insurance coverage or were allotted a loss of pay by the aggregator. Among those who reported receiving financial assistance from aggregators, only 31 per cent reported that the assistance was sufficient to cover the financial loss caused by the accident (not presented in the Table).

**Table 3.22: Assistance Received from Aggregators for Accidents (in per cent)**

Assistance	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
No assistance	74.1	90.0	76.5
Insurance coverage	25.9	10.0	23.5
Loss of pay/wages	1.7	-	1.5
<b>Base*</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>68</b>

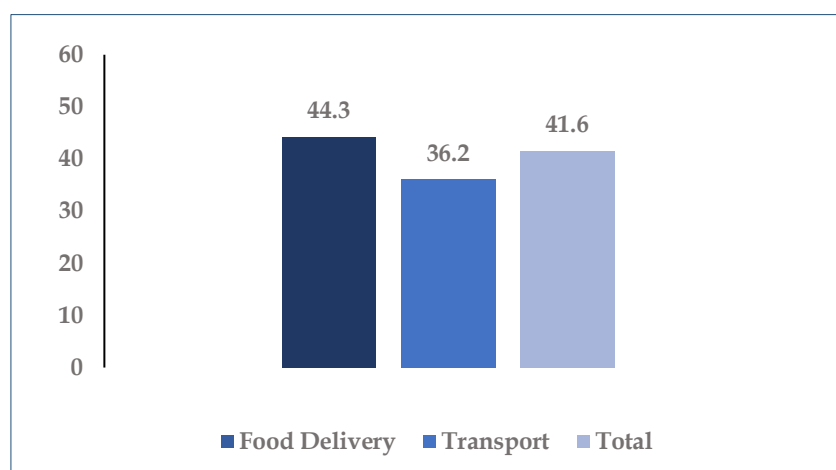
**Note:** \* those who met with accidents during work reported the incident to the aggregator; Multiple Responses.

**Source:** Primary Survey

### 3.5.2 Recurring Health Issues

Due to the intense nature of the platform work, workers face health challenges. Among the respondents in the primary survey, 42 per cent reported facing recurrent health issues due to platform work, as presented in Figure 3.9. A higher share of food delivery workers reported health issues than transport workers.

**Figure 3.9: Health Issues Reported by Platform Workers after Work (in per cent)**

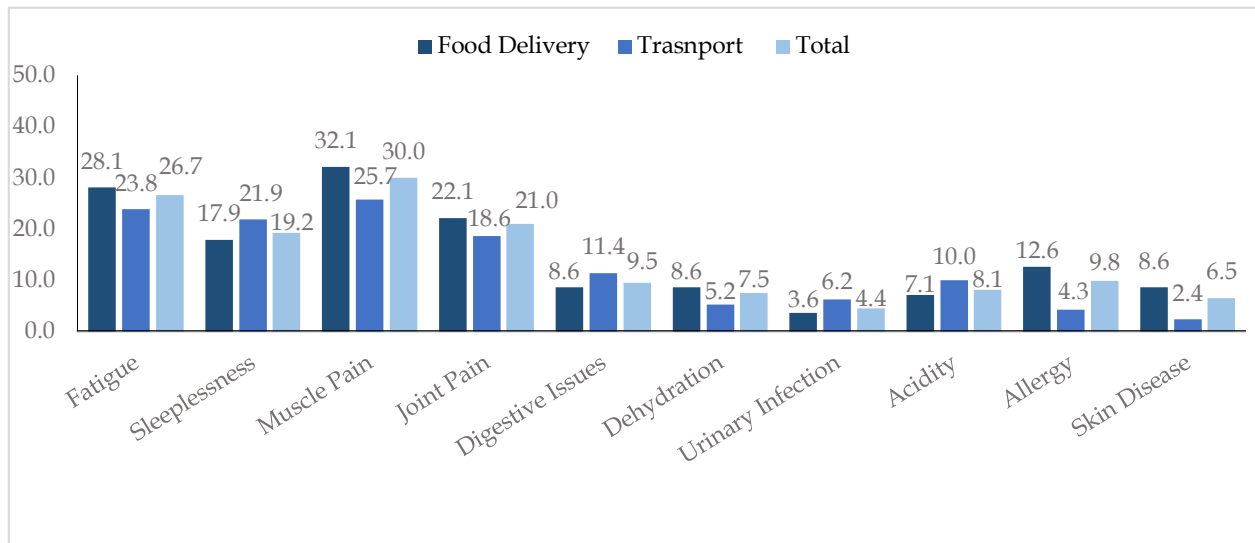


**Note:** Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.

**Source:** Primary Survey

Recurring health issues reported by workers are presented in Figure 3.10. After joining platform work, major health issues reported by workers are muscle pain, fatigue, joint pain, and sleeplessness. There are variations in health issues between food delivery and transport workers. While transport workers report sleeplessness, digestive issues and acidity, food delivery workers are more prone to dehydration, allergy and skin issues. These variations could be well associated with the difference in nature of the work between food delivery workers and transport workers, such as irregular food intake, exposure to sunlight/rain, exposure to pollution, difference in the mode of transport, etc.

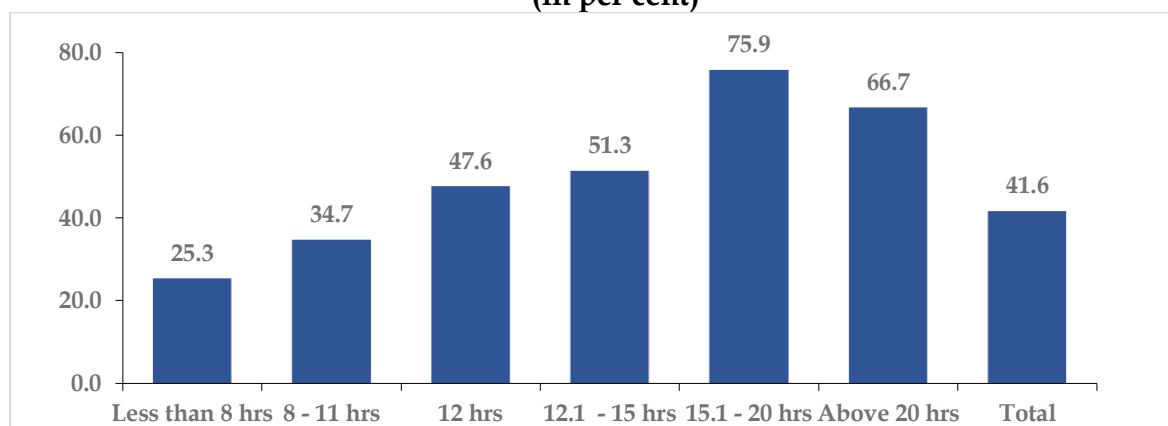
**Figure 3.10: Recurring Health Issues Reported by Platform Workers (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport; Multiple Response.  
 Source: Primary Survey

An ILO study conducted among platform workers in Ukraine found that a high proportion of taxi and food delivery workers (79 per cent and 74 per cent, respectively) reported feeling stressed by their work and working conditions. This is often due to traffic congestion, insufficient payment, lack of jobs, long working hours, the risk of work-related injury and pressure to drive quickly (ILO, 2023). In a study conducted in Delhi, Delhi, Sekhar et.al (2023) demonstrated that delivery workers are exposed to particulate matter and volatile organic compounds at much higher levels than standards set by India’s Central Pollution Control Board and the World Health Organisation, negatively impacting the health of workers.

**Figure 3.11: Health Issues Reported by Platform Workers by Hours of Work (in per cent)**

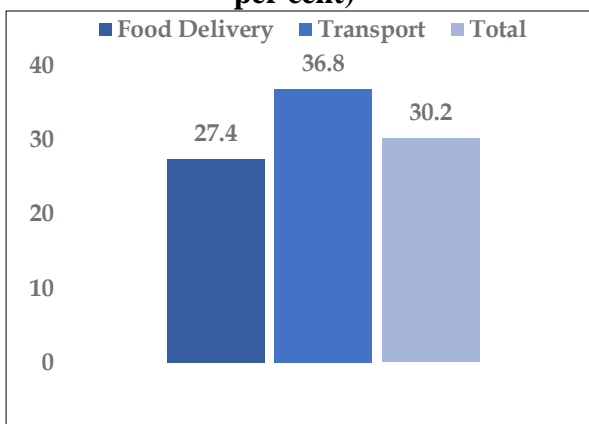


Note: Base is 262, which includes 186 food delivery workers and 76 transport workers who reported health issues; Multiple Response.  
 Source: Primary Survey

As clearly emerging from Figure 3.11, as the hours spent by workers on the platform increase, so do workers' health issues. A significant share of those reported as working more than 15 hours a day cited more health issues than those who work fewer hours in a day. More importantly, data from the primary survey also suggest that those who have reported health issues are more prone to accidents. While 34 per cent of platform workers have reported an accident while at work, among the platform workers who reported any health issues, the share of those who have met with accidents is 42 per cent (not presented in the figure).

Despite a significant share of platform workers reporting recurring health issues, merely 30 per cent of them have sought any treatment. A higher share of transport workers has sought treatment than food delivery workers, as presented in Figure 3.11. Regarding expenditure on health care, a little more than three-fifths of those who reported health issues and sought treatment have spent, on average, less than Rs. 1,000 per month (Figure 3.12). The monthly average expenditure on platform workers' health care is Rs. 1,457 per month (not presented in Table). For food delivery workers and transport workers, the figures are Rs. 1,567 and Rs. 1,257, respectively. Merely two food delivery workers reported receiving some assistance from aggregators. While one respondent received Rs.1000 for kidney stone surgery, another one reported receiving Rs.4000 for hernia surgery.

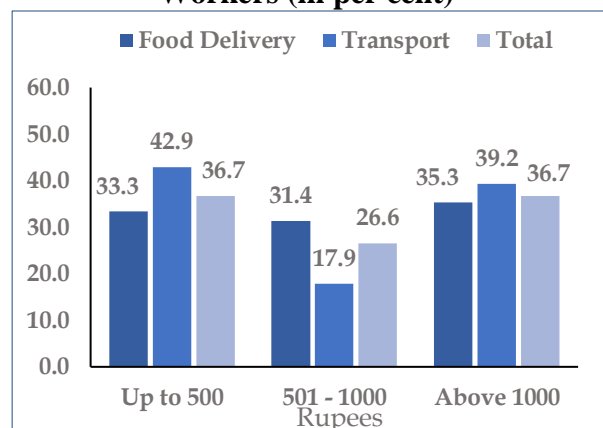
**Figure 3.12: Platform Workers Who Sought Treatment for Health Issues (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 262, which includes 186 food delivery workers and 76 transport workers who reported health issues.

Source: Primary Survey

**Figure 3.13: Average Monthly Expenditure on Health Issues by Platform Workers (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 79, including 51 food delivery workers and 28 transport workers who had accidents during work.

Source: Primary Survey

Platform workers who reported health issues but did not seek treatment were asked about the reasons. The majority, 85 per cent, responded that they did not think the health issues were serious and required treatment. The response is understandable, considering that the majority of platform workers are relatively young. However, 12 per cent of respondents delayed seeking treatment due to financial constraints, and another 11 per cent could not manage time to seek health care.

**Table 3.23: Reasons for Not Seeking Health Care (in per cent)**

Reasons	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Did not consider alignment serious	85.9	83.3	85.2
Financial constraints	9.6	18.8	12.0
No free time	7.4	20.8	10.9
Others	1.5	-	1.1
<b>Base*</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>183</b>

Note: \* who reported health issues and did not seek treatment; Multiple Response.

Source: Primary Survey

### 3.6 Platform Workers' Relation with Aggregators

Data indicates that 84 per cent of platform workers have, at some point, contacted aggregators. A higher share of those involved in food delivery (86 per cent) has contacted aggregators compared to those working with online travel platforms (79 per cent). The reasons provided by respondents who contacted aggregators are provided in Table 3.23. The top reasons for contacting aggregators were to report grievances and make general queries.

**Table 3.24: Reasons for Reaching out to the Company (in per cent)**

Reasons	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
To report grievances	67.3	72.7	69.0
General queries	59.3	41.2	53.6
Changing profile details	12.7	9.1	11.6
<b>Base*</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>526</b>

Note: \* who have contacted aggregators; Multiple Response.

Source: Primary Survey

As presented in the Table. 3.25, two-thirds of platform workers contacted the aggregator via call support or helpline number. However, it is essential to note that workers can only request call support when assigned an order or ride. To resolve their grievances regarding past orders/rides and updating profile details, workers can use the app's option 'raise

tickets'. Among the workers, merely 7 per cent have used this option. If the grievance of platform workers is not resolved by call support or by raising tickets in the app, or if they have a complaint that cannot be reported via the two options mentioned above, the worker can either go to the local office directly or contact the team leader (aggregator staff). Among the workers, 29 per cent have contacted the team leader, and 15 per cent have contacted the local office to voice their complaints. Notably, most prominent online platforms do not have local offices in every city, so this is not always practical for workers. Notably, 8 per cent of the platform workers maintained that they had restrained from reporting their grievances because they did not know how to contact the company (not presented in Table).

**Table 3.25: Mode of Contacting Aggregators (in per cent)**

Reasons	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
By call support/helpline	56.2	85.5	65.4
Contact team leader	38.0	8.5	28.7
Contact local office	13.6	17.0	14.6
Contact via app	6.6	6.7	6.7
<b>Base*</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>526</b>

Note: \* who have contacted aggregators; Multiple Response.

Source: Primary Survey

Table 3.25 presents major grievances pointed out by platform workers. More than half of the platform workers stated that they experience long delays in receiving orders/rides as they are about to achieve daily targets. Food delivery workers frequently face this issue compared to transport workers. Nelson, a food delivery worker in Kannur, described the situation as follows:

*"They promise to give an incentive of Rs. 450 once I complete 15 daily orders. However, once I complete 13 orders, it takes a long time for me to receive two more orders to be eligible for the incentive. The algorithm is designed in such a way as to make it difficult for workers to obtain incentives. Several days later, I returned home disheartened, unsuccessfully waiting for hours to obtain one more order to get the incentive. It is stressful."*

**Table 3.26: Grievances Regarding Platform Work (in per cent)**

Grievances	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Not getting orders/rides when workers are about to achieve the target	62.4	31.9	52.2
Inappropriate behaviour of security at customer location	51.7	46.2	49.8
Inappropriate behaviour from restaurant staff	49.0	-	33.0
Wrong calculation of remuneration in the app	25.7	41.4	31.0
Levying penalty wrongly	25.7	23.3	24.9
Payment related disputes with customers	19.5	29.5	22.9
Blocking the account for delayed/cancelled orders due to rain, traffic, accident or vehicle issue	9.5	27.1	15.4
Delay in wages	8.8	5.7	7.8
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Note: Multiple Response.

Source: Primary Survey

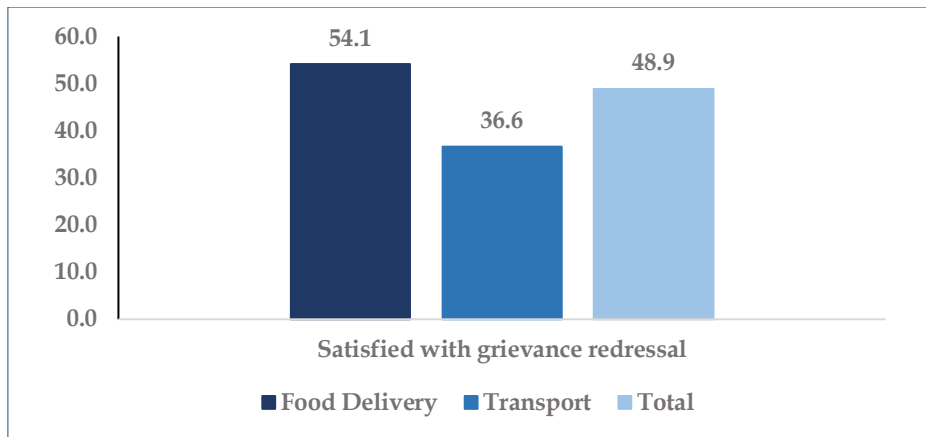
Half the workers reported that they faced rude and disrespectful behaviour from security and restaurant staff at customer locations. Prince, a food delivery worker from Thrissur, noted:

*"During peak time, there will be a lot of food delivery workers waiting outside the restaurants. Restaurant staff used to abuse us for standing at the door while waiting to receive the order for delivery. Similarly, several resident associations in Thrissur and Kochi allow dogs in the lift, not food delivery workers. They also do not allow food delivery workers' vehicles inside their compound. It was very insulting to us."*

There are times when the app makes mistakes while calculating workers' remuneration, a point noted by 31 per cent of workers. It is found that transport workers are more likely to face such issues compared to food delivery workers due to the unstable commission rate set by platform companies. On a positive note, 92 per cent of the platform workers reported that they had faced no delay in wages. Anil, a food delivery worker from Thiruvananthapuram, noted:

*"The app makes mistakes in calculating the distance we travelled. The app shows one to two kilometers less than the distance we travelled. This results in underestimation of the actual distance travelled and eventually leads to loss of incentive."*

**Figure 3.14: Response to Grievances by Workers (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 536 (excluding non-responses), which includes 375 food delivery workers and 161 transport workers

Source: Primary Survey

Only half of the platform workers who had grievances with work were satisfied with the grievance redressal (Figure 3.13). It is found that transport workers are more dissatisfied with the grievance redressal compared to food delivery workers. Some of the reasons cited for dissatisfaction are no action taken by the aggregator, no person available to report complaints as complaints need to be narrated to automated machines, aggregators always provide more weightage to the perspective of customers in case of a dispute between workers and customers.

*"There is no option for us to report our grievances directly to the company staff. Though there is a call support, it was handled by an agency that usually does not understand our issues. In Ola, it is not possible to communicate in Malayalam. Though Uber provides support in Malayalam, the waiting time is very long. The only way to report grievances is via the app, again examined by artificial intelligence. Ola has no office in Kerala, and Uber only has one in Kochi. But the staff hardly help us solve our grievances."*

Response of Nazeer, an online taxi driver from Kozhikode.

*"I faced issues when I tried to log in to an online travel app after taking a break due to COVID-19. When I visited the local office of the aggregator, the staff informed me that a police case had been filed against me. I was certain there was no such case. Despite providing a police clearance certificate, the local office is unwilling to reinstate my account. I am unsure how to resolve the issue or whom to contact."*

Response of Vinod, an autorickshaw driver from Kochi.

**Table 3.27: Difficulties in Communicating with Aggregator (in per cent)**

Responses	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Staff are not easily accessible	75.8	86.5	79.4
Delay in communication	54.8	42.7	50.7
Unable to communicate in mother tongue	8.6	22.9	13.5
Inappropriate behaviour from staff	5.4	9.4	6.7
<b>Base*</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>282</b>

Note: Multiple Response.

Source: Primary Survey

It is reported that 45 per cent of platform workers experience difficulties communicating with the aggregator. The top reason cited was difficulties connecting with the aggregator staff, noted by 79 per cent of workers, as presented in Table 3.26. Half of the platform workers who shared that they face problems in communicating with aggregators complained about the long delay in communication. Workers also cited no option to communicate in their mother tongue and inappropriate behaviour by aggregator staff as the other reasons.

*"I am working with a prominent food delivery platform, and they used to deduct small amounts from the payment. But they don't give any reasons for deduction. One day, I decided to enquire about it by going directly to their office. But they made me wait for hours and didn't give me any proper response."*

Response from John, a food delivery worker in Kochi.

*"One day, my bike broke down while I was on my way to deliver an order. The company's staff were unavailable to help me. At last, I hired an autorickshaw to deliver the order."*

Response from Salim, a food delivery worker in Kottayam.

### 3.7 Work Experience and Challenges

#### 3.7.1 Influence of Platform Work on Workers' Life

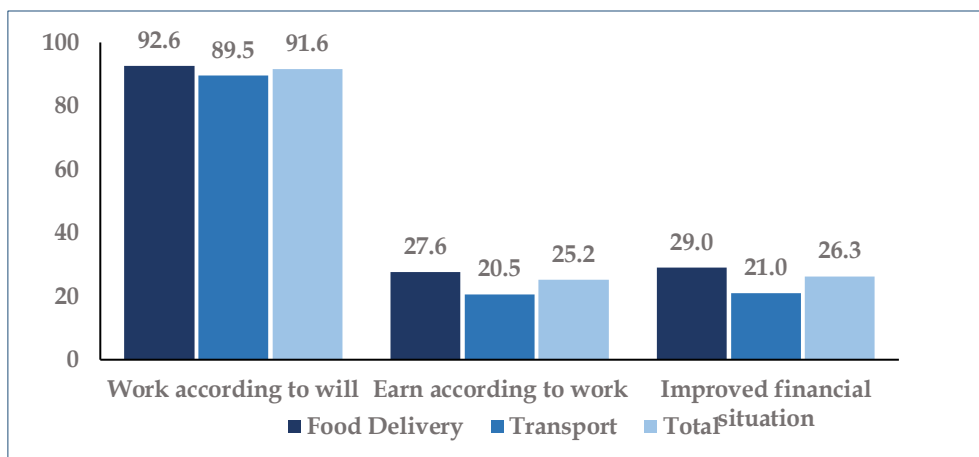
The majority of platform workers responded that they could work according to their will, an important aspect of flexible employment as promised in platform work (Figure 3.14). Workers shared that they are happy because there is no one to dictate how to work or how much they should work in a day. However, the notion of not having a boss is imaginary, as workers' income is directly linked to how much time they are willing to

work. The data shows that workers can only exploit the flexibility in platform work while compromising their capacity to earn as aggregators dictate how one works by offering incentives/bonuses. Prakashan, a food delivery worker from Thiruvananthapuram, said:

*"I always wish to celebrate at least Onam with family. But Swiggy offers lucrative incentives and bonuses during the festival season. So, I changed my mind about working during Onam."*

Although 92 per cent of the workers opined that they could work according to will, only one-fourth of the platform workers reported that they could earn according to work. Their financial situation has improved after working on platforms. Compared with transport workers, a slightly higher share of food delivery workers agreed that they could earn according to their work.

**Figure 3.15: Freedom of Respondents in Platform Work (in per cent)**



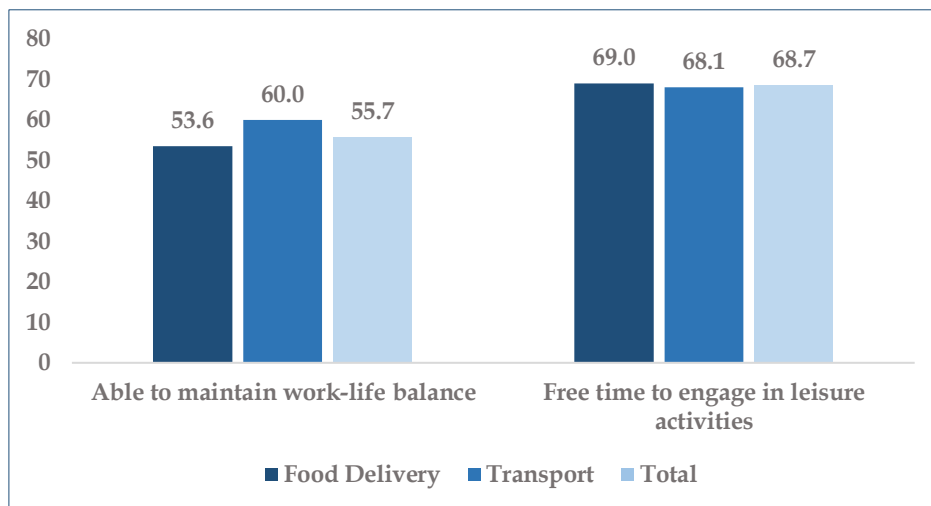
Note: Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.  
Source: Primary Survey

Balancing work and personal responsibilities is an essential feature of any good job. More than half of the respondents noted that they could maintain a work-life balance, and more than two-thirds of workers stated they could find free time to engage in leisure activities, as presented in Figure 3.15. It is important to note that a higher share of those involved in the transport sector could strike a better balance between work and personal commitments. As noted elsewhere, the control exerted by aggregators is more intense on food delivery workers than transport workers, which could partly explain the difference. Discussions held with women in platform work indicated that despite the flexibility provided by platforms to work as per the convenience of workers, they find it stressful to

manage platform work and domestic responsibilities. Drisya, a food delivery worker in Kochi, said,

*"Managing the household chores is difficult. Though my family offers full support to work in platforms, they won't compromise the domestic work I must engage with. So, I have to compromise my sleep for it. I have slept only three to four hours daily during the last two years. Now I'm completely used to it. "..... "some of my friends are willing to join platform work as it offers comparatively better pay to women. But their family members do not permit them because of its risky nature. The support from family is the key for women platform workers."*

**Figure 3.16: Work-life balance in Platform Work (in per cent)**



When it comes to platform work improving workers' self-esteem and overall job satisfaction, the response from workers is not very promising. Compared to transport workers, food delivery workers indicated job satisfaction. An important factor influencing self-esteem and job satisfaction is becoming self-sufficient financially, a point noted by 58 per cent of respondents (not presented in the Figure). Part of the reason that affects self-esteem could be a lack of support from family and relatives towards platform work, discussed elsewhere. Further, there are differences in how respondents view platform work, depending on their activity status other than as a platform worker. For instance, students and part-timers do not consider platform work as a primary source of livelihood and share a different approach, as noted by Justin, an IT professional in Kochi who is also engaged in a food delivery platform:

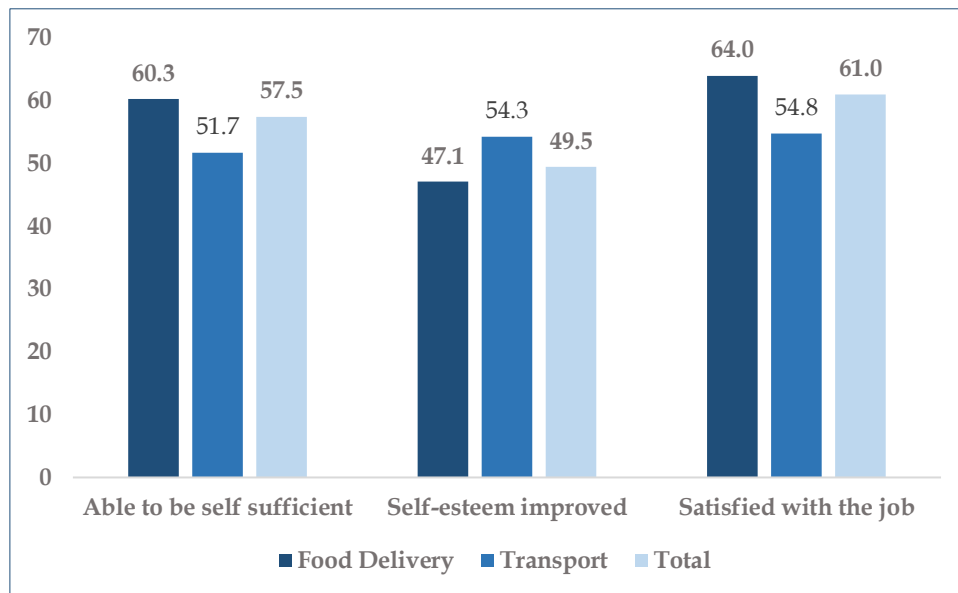
*"I have been working from home for the past three years. I was fed up staying at home all day. Since I like driving, I*

*joined as a food delivery partner to ride and earn. I am delighted that I could make new friends after joining platform work. It would not be wrong to say that I joined platform work to balance my work and life better."*

For Prasanthan, a retired person engaged in food delivery, platform work improved his self-esteem. His response was as follows:

*"I started getting more respect from family members and friends when I quit my retirement life and joined food delioery. Now, I am not dependent on anyone. Sometimes, I give money to my daughter to repay her debt. Platform work is more than an income-generating activity for me; it is a stress relief and a good exercise. It keeps me active all day."*

**Figure 3.17: Respondent's Satisfaction with Platform Work (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.  
Source: Primary Survey

Students engaged in platform work reported that although they could meet their educational expenses by working in platforms, they find it challenging to balance their educational commitment and platform work. Students working on the platform reported it was difficult to concentrate on their studies, felt tired and sleepy in class and sometimes skipped classes.

### **Box 3.11: Platform Work Empowering Women: Case of Food Delivery Worker**

Manju worked in a white-collar job before joining platform work. "I used to supervise around 350 workers, and they respectfully called me madam. I frequently visited Chennai, Bangalore, and Delhi as part of my job, and I enjoy that freedom," says Manju. She resigned after having a child because she struggled to balance domestic and work commitments. Most of the jobs which offered flexibility could only pay low wages. So, she thought of taking up platform work. Manju was among the first few women who joined platform work in Ernakulam. She struggled in the job during her initial days as a delivery partner. She was not proud of her job and wore a mask before COVID-19 to cover her identity from friends and relatives. One day, Zomato featured Manju in a YouTube video as a success story, and that's how her story was on YouTube. That's when everyone learned about her new job as a delivery person.

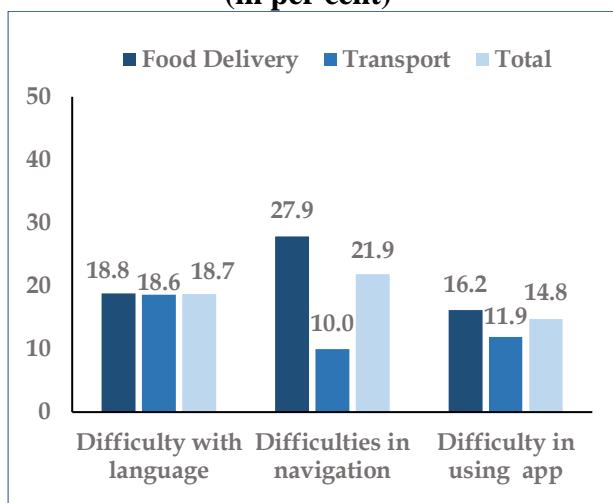
Unlike the initial days, Manju is proud of her job and earns, on average, between Rs.40,000 to Rs.45,000 monthly. I'm now very proud of what I do. She says these days, online platforms are supportive of women. They have different categories under which women can register and opt to work or not to work during nighttime. Zomato offers dedicated algorithms for women delivery workers (they only receive orders within 5 km); women mostly prefer to work on this platform over others due to safety concerns. After her video became viral, Manju says several women contacted her and wanted to know about working in platforms. She claims to know several women homemakers who joined platforms and have become decision-makers in their families. Manju maintains good relationships with fellow workers, restaurant managers, aggregator staff, and union leaders. She participates in workers' protests and claims she often receives calls from unknown platform workers for advice and help.

### **3.7.2 Challenges in Platform Work**

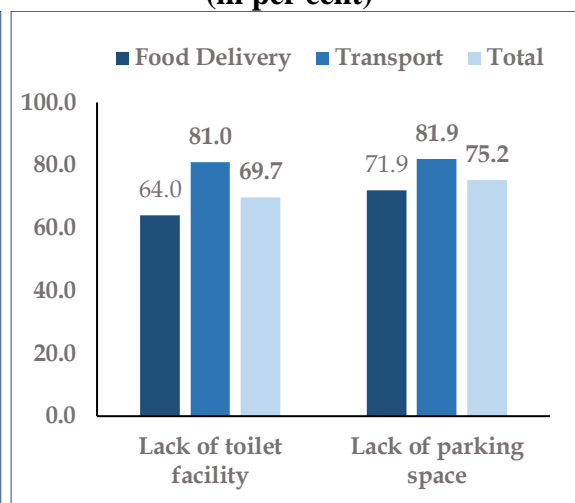
Workers experience different challenges while working on platforms. The first set of problems is related to using the app, as presented in Figure 3.17. Difficulties in language, navigation, and the app are cited as problems related to the app. Regarding workplace facilities, 70 per cent of workers pointed out the lack of toilet facilities as a major difficulty (Figure 3.18). Workers also face problems as they do not have adequate parking space at restaurants while waiting to collect food or a ride. They also face problems with parking space when they wish to take a break and rest during work. Yesudas, a transport worker from Thrissur, explained:

*"We only get rides when we stay close to the main hubs such as railway stations, bus stands, hospitals, hotels, theatres, and parks. However, all we saw there were NO PARKING boards. Even if we want to use toilets, no toilets have parking spaces for taxis. If we park the vehicle nearby to return quickly, the traffic police immediately charge penalties. As of now, we only depend on the toilets in petrol pumps."*

**Figure 3.18: Workers who Reported Difficulties in Using the App (in per cent)**



**Figure 3.19: Workers who Reported Lack of Facilities in Platform Work (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.  
Source: Primary Survey

The platform workers are reported to engage in risky behaviour to meet work conditions and maintain good ratings (Figure 3.18). To meet work commitments, 82.5 per cent of platform workers reported regularly skipping meals during work. Besides the food delivery workers most in demand during dining times, more than three-fourths of the transport workers also reported regularly skipping meals.

*"I only eat two times a day. I regularly limit my breakfast to tea and eat something by 11:30 am. Again, I will have tea and snacks at 6 pm. I try to limit my food expenses to within Rs.100 per day. I will only have a full meal around midnight after reaching home, usually around 1:30 am. I know it is unhealthy, but if I choose to go home for every meal, I may not be able to achieve the target."*

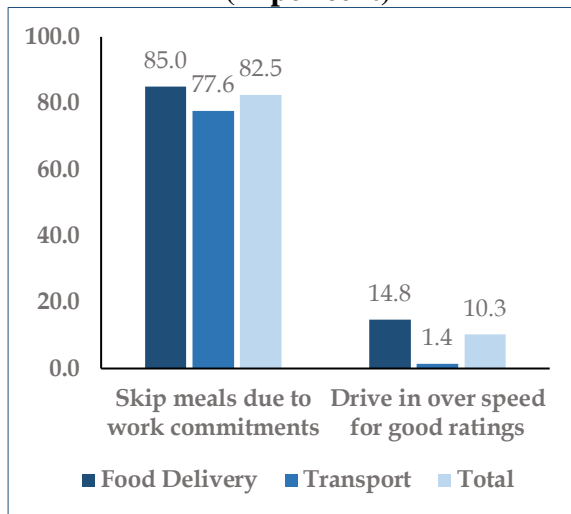
Response from Anburasu, a food delivery worker from Thiruvananthapuram.

*"Food delivery persons always skip meals and work ignoring our hunger. But as part of work, we handle food and sometimes get tempted to see delicious food. I always keep a few Vicks lozenges to control my urge to take a food break. Whenever I feel hungry, I eat Vicks lozenges and drink water. I know some of my co-workers have developed a habit of smoking to avoid feeling hungry."*

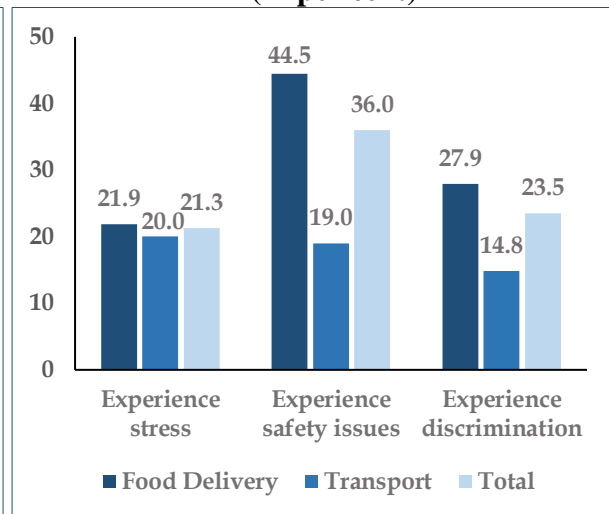
Response from Shibu, a food delivery worker from Kozhikode.

Apart from skipping meals, close to 15 per cent of food delivery workers also reported rash driving to deliver food on time, which will help them maintain good ratings.

**Figure 3.20: Workers who Reported Compromising Health & Safety (in per cent)**



**Figure 3.21: Workers who Reported Experiencing Emotional Issues (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.  
 Source: Primary Survey

Platform workers also narrated the insecurities they face while performing their jobs. Close to one-fifth of respondents reported feeling stressed due to work (Figure 3.20). Detailed probe indicated they are constantly stressed about receiving and delivering orders/rides. Facing safety issues at work was reported by 36 per cent of workers. They narrated incidents such as theft attempts, animal attacks, stalking by strangers, physical abuse from customers and strangers, etc. Prince, a young delivery worker who quit platform work, said:

*"One day, I got an order from an interior area near Maradu, Kochi. When I reached the location, the customer cancelled the order and threatened me to hand over the food for free. I had no option but to give the food to them. I reported the incident immediately to the aggregator. I don't know if the aggregator has blocked the customer, but I haven't got a refund of the money I paid at the restaurant while receiving the order."*

Nearly one-fourth of the respondents reported experiencing discrimination while working on the platform (Figure 3.19). Incidents of hate speech and discriminatory behaviour from customers, security, police, restaurant staff, staff of aggregators, and family and relatives were reported.

*"Traffic police generally perceive that food delivery workers are lawbreakers. So they treat delivery workers indifferently."*

Response of Anson, a food delivery worker from Kochi

*"As a woman, we should foresee the risk in this field even during daytime. I always keep a distance from the doorstep, collect the phone numbers of the security person of the buildings I usually visit, and keep self-protection tools. However, I haven't experienced anything bad during the last three years. People generally respect us as a few women working in a male-dominated sector. The customers, security guards, and police officers behave very politely. Though I waited so many times on the roadside during mid-night, no one ever disturbed me."*

Response of Meenu, a food delivery worker from Kochi

Experience of harassment and discrimination was significantly higher among food delivery workers due to the nature of their jobs. However, some workers added that things were different during COVID-19 when food delivery workers were essential in delivering food safely to their doorstep.

Individuals have specific plans on how long they will continue platform work. As presented in Table 3.27, nearly half of food delivery workers and one-fifth of transport workers plan to engage in platform work until they get a better job. Considering the tedious nature of the job there, 31 per cent of platform workers will continue until they are physically fit. Securing another job and improving financial status are milestones platform workers plan to achieve before they stop engaging in platform work.

**Table 3.28: Plans on Continuing Platform Work (in per cent)**

Target	Food Delivery	Transport	Total
Secure better-paid job	48.3	20.0	38.9
Until physically fit	15.2	61.9	30.8
Get a job	20.0	5.7	15.2
Improve financial status	11.4	11.0	11.3
Complete education	4.8	-	3.2
Till shift residence	3.8	1.4	3.0
<b>Base</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>630</b>

Note: Multiple Response.

Source: Primary Survey

### 3.8 Workers in Platforms other than Food Delivery and Transport

This sub-section will detail workers' work and working conditions in location-based platforms other than food delivery and transport. The focus is to understand the work and working conditions of e-commerce platforms that deliver consumer goods and those platforms providing personal services like cleaning or repair at the customer's location. The discussion is based on in-depth interviews with workers in these location-based platforms.

The mode of operation of e-commerce and grocery platforms differs from that of food delivery and transport platforms. Workers, aggregators and customers are not mediated via an app in e-commerce and grocery delivery platforms. The central role of the app in these platforms is only to facilitate communication among workers, customers and aggregators. Unlike food delivery platforms, major e-commerce platforms do not directly hire delivery workers. Instead, they subcontract the delivery to national and local logistics companies (such as Shadowfax and LoadShare). Unlike in food delivery and transport platforms, entry and exit to these companies is not easy for workers. Those willing to join as a delivery person must submit their application to the godown manager, and hiring depends on available vacancies. Upon joining, workers receive a day-long training, and the godown manager accompanies them on their first delivery. As narrated by a delivery person:

*"I usually begin my work at 8 AM, collecting items, scanning their QR codes, and arranging them for delivery. These orders are displayed in the app based on the order of scanning. The app only shows the delivery address; navigation via google maps is not provided. However, I can seek the help of customers for directions. Once the item is delivered to the customer, I enter the OTP they provided to mark the order as delivered. After completing each day's work, I report to the godown manager and hand over the money collected by cash on delivery. If the customer cannot take the order, the item is returned to the godown."*

These platform companies hire salaried workers and those working for piece rate commission. The payment is calculated manually and credited to their bank accounts weekly or once every two weeks. A worker in a platform that delivers customer goods noted:

*"I usually deliver 50 to 60 items in a day. A fixed amount of Rs. 17 is provided per delivery, and I earn Rs. 500 to Rs. 1,000 daily. Salaried workers receive Rs. 12,500 as basic pay, Rs 100 as daily petrol allowance, social security benefits, and incentives for delivering more than 30 deliveries daily."*

Since only a few workers are hired in a zone, the delivery work for e-commerce and grocery delivery companies does not have flexibility like that of food delivery platforms. Like in an office job, the workers must inform the godown manager before taking leave. Also, there is a cap on the number of leaves one can take. However, those working for piece rate commission have more flexibility regarding leave and timings than salaried workers. A delivery worker explained:

*"If I need leave, I must report it to the area manager. If we continuously take leave for three days, our IDs will be disabled. The account will be reopened once they report to the area manager and the reason cited is satisfactory."*

Home-based service platforms operate similarly to food and transport platforms. Home-based service platforms provide home-based services such as cleaning, gardening, repairing, plumbing, grooming, etc. The partner registration process for home-based service companies is more extensive than that of other platforms. To register, workers must have qualifications or experience in their trade. Also, workers must pay a joining fee of Rs.5,000 to Rs.40,000, depending on their trade. Upon joining, they must undergo two weeks of intensive training provided by experts. Unlike transport and food delivery platforms, workers need to pay a commission in advance apart from a subscription charge to start receiving work. Suma, providing beauty services through an online platform, noted:

*"Apart from the joining fee, we must also pay a monthly subscription charge of Rs.2100, for which they receive a minimum of 50 works. However, a penalty would be imposed if the worker does not complete at least 35 works in a month."*

Unlike other platforms, home-based service companies allow customers to choose their preferred partner (worker), and partners can accept or decline assigned work without any consequence (as long as they complete a minimum of 35 works a month). However, cancelling work after accepting it affects worker rating and may invite

penalties in case of repeat offences. For instance, the app gets automatically blocked, and the worker must provide a satisfactory explanation to revoke their ID without penalty. Some home-based companies mandate that partners purchase required materials exclusively from them; they may even demand to purchase specific brands. These materials provided to workers have QR codes, which workers must scan before delivering a service to avoid penalties. When probed about earnings, Suma's response was as follows:

*"I typically provide 70-80 works monthly and earn around Rs.1,00,000. After accounting for commissions, subscription charges, material costs, and travel expenses, I only retain Rs.30,000 rupees per month."*

Like workers in food delivery and transport platforms, the workers in other location-based platforms cite higher commission rates and the absence of social protections as major challenges in the sector. Although these workers received higher wages when these platforms were launched, their earnings have been considerably reduced over the years. Similar to food delivery, e-commerce and grocery delivery workers also shared incidents of accidents and work-related health issues. Most wished to discontinue the delivery job due to its physically taxing nature and lower social status. A delivery person concluded:

*"Earlier, the large-sized items such as Mixie, Air Condition, Television etc are carefully delivered by godown staff by renting four wheelers. However, nowadays delivery persons are forced to deliver such items in two-wheelers. They ask us to carry multiple large-sized bags to deliver the maximum number of items. Police may charge us for carrying load dangerously."*

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The analysis presented in the Chapter indicates the challenges faced by the platform in Kerala. It is important to note that platform workers encounter difficult working conditions impacting their health and safety. The next Chapter will examine key stakeholders' responses to improving platform workers' work and working conditions.

# IMPROVING PLATFORM WORK: PERSPECTIVES OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

## 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 discussed in detail the work and working conditions of platform workers in Kerala. This Chapter will discuss the response of key stakeholders – aggregators, service providers (restaurants), customers, trade unions/associations, and government to challenges encountered by platform workers. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and an online survey among customers of food delivery and transport platforms. The rest of the Chapter is structured as follows: Section 4.2 will present perspectives of aggregators, while concerns by service providers (restaurants, bakeries, etc) are presented in Section 4.3. Responses of food delivery and transport platform customers are presented in Section 4.4. Perspectives of trade unions and associations and the State responses are covered in Sections 4.5 and 4.6, respectively. Section 4.7 concludes the Chapter.

## 4.2 Aggregators' Response

As discussed in Chapter 3, a primary concern shared by platform workers' is the decline in their earnings over the years, mainly because of the changes introduced on how much they can earn per order/ride and incentives. However, aggregators were not favourable towards workers' demand for higher remuneration. They cite declining profits as the reason for not increasing workers' remuneration, corroborated by available evidence. For instance, Swiggy suffered a loss of \$540 million (over Rs. 4,400 crore) in calendar year 2022 (The Times of India, 2023), while Zomato registered a loss of Rs 346.6 crore for the quarter that ended in December of 2022-23, compared with Rs 63.2 crore during last quarter of 2021-22 (Business Standard, 2023). Similarly, Ola reported that their net loss widened over 36 per cent to Rs 1,522.3 crore during the financial year 2021-22 against Rs 1,116.6 crore the previous year (The Economic Times, 2023), and Uber India incurred a net loss of Rs

216.42 crore for the year ended March 2022 (The Economic Times, 2022). A staff from the food delivery platform explained,

*"During the initial phase, the company's primary motive was to have a good customer base and pool of delivery workers in the city. The company initially offered relatively higher remuneration to workers and enticing offers to customers. At this point, it isn't as easy to provide offers to customers and remuneration to delivery workers as it was in the initial phase. I mean, every business works that way."*

Discussions held with aggregators indicate that if they were to increase workers' remuneration before they make a profit, the financial burden would be disproportionately over customers, affecting their business. The staff from a food delivery platform added:

*"There is always a threshold for each customer to decide whether to place an online food order or purchase directly from the restaurants. If they feel it is better to purchase directly from restaurants than online, the hard-earned customer will be lost forever. So, it is impractical to hike the price after a certain level. If one customer is lost, the worker's earning potential will also decrease."*

As noted elsewhere, platform workers are always referred to as 'partners,' 'delivery partners', and 'self-employed entrepreneurs' while referring to their 'workers.' Aggregators condemn workers' demand for 'employee status' and maintain that platform work is 'task-based' where individuals have short-term contracts with the company. However, as the terms of work are unilaterally determined by aggregators and exercise control over different aspects of work, including remuneration, the argument not to consider those engaged in platforms as workers is flawed.

While the discussion of considering the platform worker as an 'employee' continues, aggregators have initiated steps to offer those engaged in platform accident insurance and reimbursement of costs towards medical care, as discussed in Chapter 3. At the same time, aggregators maintain that social protection measures like paid leave, sick leave, maternity benefits, etc., cannot be extended to platform workers as they are not company employees. The response of the staff of a food delivery company was as follows:

*"Delivery work, by its nature, is designed for aiding those who want to work part-time or people who wish to engage for a short period. Owing to our policy, the company does not promote full-time work. While we appreciate worker's full-time commitment, special treatment for them is beyond our capacity. We believe it might be prudent for the state government to handle the matter."*

As a strategy, aggregators generally refrain from directly engaging with labour unions. Most of the discussions held thus far have occurred through the mediation of the labour commissioner. In most cases, such consultations result in half-baked solutions as both parties fail to reach a satisfactory settlement. However, these consultative meetings have indeed become an informal arrangement between labour unions and representatives from aggregators to engage with worker issues that remain unresolved through formal grievance channels, say issues with claiming insurance. Further, such consultative processes in Kerala and elsewhere in India played a non-significant role in highlighting workers' concerns and bringing about several changes, as presented in Box 4.1, towards their work and working environment over the last few years.

#### **Box 4.1 Positive Changes in Platform Work**

- Rental and advance booking options introduced by Uber and Ola help drivers ensure their future earnings.
- The fleet managers in Zomato schedule meetings in a designated zone once a week, a forum where workers can resolve their queries and raise grievances.
- 'Verified location tag' of customers who make repeated orders was introduced by Zomato, making navigation easy for workers.
- Zomato has also introduced an option in the app to seek the help of other delivery workers in case of vehicle breakdown.
- Swiggy started to provide workers guaranteed return pay after delivering long-distance orders.
- Swiggy and Zomato have introduced a QR code facility in the delivery app, which helps reduce customer payment disputes. The facility allows customers to make online payments after collecting the order.
- A new feature was introduced in the app that allows delivery workers and customers to chat with each other without aggregator call support. This feature helps to save time and avoid communication gaps.
- Weather-related information and notifications on areas that receive more orders in the food delivery applications immensely helped workers improve their work efficiency.

- Both food delivery and transport platforms introduced an option to set a destination location. This feature helps workers set an area where they would prefer to deliver an order/ride, which is helpful while taking the last order/ride for the day.

It is also important to note that there are examples of platform companies, particularly new ones, that offer worker-friendly alternatives. For instance, Tukxi, an online travel platform start-up based in Kochi, has aligned its fare with the Kerala government's rates. In Tukxi, passengers can hire autorickshaws for their rides, and the aggregator does not charge any commission from auto drivers partnering with them. Instead, they charge customers a flat rate of Rs.10 for a ride as a service charge in addition to the auto-charge. During an interaction with the Head of Business Operation, Tukxi responded,

*".....we want to make the situation a win-win situation for all drivers, customers and us."*

The start-ups operating in the food delivery and transport sectors face stiff competition from leading platform companies in Kerala. The operational manager of a ride-hailing company noted:

*"As the competitors in the industry are multinational companies, they can spend lots of money to acquire new customers in the form of special offers and bonus points. We need to figure out new marketing techniques apart from regular branding methods to be visible to customers."*

When Piu was launched in 2019, they introduced a fair pay policy in which the drivers need not pay a commission. Piu introduced a subscription-based model, where drivers signing up with them would only be required to pay a moderate annual fee of Rs. 19,200. This fee was considerably lower than the commissions typically charged by Uber and Ola. While Piu succeeded in signing up the cab drivers, it failed to compete with the giants when it came to attracting customers. Interestingly, labour unions in Kerala also attempted to fight against aggregators by launching an app. For instance, in 2019, the Calicut Airport Taxi Drivers' Development and Cooperative Association started an online service, 'QBR,' primarily serving the Kozhikode district. QBR operates at the tariff fixed by the government of Kerala and only charges a six per cent commission from drivers. In a similar move, the collective of cab drivers' unions in Kerala developed an online transportation venture named 'Kera Cabs that operates at rates fixed by the government. Kera Cabs was registered as a Limited Liability Partnership, and the Board consisted of 100 drivers from all the districts in Kerala. Any cab driver can acquire shares in the

company and get lifetime share dividends from the app. The operational fund for the app is the 10 per cent commission from cab drivers per trip. The app was launched in January 2020, and 1000 drivers joined it in the first month. However, both QBR and Kera Cabs failed to attract customers. A similar case is with Kerala Savaari, launched by the government of Kerala, which could not gain much popularity among drivers and customers.

While prominent platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, Uber, and Ola resist any government intervention in their operation, start-up companies are optimistic that the State intervention could create a level playing field for competition. The start-ups have also urged the government to develop a fair platform ecosystem and draft guidelines to operate without hassles. A representative of a transport platform commented:

*"Police officers are clueless in dealing with complaints related to platforms. For example, when a customer complains about misbehaviour by the driver, police question us for not reporting the issue. However, if we report an issue, they are uncertain whether to act or not based on the complaint we made."*

Online transport companies also suggest that the government take a platform-friendly approach, make laws suitable to govern platform work, and enforce existing laws. Strengthening the punishments for those who abuse online taxi/auto drivers, introducing a centralised auto permit system that allows drivers to take trips outside their local self-government, smart monitoring in traffic management, public toilets with car parking facilities, etc. are some of their suggestions to improve work and working conditions of those in platforms.

#### **Box 4.2: Initiatives by Aggregators to Improve Platform Workers Welfare**

##### **Rest Points**

Zomato introduced designated rest points as part of its 'Shelter Project,' which aims to enhance platform workers' well-being. These public infrastructure spots are strategically designed to cater to all platform workers despite the aggregators they are working with. The facilities include clean drinking water, phone charging stations, washrooms, high-speed internet, a 24x7 help desk, and first-aid support (Zomato, 2023). The first rest point was inaugurated at Vega City Mall, Bengaluru, in June 2023 (Bhattacharjee, 2023), and the facility is planned to be extended to other cities, including Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram.

##### **Vehicles for People with Disability**

In 2022, Zomato introduced its flagship program, ZEAL (Zomato's Equitable Action for Livelihood), to promote inclusivity throughout its value chain (MediaInfoline, 2023). As an extension of this commitment, Zomato partnered with NeoMotion, a startup specialising in mobility devices for individuals with locomotor disabilities, to launch the "Livelihood on Wheels" initiative (Ramesh,

2023). This innovative initiative provides employment opportunities for individuals with locomotor disabilities by enabling them to work as delivery workers for Zomato. Collaborating with NeoMotion, Zomato offers a detachable motorised wheelchair, similar to an electric scooter, to delivery professionals. Notably, during the onboarding drive in Bengaluru in August 2023, Zomato distributed these specialised vehicles to 60 delivery workers (Ramesh, 2023).

#### **Women Inclusion**

As of June 2021, Zomato reported a mere 0.5% representation of women in its delivery workforce and has committed to elevating this figure to 10% in cities such as Mumbai, Pune, and Bengaluru by December 2021 (Zomato, 2021). To enhance women's participation, the company has implemented measures like mandatory self-defence training during the onboarding process, the provision of free self-defence kits, and default contactless deliveries during late evenings. While Zomato (2020) states that all female staff, including transgender individuals, are entitled to up to 10 days of annual leave, no information regarding paid menstrual leave for delivery workers is available. In 2021, Swiggy introduced paid period leave to its female delivery workers (Swiggy, 2022).

### **4.3 Response of Restaurants**

Most restaurant managers in the platform network expressed satisfaction with how online platforms have helped their business. As and when online food delivery platforms expanded operations, aggregator staff approached restaurants in different localities to partner with platforms. Unlike 'delivery partners', the restaurant does not need to pay any joining fee to be a service provider for online food delivery platforms. Aggregators' staff visits the restaurant and completes all procedures to work as a service provider, providing orientation about using the app and reporting grievances. Discussions with restaurant managers revealed that the primary motivation for becoming a service provider is increasing business visibility and revenue. A few restaurants also joined due to a fear of missing out, as all other restaurants started to partner with platforms and in response to customer requests, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. While several restaurants have their delivery system, it is almost impossible for them to cater to everyone like platforms do.

*"We intended to partner with platforms only during COVID-19 and subsequently suspended that partnership when the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. However, we again resumed this collaboration solely in response to requests from customers residing in distant locations and those who have difficulty coming to our place like old people."*

Manager of a popular catering service in Ernakulam

*"We have few regular customers in both Swiggy and Zomato. Even if we are late logging into the app, they call and enquire why. As a restaurant, this is incredibly gratifying."*

Owner of a cloud kitchen<sup>5</sup> in Thiruvananthapuram

Several restaurant managers recollected how online food delivery platforms helped them during the pandemic when people were reluctant to dine out.

*"Platforms supported me at the time of COVID-19. I got ample orders from platforms while the regular sales were nearly zero. Without platforms, I would have ended up in big loss."*

Cake shop owner in Kottayam

Restaurants rarely encounter technical glitches and problems with payments. If an issue arises, they are promptly resolved by the aggregator. The restaurant could also have an option to request a meeting with the aggregator staff if required. The staff of the aggregator visit the restaurant monthly. Further, the platforms offer a dedicated sales monitoring mechanism that assists the restaurant by providing valuable tips and marketing strategies to enhance sales. For instance, online platforms promote restaurants by notifying customers about the restaurant or featuring the restaurant in the customer app. The manager of a restaurant said:

*"The platform sales team used to suggest combo offers, and it works well for us. They recommended an Onam package last year, which boosted our earnings immensely."*

While restaurants unanimously agree that the sales have increased after becoming a service provider in the online platform, they are also concerned about the aggregators' 20 to 30 per cent commission.

*"If we have a sale worth one lakh rupees daily, 80,000 rupees are generated through platform sales. However, we need to give Rs.20,000 as commission charges. After accounting for raw materials, labour, and infrastructure expenses, we end with a net income of just Rs 20,000. In essence, the platform earns a profit equivalent to that of the restaurant simply by intermediating."*

Response of a restaurant owner in Kochi

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<sup>5</sup> A company or individual who prepare, pack, and deliver food based on orders from other restaurants and platforms without an in dining facility for customers.

In response to the profiteering of platform companies at the expense of restaurants, the Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association (KHRA) organised protests as early as 2018. When their demands for government intervention in the platform sector to regulate platform companies were hardly met, they launched their food delivery application named 'Rezoy' in May 2021. The funds to set up the food delivery platforms were pooled from the member restaurants in KHRA. Unlike other platforms, Rezoy charges only a 10 per cent commission from restaurant owners to meet the salary of delivery staff and expenses incurred on delivery. However, Rezoy failed to acquire both delivery workers and customers. Delivery workers who worked for Rezoy pointed out numerous disadvantages, such as fewer orders, delayed payment, inability to communicate in Malayalam, technical glitches with the app, etc.

Without a viable alternative, some restaurants express deep concern about their increasing reliance on platform aggregators. They mentioned that the proportion of their sales through these platforms has grown to more than half of their total restaurant sales. This situation has left them where their existence is heavily tied to platforms. Capitalising on this dependency, aggregators often impose higher commission rates on these restaurants. Furthermore, restaurants have reported that aggregator staff sometimes pressure them to pay promotional charges. Failure to comply with these demands can lead to algorithmic discrimination, pushing the restaurant to the bottom of the app's listings and making it less visible to customers. Since these restaurants primarily rely on platforms for business, such algorithmic discrimination severely impacts their earning potential. When restaurant sales decline, aggregators may insist restaurants hire a sales executive to boost sales. Suppose the restaurant declines such proposals from the aggregator, they may face other consequences, including aggregators unilaterally offering discounts on food items without consultation, assigning shorter cooking times, imposing higher penalties, poor grievance redressal, etc. The owners of cloud kitchens on platforms also shared similar concerns.

#### **Box 4.3: Experience of a Bakery on the Food Delivery Platform**

Jithu established a bakery in Kochi in 2018 and partnered with online food delivery platforms the following year to increase sales. Sales in the bakery significantly improved after teaming up with these platforms, and they started to receive orders from different parts of Ernakulam. Currently, three-quarters of the bakery's total sales come from these platforms. However, Jithu is concerned with the 26 per cent commission online platforms charge on each sale. In addition to the commission, they have begun offering customers discounts on certain food items without consulting the owner and pressuring them to do paid promotions on the app. During COVID-19, when sales were good, Jithu opted not to do promotions. But now, if he opts not to pay for promotion, the name of his bakery will be pushed to the bottom of the list, forcing customers to search for it to place an order, and there will be a significant drop in orders. Jithu used another platform to deliver his orders to escape the high commission rates,<sup>6</sup> but it did not work out. When Jithu joined online platforms, he hoped his online customers would become regular customers even if he stopped partnering with online food platforms. However, that did not happen in his case, and he continues to partner with food delivery platforms and pay them a commission.

A close examination of the narratives of restaurant managers reveals that the autonomy and flexibility of restaurant partners are also based on the value of the restaurant's brand image. The top restaurants shared that they pay a comparatively lower commission rate and even negotiate the commission rate. Apart from the team leader, the aggregator provides top restaurants with a dedicated staff to support orders. Another apprehension commonly shared by restaurants is how platform companies take advantage of their loyal customers.

*"When we sell food items worth Rs.100 through these platforms, we receive only Rs.80, which we find acceptable. However, the platforms apply an additional 20 per cent as a delivery charge and collect Rs.120 from the customers. This has disheartened us, as they are exploiting our customers."*

Response of a restaurant manager in Kollam

*To offset the commission costs, we are compelled to raise the price of a biryani initially priced at Rs. 100 to Rs. 130 when sold through platforms. This additional charge helps us cover the commission fee, thereby minimising the impact on our profits. At the same time, we are sad that our customers are the ones who bear the brunt of these increased prices."*

Response of a restaurant manager in Malappuram

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<sup>6</sup> There are online platforms that provide delivery workers to businesses, such as Qwqer.

Restaurant owners and delivery workers consider each other as groups with different interests rather than partners within platforms. Restaurants' concerns regarding platform workers include inappropriate behaviour, failure to wear uniforms, neglecting to mark orders as picked up in the app, etc. Most restaurant managers/owners opined that the delivery workers are not disciplined and cause inconvenience to their regular customers.

*"Though we strictly ensure that the food is delivered on time, it's humane to have occasional delays. However, food delivery persons do not understand this. They hustle to get the food as soon as they reach the restaurant. Though we tolerate the misbehaviour towards our staff, we cannot keep silent if they cause inconvenience to our customers."*

Response of a restaurant manager in Alappuzha

*"It is safe to have a monitoring mechanism to oversee who is joining the sector, such as making police clearance certificates mandatory. Also, platforms should properly train their delivery personnel to conduct themselves professionally and interact with customers and restaurant staff."*

Response of a bakery owner in Kochi

To minimise issues of working with food delivery platforms, the restaurants have made several changes to their operation, like appointing dedicated staff for online delivery orders, providing pick-up points for food delivery workers, etc. During the fieldwork, we found that a few restaurants provide amenities such as chairs or a resting place, access to drinking water, and charging ports for mobile devices for delivery workers. Facilities for delivery workers at a few restaurants are presented in Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. The manager of a catering service noted:

*"They are the ones who are connecting us with customers. So, none of them should work while hungry. Therefore, we provide free breakfast to delivery workers."*

Because of space constraints, many small-scale restaurants find it challenging to provide workers with parking facilities, shade, and drinking water. On the other hand, several major restaurants that could afford to provide facilities to platform workers are not ready to address workers' concerns. Citing that food delivery workers are independent partners, some restaurant managers responded as follows:

*".....it is not their duty to fix the dignity of delivery workers. ...."*

**Figure 4.1: Mobile Charging and Drinking Water Facility for Delivery Workers**



**Figure 4.2: Separate Pick-up Point for Delivery Workers with Drinking Water Facility**



**Figure 4.3: Chairs Provided for Delivery Workers while Waiting for Order**



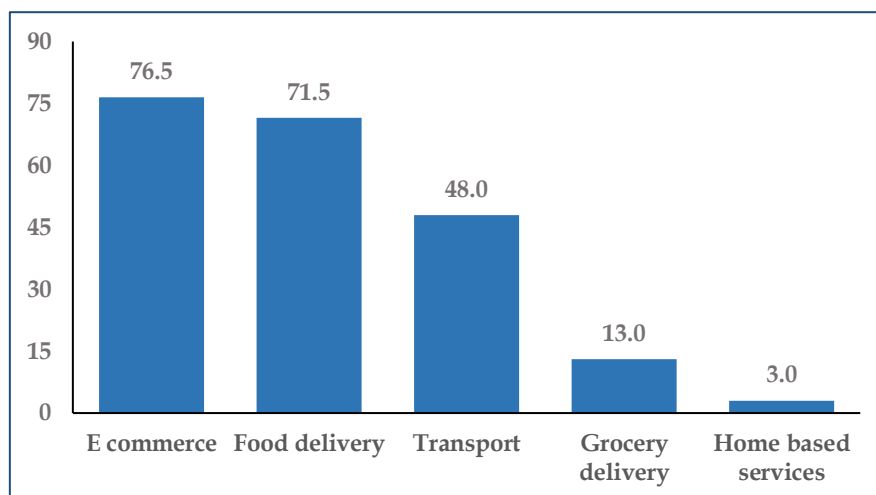
In July 2021, the National Restaurants Association of India (NRAI) moved to the Competition Commission of India (CCI), alleging anti-competitive practices by the food delivery platforms. In the order under Section 26 (1) of the Competition Act, 2002, CCI remarked that "After careful perusal of the allegations as well as the submissions made by the parties, the Commission is of the view that prima facie a conflict of interest situation has arisen" in the case of Swiggy and Zomato, because of the presence of "commercial interest in the downstream market, which may come in the way of them acting as neutral platforms." CCI has mandated an investigation into Zomato and Swiggy's practices regarding allegations of delayed payment cycles, unfair pricing, platform neutrality, and other related aspects.

#### 4.4. Response of Customers

As part of the study, an effort was made to understand customers' perspectives regarding online platforms. This section is based on an online survey among Kerala residents who reported using food delivery or transport platforms during the last three months. The survey was conducted during September and October 2023. The online survey covered 200 respondents, consisting of an almost equal share of males and females.

As presented in Figure 4.4, more than three-fourths of the respondents have used e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, etc., and 71.5 per cent reported using food delivery platforms. Nearly half of the survey participants used transport platforms. While grocery delivery platforms are used by 13 per cent of respondents, home-based services are reportedly rarely used.

**Figure 4.4: Online Platforms Used During Last Three Months (in per cent)**

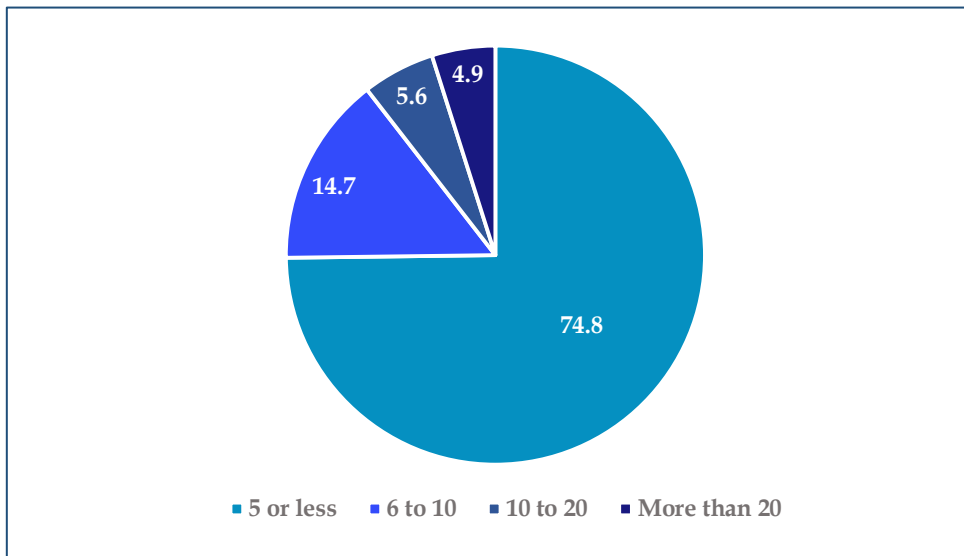


Note: Base is 200; Multiple Responses.

Source: Online Survey

Three-fourths of the food delivery platform users reported using the platform only five times or less in a month, as shown in Figure 4.5. Only 5 per cent of the respondents who used food delivery platforms are regular customers (use more than 20 times a month).

**Figure 4.5: Food Delivery Platforms Used During Last Three Months (in per cent)**

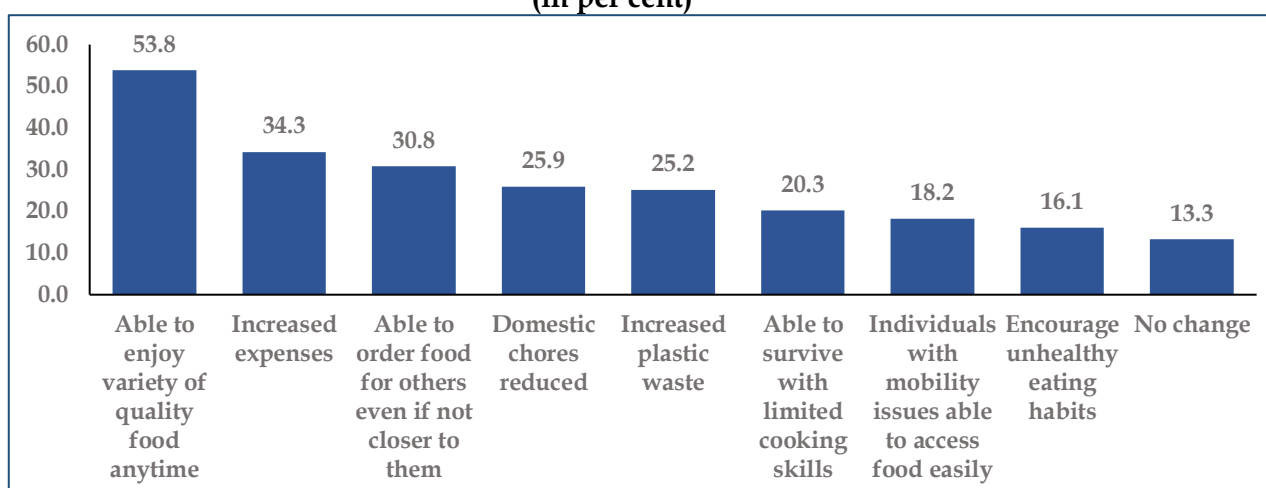


Note: Base 143 respondents who used online food delivery platforms in the last three months.

Source: Online Survey

The online survey focused on understanding consumers' perspectives on food delivery and transport platforms. As presented in Figure 4.6, more than half of the respondents reported that they could enjoy different cuisines and quality food at their convenience because of food delivery platforms. Providing food to dear ones even if they are not close in distance is also considered a positive change by 31 per cent of the respondents. One-fourth of the respondents, or two-thirds of women who participated in the survey, stated that online food delivery services freed them from domestic chores. The majority of respondents in the young age group (up to 30 years old) have indicated that online food delivery services are a boon to those with limited cooking skills. Nearly one-fifth indicate that individuals with mobility issues have greater access to restaurant food through these services. However, respondents also shared a few negative impacts of using food delivery platforms. A little more than one-third agree on the fact that relying on online food has a negative impact on daily expenditure. One-fourth of the food delivery platform customers report that ordering food online increases plastic waste, and 16 per cent believe it encourages unhealthy eating habits.

**Figure 4.6: Changes in Life Due to the Use of Online Food Delivery Services (in per cent)**



Note: Base 143 respondents who used online food delivery platforms in the last three months, Multiple Response  
Source: Online Survey

Table 4.1 lists issues customers face while using food delivery services. About two-thirds of the customers have reported at least one problem they have faced while using the platform. Nearly two-fifths of the customers indicated that the company charges more for their orders. Complaints about the quality or taste of food are raised by 21 per cent of customers. Other significant concerns mentioned include unwanted advertisements and push notifications (16 per cent) and problems with the quantity of food (13 per cent).

**Table 4.1: Problems Faced from Online Food Delivery Services**

Problems	In per cent
No problem	32.9
Company charges more money	39.2
Quality/ taste of food is unsatisfactory	21.0
Unwanted advertisements and notifications	16.1
Quantity of the food is less	12.6
Difficult to contact customer support	9.8
Grievance redressal is inefficient	9.1
Delivering wrong orders	7.7
Food items are missing	4.2
<b>Base</b>	<b>143</b>

Note: Base 143 respondents who used online food delivery platforms in the last three months, Multiple Response  
Source: Online Survey

Two-thirds of the respondents who participated in the online survey reported no problems with food delivery workers, as presented in Table 4.2. More than one-fifth of them reported delays in receiving the order. Violating customer instructions, disputes

over money, unprofessional attire, and inappropriate behaviour were other problems experienced by customers. Among the female respondents, 3 per cent reported having experienced awful comments and unpleasant stares from workers (not presented in the table). Of the customers who had bad experiences with delivery workers or platforms, only 28.9 per cent reported complaints in the app; among them, 69 per cent were satisfied with the grievance resolution. While one-fifth of the customers were unsatisfied with the complaint resolution, 8 per cent reported that complaints were not resolved.

**Table 4.2: Problems Faced from Online Food Delivery Workers**

Problems	In per cent
No problem	67.8
Delay in food delivery	23.1
Not following customer instructions	7.7
Disputes over money	5.6
Unprofessional attire	4.9
Inappropriate behaviour	0.7
<b>Base</b>	<b>143</b>

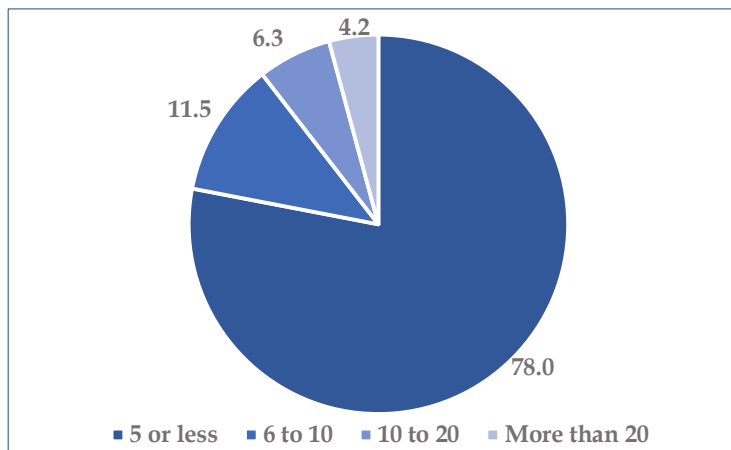
Note: Base 143 respondents who used online food delivery platforms in the last three months, Multiple Response

Source: Online Survey

During the survey, questions on providing ratings to workers were probed as it forms an important factor in determining their earnings, as noted in Chapter 3. However, the survey found that 54 per cent of respondents preferred not to provide ratings. Nearly one-third are reluctant to provide lower ratings, even if they had bad experiences. Only 13.3 per cent reported that they give lower ratings to the delivery workers if they face any problem in food delivery. It is quite possible that food delivery workers' ratings are affected by things beyond workers' control.

Now, coming to the online transport platforms, more than three-fourths of the respondents use online transport services up to five times a month, as presented in Figure 4.7. Only 10.5 per cent of survey participants reported using online services more than ten times.

**Figure 4.7: Transport Platforms Used During the Last Three Months (in per cent)**

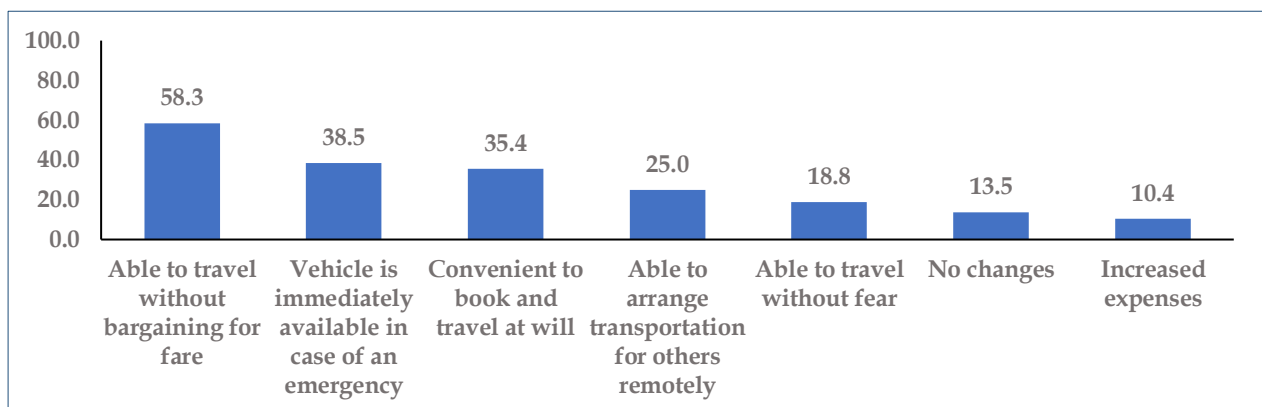


Note: Base 96 respondents who used online transport platforms in the last three months;

Source: Online Survey

For more than half of the respondents, the possibility to travel without haggling is the most significant positive change reported, as presented in Figure 4.8. More than one-third of the customers cited the availability of vehicles in an emergency and the convenience of booking and travel at will. Arranging transportation for others remotely (25 per cent) and being able to travel without fear (18.8 per cent) were other specified changes in their life. Only 10 per cent reported that the wide availability and accessibility of these platforms increased their expenses.

**Figure 4.8: Changes in Life Due to the Use of Transport Platforms (in per cent)**



Note: Base 96 respondents who used online transport platforms in the last three months; Multiple Response.

Source: Online Survey

Table 4.3 presents major problems faced by customers while using transport platforms. Close to three-fifths of the respondents reported at least one problem. Importantly, one-third of the respondents cited the delays in assigning rides. Other reported issues include high ride cancellation charges, higher travel fares, etc.

**Table 4.3: Problems Faced from Online Transport Platforms**

Problems	In per cent
No problems	41.7
Delay in assigning ride	32.3
High charge for travel/cancellation	16.7
Company charges more money	16.7
Difficult to contact customer support	10.4
Inefficient grievance redressal	10.4
Unwanted advertisements and notifications	7.3
Inadequate security functions in the app	5.2
<b>Base</b>	<b>96</b>

Note: Respondents who reported using online transport platforms in the last three months; Multiple Response.

Source: Online Survey

About the problems faced from online transport workers, one-third of the users mentioned the frequent cancellation of rides by the transport workers as a major issue, presented in Table 4.4. Similarly, the use of mobile phones while driving, bargaining for additional money, unclean vehicles, delays in pick-up and drop and rash driving were the significant problems raised by online transport platform users. However, nearly two-fifths of the customers faced no issues with online taxi/auto drivers.

**Table 4.4: Problems Faced by Customers from Online Transport Workers**

Problems	In per cent
No problems	37.5
Drivers frequently cancel the rides	33.3
Using mobile phones while driving	22.9
Drivers bargain for additional money	19.8
Vehicle is not properly cleaned	16.7
Delay in pick-up and drop	12.5
Rash driving	11.5
Inappropriate behaviour	9.4
Instructions of customers not followed	5.2
Follow alternate routes than the one prescribed by the app	5.2
Intermittent stoppages during rides without permission	3.1
Strangers joining the ride	1.0
<b>Base</b>	<b>96</b>

Note: Respondents who reported using online transport platforms in the last three months; Multiple Response.

Source: Online Survey

The majority of respondents (96 per cent) reported feeling safe and secure while using online transportation facilities. Female respondents were probed explicitly if they had faced any inappropriate behaviour from online drivers. Among the 48 women respondents, four women (8.3 per cent) reported facing either awful comments or unpleasant gazes while travelling using an online platform or being stalked after completing the ride. Among the customers who had bad experiences with online taxi/auto drivers or platforms, 73 per cent did not file complaints. One-fourth of the customers reported their problems with the app, and one respondent filed a police complaint. Of those who have reported their complaints to the aggregator, 38 per cent are satisfied with the resolution. More than half of the respondents reported not rating the drivers even if they had any bad experience, and only one-fourth of the respondents reported giving lower ratings to the transport workers if they faced any problems in their travel.

**Box 4.4: Violation of Customer Rights by Transport Platforms**

The alleged unfair trade practices and violation of consumer rights by private app-based cab aggregators are major concerns for governments. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) have disclosed that they have received customer complaints on online travel platforms. According to the National Consumer Helpline (NCH) data, consumers registered 2,482 grievances against Ola, and 770 were registered against Uber from April 1, 2021, to May 1, 2022. In the case of Ola, 54% of the complaints were related to the deficiency in services, while in the case of Uber, the figure was 64%. Complaints registered under deficiency in services include lack of proper response from customer support, driver refusing to accept payment by online mode and insisting payment in cash, driver unprofessional behaviour and driver refusing to switch on AC when the consumer is promised AC ride on the app. There are also issues related to inadequate consumer grievance redressal mechanisms: unreasonable levy of cancellation charges when cancellation charges are not displayed prominently on the platform before booking the ride or timeframe within which cancellation is permitted without a fine. Undue cancellation charges are also borne by users when they are forced to cancel the ride due to the unwillingness of the driver to come to the pick-up location or when there is a considerable delay in obtaining the ride.

#### **4.5 Response of Trade Unions and Associations**

It is challenging to organise platform workers due to the nature of their work. In Kerala, the first protest by platform workers against unfair working conditions was organised in 2016 against Uber in Kochi. When their needs were unmet, transport workers staged five protests in the same year as tripartite meetings held by the Labour Commissioner and District Collector yielded no results. In 2019, food delivery workers staged a two-day

protest in Kochi, demanding Swiggy to increase their wages. From 2019 onwards, food delivery and transport workers held several protests in Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram.

The first registered union for online taxi drivers in Kerala, the Online Drivers Union (ODU), was formed in Ernakulam in 2019. Later, various collectives for those in the platform sector were formed, which included registered trade unions, independent associations, location/religion-based communities, and WhatsApp groups. Online transport workers have so far formed 29 registered associations in Kerala, which include Online Drivers Union (ODU), Yellow Cab Drivers Association (YCDA), Ernakulam Car Drivers Association, Kerala Taxi Driver's Organization (KTDO), Drivers Cooperative Society (DCS), Kotta Online Taxi Association (KOTA), Kerala State Auto Taxi & Light Motor Workers Federation, Self-employed Drivers Union (SEDU), Independent Union, Drivers Cooperative Society, Online Taxi Drivers Association (OTDA), Online Taxi Association, Online Taxi Community, All Kerala Online Taxi Union (AKOTU) etc. However, many of these associations are hardly active. Even in the case of active associations, the primary medium of holding meetings and discussions is via WhatsApp group.

Compared to the online transport sector, there are very few registered associations among food delivery workers. The Food Online Delivery Workers Union (FODWU), formed under the aegis of AITUC and the District Online Delivery Workers Union at Thiruvananthapuram, are the major unions that work exclusively for food delivery workers. Apart from the registered associations, there were several WhatsApp communities of food delivery workers. In 2022, many independent associations and WhatsApp communities were brought together by CITU to form the first registered trade union of platform workers (consisting of food delivery, transport, and other online delivery workers) called the All India Gig Workers Association (AIGWU). Apart from AIGWU, the United Food Delivery Partners Union, the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers Union, Telangana Gig, and Platform Workers Union are the other active unions in India for platform workers.

The inability of labour unions and associations to bargain collectively emerges from difficulties in organising platform workers, who work at different places and do not know each other. As Masiero (2021) points out, the geographical spread of workers and the non-cooperative nature of digital work often make platform workers compete rather than

collaborate. This competition for the same task and the risk of account deactivation due to low ratings or failure to complete tasks within the stipulated time limits their opportunity for collective bargaining. Further, as noted in Chapter 3, platform workers are a heterogeneous group of individuals, including students with other income sources and full-time workers. Hence, only a sub-sect of the workers who intend to work longer are interested in protests and struggle for the common good.

*"It is easy to start a union, but to have active members in the union is the hardest part. People come to the unions only when they have an issue. If the issue is not resolved, they become angry and never return. On the other hand, if the issue is resolved, they become happy but still stop associating after a few days. Platform workers do not consider labour unions important for their welfare."*

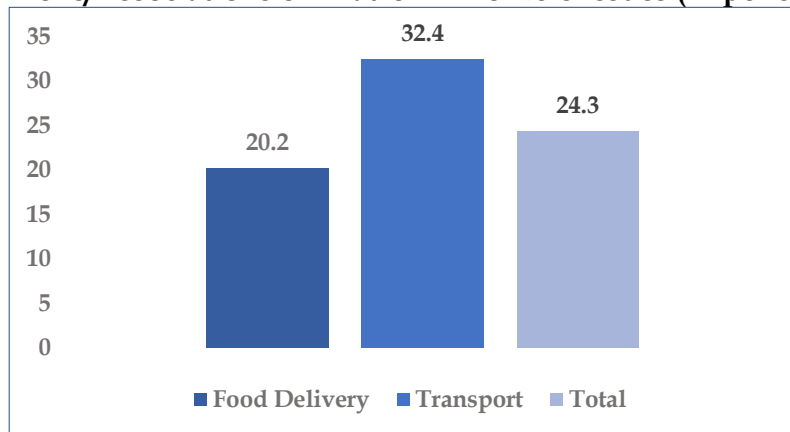
President of an independent union for online transport workers  
Many platform workers are reluctant to join labour unions because of their political affiliation. Workers show more affinity towards joining unions that promote themselves as "independent union" and "workers society". However, due to the differences in opinions between members, such unions frequently split into new unions and often fail to address workers' concerns. The presence of around 30 independent associations in the online transport sector is cited as more of a trouble than a benefit.

*"We used to discuss our problems and plan protests through our WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group is open to all, as most of us do not know each other. So some workers who are favourable to the staff of aggregators used to share the details of our discussion with them."*

Ernakulum district secretary of a trade union

Data from the primary survey indicates that only one-fourth of the platform workers think that labour unions are actively involved in the issues of platform workers, as presented in Figure 4.9. While just below one-third of online transport workers consider labour unions to be actively involved with the issues of platform workers, only one-fifth of the food delivery workers share the same.

**Figure 4.9: Response on Active Involvement of Labour Unions/Associations on Platform Workers Issues (in per cent)**

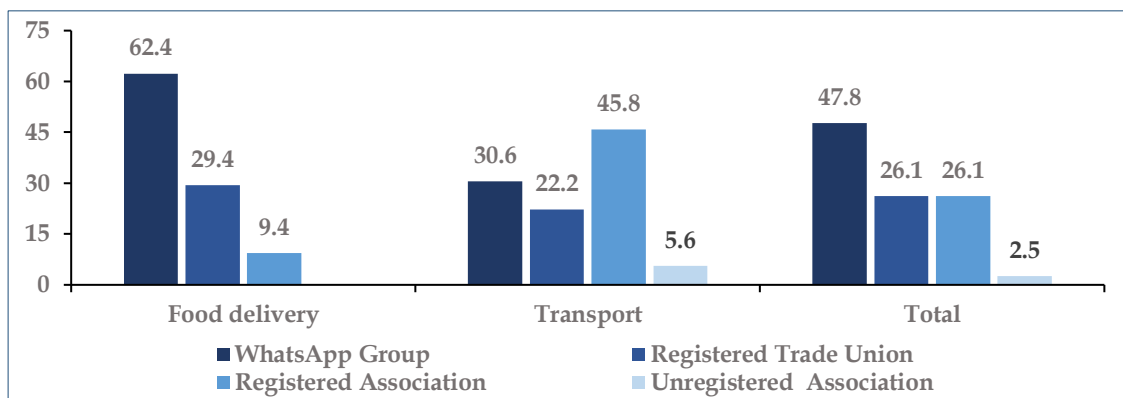


Note: Base is 630, which includes 420 food delivery workers and 210 transport workers.

Source: Primary Survey

The data from the field survey also indicated that two-fifths of food delivery workers and just above two-thirds of transport workers are members of labour unions or any associations working for the welfare of platform workers, as presented in Figure 4.10. Thus, those who are satisfied with the involvement of labour unions are more likely to be members of these unions. Among the members, 63 per cent of food delivery workers and 31 per cent of transport workers are only WhatsApp group members.

**Figure 4.10: Membership of Platform Workers in Associations/Unions (in per cent)**



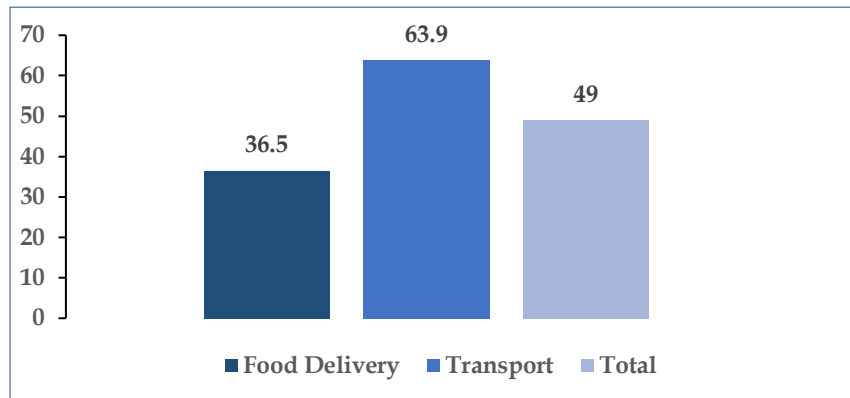
Note: Base is 157, which includes 85 food delivery workers and 72 transport workers who are members of labour unions/associations/communities; Multiple Responses

Source: Primary Survey

The share of food delivery workers in WhatsApp groups is more than double that of transport workers. While 26.1 per cent of workers are registered trade union members, the same share of workers are members of other registered associations. It is observed that a significantly higher share of food delivery workers are members of registered trade unions than registered associations. At the same time, the reverse seems to be true in the case of transport workers.

Data also indicates that only half of the workers who have membership in any union or association participate actively in its activities, as demonstrated in Figure 4.11. Compared to food delivery workers (36.5 per cent), a higher share of online transport workers is active in the activities of unions/associations. The workers in the transport sector are more active in the union activities.

**Figure 4.11: Participation of Workers in Activities of Unions/Associations (in per cent)**



Note: Base is 157, which includes 85 food delivery workers and 72 transport workers who are members of labour unions/associations/communities.

Source: Primary Survey

Labour unions allege that when workers are found to be actively engaged in the activities of a union, the aggregators deactivate their accounts without warning or providing justification. The suicide attempt by a driver at the Uber office in Kochi (Deccan Chronicle, 2016), whose account was blocked for initiating a strike, evidently reveals the hurdles in collective bargaining. Prabhu, a union leader who led the strike against Swiggy in Kochi noted:

*"We put up 30 days of continuous offline protest in Kochi during November 2022. The company was not ready for a tripartite meeting, and eventually, the strike was called off. The IDs of twelve workers at the forefront of protest were blocked for eight months right from the start of protests."*

It is reported that only 15 per cent of the platform workers who participated in the survey took part in strikes or protests announced by labour unions. Among the platform workers who participated in the protests, 11.5 per cent shared that the aggregators had taken disciplinary action against them for participating in the protests. The companies' major disciplinary actions are blocking ID, reducing orders/trips, cutting down ratings, and restricting special offers.

Normally, the ratings of a platform worker and the physical proximity of the worker to the restaurant/customer location (in the case of a transport app) are two indicators used by the algorithm to assign orders to workers. However, union members allege that the platforms use algorithms in a discriminatory way to suppress the protests by designing algorithms so that certain people get more rides or orders than others. Similarly, the algorithm mistreats the workers if they are found to be engaged in collective bargaining. However, the research team could not cross-check such allegations with the aggregators. Rony, a union leader who led the strike against a major food delivery platform in Thiruvananthapuram, whose account was blocked by the company eight times, noted:

*"The company has blocked accounts of union leaders and reduced the number of orders given to protesters. Also, they give more orders to newcomers compared to experienced workers. The company manipulates the app algorithm based on their wish and wants and is often used as a tool of disciplinary action."*

*"Currently, there are only 50 to 60 online transport workers in Kozhikode, and we know each other. Hence, we can stage a strike by ensuring all drivers are offline. However, Uber shows dummy vehicles in the app to create a feeling among protesters that some are working silently."*

Secretary of an Independent online taxi union

Food delivery companies, especially Swiggy, have an agreement with third-party companies such as Shadowfax and LoadShare to supply additional food delivery workers. Usually, such an agreement is helpful for aggregators to have enough platform workers say when there is high demand for deliveries. However, a prominent food delivery platform uses riders from these third agencies during strikes by offering them attractive incentives. A leader of an independent association noted:

*"As the strike continued, many workers in this platform have joined these third-party agencies and other delivery platforms. Thus, we were forced to call off the protest after 30 days."*

When enquired about earnings from a Shadowfax rider who also delivers food for another major food delivery platform, his responses were as follows:

*"Since incentives are calculated based on order pay in the food delivery platform, their delivery workers are generally assigned small distance orders. Meanwhile, the incentives are calculated in logistic platforms based on the number of*

*deliveries completed. Hence, we are assigned long-distance orders. They play smart with an algorithm in this way to limit the capacity of workers to earn more."*

The competing nature of work, the limited possibility of building relations among workers, the lack of enthusiasm from part-timers, and the lack of solidarity within the union make it increasingly challenging to establish formal and informal avenues for unionisation and collective bargaining.

## **4.6 Response of the State**

It is imperative for the State to ensure the rights at work of all labour market participants, irrespective of their employment classification. However, in the case of platform work, this poses a challenge and necessitates exploring experience at the international level (Lane, 2020). This section thematically explores the issues that require interference from the state and provides relevant examples from other countries.

### **4.6.1 Minimum Wages and Work Time**

To address issues of income instability, low pay, and economic security, entitlement to minimum wage is essential. Globally, various countries have proposed regulations for ensuring fair remuneration for platform workers. In January 2018, New York City became the first in the U.S. to set a minimum wage for app-based car services. Under the law, apps are given different options on how they would like to remunerate their workers: per delivery, per hour worked, or formula of their own making, as long as workers earn a minimum of U.S. \$17.96 per hour. Apps that pay per trip must pay approximately 50 cents per minute, while apps that pay delivery workers for the entire time they're logged in, including when waiting for an order, must pay approximately 30 cents per minute. The New York Supreme Court ruling in June 2023 also extends the minimum wage to food delivery companies such as DoorDash and Grubhub. So, the workers will start earning U.S. \$17.96 per hour and increase to U.S. \$19.96 per hour by 2025 (New York City Consumer and Worker Protection, 2023).

Similarly, the Ontario Government has introduced the Working for Workers Act, 2022, making Ontario the first province in Canada to establish a minimum wage for digital platform workers who offer rides deliver food and other items for companies like Uber, Door Dash, and Instacart. The general minimum wage rate is adjusted to CAD \$15.00 per hour (Ontario Newsroom, 2022). The labour bill introduced by the Australian

Government in August 2023 gives the Fair Work Commission the power to order different sets of conditions for workers at different platforms, allowing new standards to be introduced without further legislation. Following the recommendation of the Fair Work Commission, Uber has agreed to the principle of minimum pay for drivers (Karp, 2023).

A practical difficulty in extending minimum wage legislation to platform workers is determining what counts as work. In the location-based platform, it becomes important to determine whether the workers are to be paid for the time they spend searching for work (online). There is a growing demand among platform workers to limit their working time and avail of weekly rest and annual paid leave. It is driven by several factors, such as health concerns and achieving a better work-life balance. Transport and food delivery workers often spend as much time searching for tasks as they do performing them.

*"Usually, I work fourteen to fifteen hours a day, but sometimes I have to work up to twenty-two hours to achieve the target. Uber considers the hours we wait for rides to be a resting period for drivers. But it doesn't work that way; we are online, which means we are in the business."*

Response from Saneesh, a union leader in Kochi

Different approaches are adopted to assess the working time of platform workers. For instance, the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) has set maximum working time regulations for all workers, including platform workers. These regulations include limits on the average working week and requirements for rest breaks and daily rest periods. Following the standard, the working time of Uber drivers in New Zealand must not exceed 13 hours in a cumulative workday, and then drivers must take a rest time of at least 10 hours. After 7 hours of continuous work time, drivers must rest for at least 30 minutes (Uber, n.d.). Again, work time must not exceed 70 hours in a cumulative work period, and drivers must take a rest time of at least 24 hours. Similarly, after the Supreme Court ruling in the UK, Uber requires drivers to rest for 6 hours after driving for 10 hours.

#### **4.6.2 Grievance Redressal**

If defined as "employees", individuals typically benefit from employment protection laws that defend them against unjustified breaches of contract by employers, encompassing remedies for unfair dismissal and wage theft (Lane, 2020). Inadequate dispute resolution

mechanisms in platform work provide no scope for individual workers to negotiate working conditions, eventually reinforcing the asymmetry in work relationships. Philip, a union leader from Kochi, said,

*"The platform companies have no courage to face workers. That is why they shut down their offices and keep their employees home."*

While grievance redressal is the duty of platform companies, some countries have taken measures to address the concerns and grievances of workers by establishing dedicated mechanisms or agencies. In May 2021, the Spanish Parliament passed legislation as the "Riders' Law" (Real Decreto-ley 9/2021), which has provisions related to collective bargaining and the establishment of a labour rights committee to address riders' concerns (Global deal, 2022). Social partners can also contribute to creating simplified conflict resolution mechanisms within the platform sector. For instance, in 2017, eight platform companies in Germany, in collaboration with the German Crowdsourcing Association and I.G. Metall (a trade union in Germany), founded an "Ombuds office" and formulated a Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct to address conflicts between platform workers and platform operators who had embraced the code (ILO, 2018).

#### **4.6.3 Determining Employment Status**

Food delivery and transport platforms growth display a common pattern. When launched, platforms supported delivery partners/drivers with full-time commitments to diversify their operations. These workers are treated as assets during the initial phase and paid fairly. As the number of customers of the company increases, remuneration for delivery persons/drivers declines, platform workers start to demand "employee status" instead of ascribed "partner" status, and full-time workers become a liability for the company. While the level of control exercised by platforms is the primary legal criterion in determining employee status, the nature of their control over working conditions plays a central role in regulating the labour relations in the gig economy (Collier et al. 2017). The higher the control wielded by businesses on workers, the more likely workers are classified as employees of the corresponding businesses. In several countries, the highest courts are making concerted efforts to re-evaluate the fundamental aspects used to distinguish employees and the self-employed (Khan & Sapkal, 2023).

The California Assembly Bill 5 (AB5) of January 1, 2020, is an example of legislation<sup>7</sup> that puts the onus on aggregators to prove that the worker is an independent contractor by satisfying a three-pronged test known as the "ABC" test. The test assumes that workers are employees unless the company that hires them can prove the following three things: (a) the worker is free to perform services without the control or direction of the company; (b) the worker is performing work tasks that are outside the usual course of the company's business activities and; (c) the worker is customarily engaged in an independently established trade, occupation, or business of the exact nature as that involved in the work performed (Deepika & Madhusoodhan, 2022). Aggregators challenged the AB5 ruling as they will be obliged to offer health insurance and paid time off under its provisions. Though the companies lost their appeal in the California Supreme Court, aggregators heavily supported California Proposition 22<sup>8</sup>, an alternate model proposed by them. As Californians voted 58 per cent in favour of the proposition, the drivers are designated only as independent contractors. Factors like degree of control over essential aspects of their work for platform workers, such as setting their schedules, using their vehicles, choosing their work locations, and the option to work for competing organisations were points raised not to classify them as employees.

Arguments for and against classifying platform workers as employees and not independent contractors can be seen in different countries. In February 2020, the Ontario Labour Relations Board issued a ruling (*Canadian Union of Postal Workers v. Foodora Inc.*, 2020) that classified Foodora couriers as dependent contractors of the food delivery company as they exhibited characteristics more akin to employees. Dependent contractors fall under the definition of "employee" under Part I of the Canadian Labour Code, which applies to collective bargaining in the federally regulated private sector. Similarly, in *Klooger v Foodora Australia Pty Ltd* (2018), a terminated food delivery worker was deemed to be an employee of Foodora by the Fairwork Commission of Australia in 2018

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<sup>7</sup> Although not for regulating platform economy in the United Kingdom they have Intermediaries Legislation (IR35) designed to identify contractors and businesses which avoid paying the appropriate tax by working as 'disguised' employees. The IR35 also have detailed criterion to classify individuals into contractors and employees. For details refer government of UK website, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-off-payroll-working-ir35> accessed on October 25, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> In US, proposition is typically a proposed piece of legislation, that a section of the state population wishes to see enacted. It will be brought about by the process of an initiative say by a campaign which seek to either introduce or repeal a piece of state law. As propositions are submitted via the initiative method, they will require a petition to be circulated beforehand and the petition must reach the required population threshold. At this point if successful the proposition will go to a public ballot.

through applying the degree of work control and supervision test based on the principle of employment common law. In the United Kingdom, the Supreme Court ruled (*Uber BV and Others v. Aslam, Farrar, and others*, 2021) that Uber drivers must be treated as workers, emphasising the level of control exerted by platforms over workers and the assumption that such control implies responsibility for their working conditions and well-being. The judgment unanimously dismissed Uber's appeal and upheld the Employment Tribunal decision, which found that Uber drivers are "workers" entitled to worker rights. The Supreme Court also found that Uber drivers are "workers" when they are within their working territory, have the Uber app switched on, and are ready and willing to work.

Countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, France, and Italy have started to use organisational integration as a prerequisite for presuming employment with regard to contract tenure, working hours, and work performance due to the intermittent character of work performed in the platform economy (Khan & Sapkal, 2023). Some countries, like Canada and Spain, have explored an intermediate category of "dependent contractors." However, the outcomes of such measures have been mixed. To classify a worker as a "dependent contractor," specific criteria must be met, such as working for a single employer for an extended period, earning income exclusively from that employer, and working without subcontractors or other employees, which is hard to monitor for the companies and for platform workers to comply.

#### **4.6.4 Situation in India**

In India, platform workers are brought into the labour law's ambit for the first time under the Code on Social Security, 2020 (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2020). The provisions in the Code provide various welfare policies, including social security benefits for workers. However, there are many questions about the operational definition of platform workers. Section 2(35) of CSS defines a gig worker as "a person who participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship"; Section 2 (60) defines "platform work" as a work arrangement outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities which may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment; Section 2(61) defines a platform worker as "someone engaged in or undertaking platform work"; and Section 2(86) defines an

unorganised worker as "a home-based, self-employed or wage worker in the unorganised sector." These definitions are overlapping. The definition of unorganised workers is exhaustive enough to include gig and platform workers. For instance, a person who delivers food might be classified as an unorganised worker and a gig and platform worker. However, labour unions consider the legal definition of gig and platform workers as a hindrance to furthering their demands as "employees". The Code provides for setting up a Social Security Fund, and one of the sources of the Fund is the contribution from aggregators between 1 to 2 per cent of the annual turnover of an aggregator subject to the limit of 5 per cent of the amount paid or payable by an aggregator to such workers. It is yet to be seen how such arrangements to contribute to the Fund will operate in reality, as there is enough evidence that social security funds constituted for other classes of workers have shown dismal performance. As the Codes are yet to be implemented, workers now mainly depend on the social protection provided by the aggregators. There is also criticism that gig workers are mentioned only in the Social Security code and not in the other labour codes, which means they remain deprived of access to minimum wage and safe working conditions.

To bring in better employment conditions for workers in the platform economy, it is pertinent for the government to interfere, as the existing legal framework is not suited to regulate the platform economy. For instance, platform companies in the transport sector are capitalising on the legal vacuum regarding permission to continue their operation in India. The Motor Vehicles Act, framed in 1988, does not cover ride-sharing services like Uber and Ola. In the Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill, 2016, an "aggregator" has been defined as "a digital intermediary or marketplace for a passenger to connect with a driver for transportation." Further, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (2020) has issued the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020 as per the requirements and provisions of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019 as a guiding framework for the State Governments to consider for the issuance of licenses to transport aggregators and to regulate the business conducted by such aggregators.

The Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020 has produced detailed guidelines for the competent authority (authority empowered by the State Government) and aggregators to address challenges and concerns related to the growth of ride-sharing platforms while promoting safety and transparency. The guidelines provide compliance to the competent

authority for examining the eligibility of the aggregator for granting a license and cancelling or suspending the same if conditions were breached. Likewise, it notifies the aggregators to ensure necessary compliance regarding vehicles and workers during onboarding and operations. Further, it informs about the requirements regarding the app or website, the safety of drivers and customers, and regulations of fares to be followed by the aggregator. Although this has been done to make aggregators accountable for their operations, the state governments, including Kerala, are yet to issue licenses to the online transport aggregators.<sup>9</sup>

Representatives of worker's associations voiced their disenchantment as they believed that a government monitoring mechanism to oversee the activities of platform companies would help them confront the problems of casualisation and precarity.

*"Even a street hawker requires a government license to run their business in the country. But these multinational companies have been operating for so long without a license."*

Response of a union leader from Kozhikkode

Questioning the passive attitude of the Government of Maharashtra, the Bombay high court observed in March 2022 (*Roppen Transportation Services Pvt Ltd v. Union of India*, 2023) that transport aggregators such as Ola and Uber were operating in Maharashtra without valid licenses and directed the government to issue licenses to them as per Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020. Later, in July 2022, the Delhi government finally issued the Delhi Motor Vehicle Aggregator Scheme (Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi, 2022) for the licensing and regulation of aggregators that provide passenger transport services and for the regulation of other delivery aggregators that offer delivery services of goods and commodities. Although the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020 could be worthwhile in bringing legal interventions to transport platform operations, the guidelines hardly detail any strategies to ensure the welfare of platform workers, for which state governments are accountable.

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<sup>9</sup> Answering the question raised by P T A Raheem (Question number 3642), Antony Raju (Minister for Road Transport, Motor Vehicles, Water Transport, Government of Kerala) mentioned that no licence is given to the online transport platforms in Kerala. The question was raised on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023 during the 8<sup>th</sup> session of 15<sup>th</sup> Kerala legislative assembly.

In this context, the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act passed by the Government of Rajasthan in July 2023 deserves importance. The Act provides for the constitution of the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers Welfare Board, which is endowed with specific powers such as: (a) registering platform-based gig workers and aggregators operating within the State of Rajasthan; (b) implementing the integration of the welfare cess deduction mechanism into the application of aggregators; (c) formulating and communicating schemes designed to provide social security to registered platform-based gig workers; (d) ensuring that workers have access to benefits as per the schemes; (e) ensuring that rights of platform-based gig workers are protected with time-bound grievance redressal; and (f) engaging with registered unions working with platform-based gig workers and conducting regular consultations with them.

As per the provisions of the Act, all platform-based workers onboarded with any platform are automatically registered with the Board irrespective of the duration of engagement with the platform and hence assigned a unique ID. Every aggregator shall be required to deposit a welfare cess known as the "Platform Based Gig Workers Welfare Cess" (at a rate as determined by the Government of Rajasthan), which shall be a fixed percentage of the total amount paid by the customers' to the aggregator. The Act envisages the establishment of the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers Social Security and Welfare Fund, which includes the welfare cess, individual contributions from platform-based gig workers, State Government grants, donations, and other transfers. All payments generated on platforms will be mapped through the Central Transaction Information and Management System (CTIMS) administered and monitored by the Board. The CTIMS will also oversee the details of commission charges, payments made to workers, GST deducted, welfare cess collected/ deducted/ spent, etc., in connection with platform-based gig workers. The Act also provides rights to registered platform-based gig workers to file a petition before the relevant authority designated by the Government of Rajasthan to address concerns regarding their entitlements, payments, and other benefits under the Act. The state government may constitute an advisory council with equal representation from aggregators, workers, and the state legislature to advise on matters regarding the administration of the Act.

Several concerns are raised about sharing details of platform workers with the government by the aggregators. Such data sharing comes with associated costs for

aggregators, which will inevitably be reflected in the final amount payable by the consumer. Additionally, integrating all the platform-based data into a central management system will be gruelling due to the potential variations in algorithms and technologies of different platforms. The Act is also not clear on the distribution of benefits for platform workers. Given that all resources (collected through cess) are pooled in a centralised account, all individuals registered on the platform are entitled to the benefits. But how will benefits be determined for part-time and full-time platform workers, say in the case of accidents or health emergencies.

This landmark initiative appears to be already motivating other States to bring about similar labour reforms toward the gig economy. The Karnataka State Government (Tejaswi, 2023) has announced a free accidental and life insurance cover worth Rs 4 lakh, for which the State will fully cover the cost of the annual premium. Similarly, the Tamil Nadu State Government (The Indian Express, 2023) is preparing to establish a separate welfare board for gig workers.

In contrast to many other Indian states, Kerala has adopted a proactive approach to the platform sector. A prime example of this is the introduction of Yatri in Kochi in 2021 as part of the Kochi Open Mobility Network (KOMN), which effectively extended the scope of the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) beyond its initial focus on groceries and other consumer brands. This expansion is significant because it not only paves the way for other transport platforms to join ONDC but also carries a core innovation in the form of reducing the cost structure of the critical components (like maps, cloud, operations & marketing) and, thereby converting from a high commission-based model to a very nominal subscription fee for the drivers, which is up to 10% of the government fixed base fare.

Furthermore, the Kerala government launched the Kerala Savaari app in August 2022, marking India's first state government-owned online taxi service. This initiative is driven by the state's attempt to ensure passengers receive fair and reliable services while guaranteeing decent remuneration for auto rickshaw-taxi workers struggling with private companies. Kerala Savaari adheres to government-approved fare structures, avoiding surge pricing, and applies a modest 8 per cent service charge. Of this charge, 6 per cent is allocated to the technical partner, and the remaining 2 per cent is designated for implementing and promoting the scheme (The New Indian Express, 2022). In the long

run, Kerala Savaari intends to offer insurance, train drivers as tourist guides, and expand its operation to more cities (Kallungal, 2022).

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The analysis demonstrates conflicting positions of stakeholders on different themes. Lack of trust seems pertinent among stakeholders, who doubt each other's intentions. It is essential to have regular consultations to resolve issues and to improve the platform ecosystem. There should also be discussions on what is possible and not feasible to arrive at pragmatic solutions. Taking a cue from good practices happening in other parts of the world would be beneficial.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Introduction

The primary focus of the research was to understand the work and working conditions of platform workers in Kerala, specifically focusing on food delivery and transport workers. The study also examined the response of key stakeholders in the platform economy – aggregators, service providers, customers of platforms, trade unions/associations of platform workers and the State. This Chapter presents findings from the research and recommendations to improve platform workers' work and working conditions. The rest of the Chapter is organised as follows: Section 5.2 will summarise the study's significant findings, and Section 5.3 will discuss recommendations to improve platform workers' work and working conditions. Conclusions and recommendations emerging from the study are presented thematically.

## 5.2 Conclusions

The study's findings are presented thematically in three subsections – characteristics of platform workers, work and working conditions in the platform and stakeholder responses.

### 5.2.1 Characteristics of Platform Workers

1. Platform workers, especially food delivery and transport workers, are predominantly males.
2. Those engaged in platform work are relatively young, with an average age of 32. Nearly two-thirds of the food delivery workers are below 30 years old; the average age of workers in the sample was 29 years. With respect to transport workers, nearly three-fourths are aged between 30 and 50 years; the average age of workers was 38 years.
3. Platform workers have impressive educational attainment; three-fourths have qualified plus two or above, and more than one-fourth have graduated.

4. Three-fourths of the platform workers were engaged in wage or self-employment while joining the platforms. Only one-tenth were engaged in permanent jobs. Noticeably, one-fifth of the platform workers are studying while doing platform work.
5. A major motivation to join platform work is flexibility associated with the job – the reason noted by about one-third of workers. While flexibility is a key factor that motivates young workers (below 30 years) to join platform work, the lack of other employment opportunities is the primary reason cited by workers above 30 years.
6. Close to one-fourth of workers who participated in the survey and employed before joining platforms were working outside Kerala or other countries; nearly three-fourths of them were employed in Gulf countries.
7. About one-fourth of the platform workers are not natives of the district where they work. Among the transport workers, four-fifths of the non-natives came to the district exclusively to join platform work. It is also important to note that 62 per cent of those who reported having shifted to the city where they currently work did it at least one year before.
8. While 93 per cent of food delivery workers own the vehicle used for platform work, the corresponding figure for transport workers is 79 per cent. Two-thirds of the transport and one-third of the food delivery workers bought the assets to join platform work. Half the transport and almost one-fourth of the food delivery workers purchased only vehicles to join platform work. However, a group pursued both mobile and vehicle work to join the platform work. Three-fourths of food delivery workers and 89 per cent of transport workers have incurred loans to purchase a mobile, vehicle or both to work on platforms. The average outstanding debt for transport workers is Rs. 3.13 lakhs compared with Rs. 66,207 for food delivery workers.
9. Almost half of the platform workers did not need help joining the platform. Among those who required help, more than four-fifths sought the help of friends. Friends were more supportive than family and relatives when respondents joined platform work.

10. Transport workers have spent more years in platform work than food delivery workers. While three-fifths of the food delivery workers have only one year or less of experience, the corresponding figure for food delivery workers is two-fifths.
11. Respondents included those for whom the platform was the primary source of income (90 per cent) and those for whom the platform was not the primary source of income.

### **5.2.2 Work and Working Conditions in the Platform**

1. Among platform workers who participated in the survey, 92 per cent reported they could engage in the platform work according to will. Similarly, more than half of the respondents noted that they could maintain a work-life balance, and more than two-thirds of workers stated they could find free time to engage in leisure activities.
2. On average, a platform worker worked 11 hours daily for 25 days a month. Notably, one-fourth of the workers work all days a month without taking leave for more than 12 hours daily. Transport workers spend more time a day and more days a month for work than food delivery workers. For instance, while food delivery workers spend an average of 10 hours daily and 24 average days a month, transport workers spend an average of 12 hours daily and work an average of 25 days a month. Though platforms offer flexibility to workers in choosing their desired time slot, it is evident that workers need to give up this flexibility to secure decent earnings.
3. Data from the primary survey indicate that the distance a platform worker travels daily is high. Close to one-fourth of transport workers travelled between 151 and 200 kilometres. One-fifth of transport workers travel more than 200 kilometres every day. In the case of food delivery workers, the majority travel below 200 kilometres a day. The average distance platform workers travel is 164.15 kilometres (161 kilometres for food delivery and 171 kilometres for transport workers).
4. The average distance (mean) travelled by a transport worker to secure their first order is 8 kilometres, which is one kilometre more than the average distance travelled by a food delivery worker.

5. It is found that workers' earnings have not improved over the years (in fact, lowered due to revisions in payment structure) while the expenses associated with work (such as fuel charges, mobile recharge, rent, vehicle maintenance charge) and other basic living expenses increased. Only one-fourth of the workers shared that their financial situation has improved after working on platforms.
6. The average monthly revenue of platform workers without deducting expenses is Rs.28,321 (Rs. 21,800 for food delivery workers and 4,1363 for transport workers). Platform workers' average monthly work-related expenses (fuel charges and mobile recharge) come to Rs.10,928 (Rs.7,647 for food delivery workers and Rs.17,489 for transport workers). After deducting the work-related expenses, their average monthly earnings is Rs. 17,393 (Rs.14,152 for food delivery workers and Rs.23,873 for transport workers). Platform workers' average take-home monthly income will be much lower if one considers vehicle rent, vehicle maintenance expenses, monthly loan repayment and depreciation.
7. Workers employ different strategies to improve their earnings, and working on multiple platforms is one of them. While only one-tenth of food delivery workers work on multiple platforms, two-thirds of transport workers choose to work on multiple platforms.
8. More than one-fourth of the platform workers reported encountering accidents while at work. However, less than two-fifths of them reported the incident to the aggregator. Among them, only one-fourth reported receiving assistance from aggregators in the form of accident insurance and loss of pay when unable to work while recurring from accident. Two-thirds reported that the assistance was inadequate to meet the accident expenses.
9. Among platform workers, 42 per cent reported recurring health issues (44 per cent for food delivery workers and 36 per cent for transport) after starting working for platforms. Major health issues reported by workers are muscle pain, fatigue, joint pain, and sleeplessness. The monthly average expenditure on platform workers' health care is Rs. 1,567 and Rs. 1,257 for food delivery and transport workers, respectively.
10. The majority (84 per cent) of the platform workers are reported to have contacted the aggregator at some point primarily to report grievances and general queries.

While two-thirds of platform workers contacted the aggregator via call support or helpline numbers, more than one-fourth directly contacted the team leader.

11. Platform workers reported numerous complaints and grievances about platform work to the student team. More than half of the platform workers stated that they experience long delays in receiving orders/rides as they are about to achieve daily targets. Other major complaints are mistakes in calculating remuneration, lack of transparency in computing remuneration, and wrongly levying penalties.
12. It was found that only half of the platform workers were satisfied with the grievance redressal. Transport workers are more dissatisfied (63 per cent) with the grievance redressal than food delivery workers (46 per cent). The primary reason for dissatisfaction is that the aggregator has taken no action.
13. Inappropriate behaviour from various stakeholders is one of the major grievances of platform workers. While half cited inappropriate behaviour by the security at customer locations, one-third cited similar behaviour from restaurant staff, and one-fourth complained that the customers behave indifferently.
14. It is reported that 45 per cent of platform workers experience difficulties communicating with the aggregator. While four-fifths complained that staff are not readily available, half reported a long delay getting a response from the aggregator.
15. A major challenge in platform work is related to workplace facilities; three-fourths of the platform workers reported a lack of parking spaces, and 70 per cent reported a lack of toilet facilities. Similarly, more than four-fifths of the workers shared that they skipped meals regularly at work to earn more and maintain good ratings. A significant proportion of workers also reported experiencing emotional issues such as stress, safety issues and discrimination. Overall, three-fifths of the platform workers reported satisfaction with the job. Compared to transport workers, food delivery workers indicated better job satisfaction (64 per cent vs. 55 per cent).
16. About two-fifths of workers (48 per cent of food delivery and 20 per cent of transport workers) plan to stop working on platforms if they get a better-paid job. However, nearly one-third of platform workers, two-fifths of the transport workers and 15 per cent of transport workers reported that they will continue in platform work until they are physically fit.

## **5.2.3 Other Stakeholder Responses**

### **5.2.3.1 Response of Aggregators**

1. In general, aggregators did not favour workers' demand to address the decline in their earnings. They cited declining profits, so they cannot provide higher remuneration.
2. Aggregators condemned workers' demand for 'employee status'. They maintained that they could not extend social protection beyond accident insurance and loss of pay wages when met with an accident, as workers are independent contractors.
3. Aggregators strategically avoid direct engagement with labour unions. When workers resort to strikes or protests, they agree to discussions in the presence of the labour commissioner or labour officers to resolve issues raised by workers.
4. Startups in food delivery and transport platforms are more worker-friendly, charging low commissions. However, it becomes challenging for them to continue operations due to competition from dominant aggregators who could give better offers to customers. They are for more government interference for better governance of the platform economy.

### **5.2.3.2 Response of Restaurant Owners/Managers**

1. The majority of restaurant managers who work with platforms are content with how online platforms have positively impacted their businesses. According to them, platform companies provide efficient grievance resolution, with many restaurant managers noting that concerns are addressed in real time. The platforms offer a dedicated sales monitoring mechanism that aids restaurants by providing valuable tips and marketing strategies to boost sales.
2. Although restaurants unanimously acknowledge increased sales after joining platforms, there is also shared concern about the high commission charged by aggregators (20 to 30 per cent per order).
3. Aggregator policies regarding remuneration and support vary according to the value of the restaurant's brand. Top-branded restaurants reported receiving better support from platforms. However, some restaurants are concerned about their growing dependence on aggregators. Capitalising on their dependency,

aggregators reportedly impose higher commission rates and miscellaneous charges on these restaurants.

4. The primary concern of restaurant owners regarding platform workers revolves around their inappropriate behaviour. Many restaurant managers and owners expressed that delivery workers lack discipline and create inconvenience for their staff and customers. While a few restaurants provide facilities like drinking water, waiting area and toilet facilities for platform workers, a larger share cannot afford to extend such facilities, and there are also a small share of restaurant owners and managers that it is not their duty to provide such facilities to platform workers.

#### **5.2.3.3 Response of Customers**

1. While more than three-fourths of the respondents who participated in the online survey have used e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, etc., in the last three months, little less than three-fourths reported using food delivery platforms, and nearly half used transport platforms.
2. Three-fourths of the food delivery and transport users who participated in the online survey reported using it only five times or less monthly. More than half of the users of food delivery platforms reported that they could enjoy different cuisines and quality food at their convenience because of food delivery platforms. Similarly, transport users consider the possibility of travelling without haggling to be the most significant positive change.
3. Two-thirds of the users of food delivery apps and three-fifths of the transport app users reported at least a problem on the platform. While the higher charge incurred by the platform is cited as a significant problem by food delivery workers, delays in assigning rides are noted by transport users.
4. One-third of users in the food delivery and transport apps reported at least one issue with platform workers. While delay in food delivery is the central issue reported by food delivery users, the frequent cancelling of rides by drivers is noted by transport users.

#### **5.2.3.4 Response of Unions/Associations**

1. Platform workers represent a diverse group, including students with alternative income sources and full-time employees. Consequently, only a subset of workers,

particularly those committed to longer-term engagement, show interest in collective bargaining.

2. In contrast to the online transport sector, there are notably fewer registered associations among food delivery workers. While just below one-third of online transport workers consider labour unions to be actively involved with the issues of platform workers, only one-fifth of the food delivery workers share the same opinion. One-fifth of food delivery and one-third of transport workers are members of labour unions or associations.
3. Members of labour unions assert that platforms employ algorithms in a discriminatory manner to crush protests, and algorithms are made to act in a discriminatory manner, affecting workers' earnings. During strikes organised by platform workers, the food delivery platform extensively utilises riders from third-party agencies, enticing them with attractive incentives to dampen the spirit of protests.
4. The competitive nature of the work, limited opportunities for building relationships among workers, lack of enthusiasm from part-time workers, and a lack of solidarity within the union pose increasing challenges for establishing both formal and informal avenues for unionisation and collective bargaining.

#### **5.2.3.5 Response of the Government**

1. In a landmark move, the Code on Social Security 2020 has, for the first time, included platform workers within the purview of Indian labour laws. The provisions within the Code encompass various welfare policies, ensuring social security benefits for these workers.
2. The Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020, issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways under the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019, serve as a comprehensive framework for State governments to issue licenses to transport aggregators and regulate their business operations. However, several state governments, including Kerala, have yet to frame a State Aggregator Policy or to grant licenses to online transport aggregators.
3. The government of Rajasthan enacted the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act in July 2023, establishing the Rajasthan Platform

Based Gig Workers Welfare Board. The Board is endowed with specific powers to address the welfare needs of platform workers.

4. Diverging from the approaches of many other Indian states, Kerala has taken a proactive stance in the platform sector. A notable illustration is the introduction of Yatri in Kochi in 2021 as part of the KOMN, effectively broadening the scope of the ONDC initiative. Additionally, in August 2022, the Kerala government launched the Kerala Savaari app, marking the inception of India's first state government-owned online taxi service. Kerala Savaari is planning to expand its operation all over the State.
5. The Kerala government is contemplating bringing a comprehensive act for the welfare of platform workers.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Several mechanisms could support platform workers and improve their working conditions. Top-down approaches like recognising employer-employee relationship regulations and enforcing employment standards could be practical ways to improve work and working conditions in the platforms. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are several instances at the international level when the state has attempted to improve the working conditions of platform workers, which have received varying degrees of success. For instance, there was an attempt to recognise platform workers as employees of aggregators, as in the California court order, which could not succeed as the aggregator could later revoke the court order and continue to treat drivers in app-based ride-hailing and delivery as independent contractors. Deliveroo has established Rider Forums in several European countries, allowing workers to share their ideas and feedback directly with Deliveroo. Similarly, the Ontario Government has introduced the Working for Workers Act, 2022, making Ontario the first province in Canada to establish a minimum wage for digital platform workers who offer rides and deliver food and other items for companies like Uber, DoorDash, and Instacart. In this context, it would be appropriate to discuss measures that could improve working conditions in platforms through interventions by different stakeholders in the platform economy. Major recommendations to improve work and working conditions of platform workers are noted below:

### 5.3.1 Strengthen Statutory Provision to Ensure Rights of Platform Workers

Considering positive developments in other countries to improve platform workers' work and working conditions, the Central and state governments must strengthen legal provisions to bring platform workers under existing labour laws and actively engage with aggregators through informal negotiations. A significant impediment preventing legal and welfare measures for platform workers is the inability to establish an employer-employee relationship. However, that should not impede negotiation with aggregators to ensure a minimum remuneration for workers. The study shows that platform workers incur substantial money on work-related expenditures like fuel charges, vehicle rent, etc. Workers' net income is sometimes below the minimum wage if time spent in platform work (including waiting time) is considered. Globally, several countries have proposed regulations for fair remuneration to tackle income insecurities in platform work. For instance, in January 2018, New York City became the first state in the US to set a minimum wage for app-based car services. Later, in June 2023, the minimum wage was extended to food delivery companies such as DoorDash and Grubhub in the New York Supreme Court ruling. Similar judgments were noted in Chapter 4 from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. So far, no such attempts or even discussions are happening in India. This is important considering that, unlike developed countries, those engaged in platform work in India are predominantly full-time workers.

Currently, major aggregators provide accident insurance benefits to all platform workers in India. However, platform workers do not qualify for benefits like sick leave because of their independent contractor status. However, there are good practices from other countries that could be followed. For instance, in 2018, Deliveroo announced a sick-pay policy for all UK riders. Riders who have completed at least 30 orders in the previous eight weeks are eligible for earnings support while unwell. Coverage will be for up to 15 days of payment and must be certified by a doctor.

Rajasthan is the only state in India which have brought out legislation to ensure the welfare of platform workers, while the labour welfare and skill development department in Tamil Nadu has constituted the Platform Based Gig Workers Welfare Board, which will cater to workers in e-commerce services including online food delivery and cab aggregators. It is strongly suggested that the Kerala government develop a legislative framework to protect those in the platform work and regulate the operation of

aggregators. It would be beneficial to constitute a Welfare Board comprising State officials, representatives from platform workers, aggregators, and civil society to devise schemes for the welfare of platform workers and set up a welfare fund with contributions from aggregators, customers, workers and government.

### **5.3.2 Transparency in Terms of Employment**

The terms and conditions governing platform work are not always clear and accessible to workers. There is a need to improve transparency in algorithmic management to help workers understand how tasks are allocated, terms of engagement with platforms and remuneration. This would enable workers to contest decisions that affect working conditions if needed. As remuneration for workers is constantly revised, many are clueless about how much they could earn. Transparent algorithmic management will ensure that workers can understand the terms of work and remuneration and take legal recourse if the platform breaches those conditions (Fairwork, 2021). It is crucial to notify workers of any changes in the terms of employment within a reasonable timeframe before changes come into effect. There are instances where platform workers are being barred from accessing the platform without explanation. Workers are also subject to other penalties or disciplinary decisions without provisions to contact the aggregator to challenge or appeal. Such a non-transparent way of managing algorithms by aggregators impedes workers' rights and violates basic human rights to have 'just and favourable conditions of work'. Platforms must ensure transparency in algorithmic management that determines workers' engagement terms and establish a forum for workers to register grievances and appeal disciplinary actions. Options like an ombudsman or a forum with workers' representatives could be explored.

### **5.3.3 Strengthen Social Dialogue**

Coordinated and collaborative action by various stakeholders (trade unions, labour associations, service providers, consumers and the State) is essential to improve the working conditions of platform workers. There should be forums to facilitate stakeholder dialogues, build trust, and better understand each other's perspectives. Deliveroo has established Rider Forums in several European countries, allowing workers to share their ideas and feedback directly with Deliveroo. In France, for example, 25 Rider Advisors are elected to the Forum by their fellow riders and are appointed for a maximum of twelve

months. They meet every three months to discuss various issues affecting riders, including safety, kit design and benefits. Uber has set up Driver Appeals Panels in several countries to appeal for reversing the deactivation of the driver's account. In New York City, Uber's Deactivation Appeal Programme operates with inputs from the Independent Drivers Guild. The American Arbitration Association (AAA), a not-for-profit public service organisation, facilitates hearings. Other drivers will hear the appeal and Uber's reason for the decision before recommending whether they should be allowed to access the app.

Clearly, collective bargaining can take different shapes and forms. The government may constitute a dedicated grievance redressal cell exclusive to the platform workers to deal with matters not resolved satisfactorily by the platform companies. It could also be a forum to discuss and resolve platform workers' issues. The KILE could take a lead role in grievance redressal and strengthening social dialogue. It is important to note that despite the magnitude of platform workers in the State, few aggregators have an office where workers can go and register or clarify their grievances. A system should facilitate accessible communication of workers with the aggregators.

#### **5.3.4 Access to Basic Facilities for Platform Workers**

Platform workers, particularly in food delivery and transport, face immense challenges due to a lack of parking space and toilet facilities. Rather than pinning all responsibilities on the aggregator, it would be appropriate for all stakeholders to take responsibility for providing parking space and toilet facilities for platform workers. For instance, the government could play a crucial role in identifying parking spaces, ensuring functioning public toilets and making cities safe for women to improve the plight of platform workers. Similarly, wherever possible, restaurants could provide basic facilities for food delivery workers while waiting to collect their orders. During the research, we identified good practices followed by restaurants like providing toilet facilities, drinking water, space for waiting to pick up the order and mobile charging stations. Efforts should also be made to create awareness among flat/resident associations on how ad hoc rules set by them on delivery of food/other e-commerce orders to residents, access of platform workers to lift, and facilities to park platform workers' vehicles create immense difficulties for platform workers. As these measures cannot be legally imposed, it would be ideal for all

stakeholders to arrive at workable solutions to improve the plight of platform workers, perhaps by sharing expenses, to help workers do their jobs with dignity.

### **5.3.5 Protect Rights of Consumers of Platform Economy**

During the survey, it was found that customers of platform economy also face issues on whom to contact when they face any issue with the aggregators, in terms of service delivery or an issue with the platform worker. The legal framework to protect consumer rights concerning the platform economy needs to be revisited to enquire to what extent the existing provisions are equipped to protect customers and the responsibilities of aggregators. Regarding transport platforms, it is also essential to examine how fare is set and if the aggregators follow the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020 as per the requirements and provisions of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019.

### **5.3.6 Making Platform Work Inclusive**

A positive aspect of employment in the platform is how it offers work opportunities for those willing to work. This is particularly important for women, persons with disabilities and other marginalised sections of society. However, this research did not find evidence of significant participation of women or persons with disabilities in food delivery and transport. In this context, aggregators must review its policy to make the platform work-inclusive. It would be helpful if aggregators shared data on workers registered/active in the platform by gender, age groups, persons with disabilities, etc and reflected to what extent platforms in India are inclusive. Further, aggregators will also have to check the availability of assistive devices and technologies, facilitate better communication between aggregators' staff and workers, and develop campaigns to address discrimination and stigma to make the platform work-inclusive.

Women's participation in the platform economy is evident in home-based services like beauty, care, and domestic work. Aggregators should review policies to understand what prevents women from joining non-traditional location-based jobs and ensure their fair remuneration, not penalising by algorithms that are gender blind, not taking into account the caring responsibilities of women or preventing women from working at night. Women find accessing devices like smartphones or vehicles financially challenging and essential to joining platform work. Further, digital skills and literacy also play a role in restricting access to platform work. Most platforms assume that all workers have access to

smartphones and bank accounts without considering how this prevents women and other marginalised sections from accessing platform work.

Self-defence training and equipment can be made compulsory for all platform workers, especially women workers, to ensure safety if they find themselves in unsafe spaces while out for work. Efforts should also be made to create awareness among women and other marginalised workers and key stakeholders (customers, service providers, etc) on what constitutes sexual harassment and the grievance redressal mechanism available to victims. Unions/associations of platform workers need to engage more women in leadership so that women's voices are heard.

There are several good practices from other countries to make the platform work inclusive. For instance, the Ladies on Wheel Association of Nigeria (LOWAN) is Nigeria's first registered women drivers' association. LOWAN's members include women commercial drivers, including those who drive for ride-hailing platforms. LOWAN aims to support women in a co-learning environment, including social media chat groups and social activities for women to meet and form networks. Similarly, to make the platform work disabled-friendly, Grab Malaysia launched the 'Break the Silence' initiative in 2018 to lower barriers to entry and create opportunities for people who are deaf and hearing impaired to join its platform as drivers. The initiative helped Malaysia become one of the few countries where regulations allow the differently abled to obtain a commercial driver's license. Grab also provides automated message updates and sign guides to help deaf or hearing-impaired drivers identify themselves to passengers and flashcards to facilitate better communication between passengers and people with hearing challenges.

Considering the scope of platform work in employment generation and the evidence of gulf returnees venturing into platform work, it would be helpful if NORKA could provide financial support in terms of buying vehicles, mobile and also training, say driving, to help reintegrate migrant workers in Kerala.

### **5.3.7 Alternative Platforms Under State Initiatives**

Considering the increasing popularity of platform services and the control imposed by aggregators on platform workers and consumers, the State should strengthen initiatives to offer alternative platforms for food delivery and transport. Efforts should be made to make Kerala Savaari attractive to workers and consumers and expand its operation to at

least the major cities of Kerala. The platforms under the aegis of the government should demonstrate a model where workers are not exploited, and fair remuneration is ensured to them. The government could also encourage platform start-ups in food delivery and transport that offer a fair model for all stakeholders by providing them with financial and technological support. The idea should pose a market challenge for established multi-country aggregators engaging in unfair practices.

### **5.3.8 Strengthen Knowledge Base on Platform Work and Workers**

Studies and surveys at multiple levels are required to understand how platforms operate, how they engage workers, and terms of engagement. For instance, little is known about work and terms of engagement in platforms that provide home-based services. Researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds should be encouraged to study platform work to build a knowledge base.

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