

# Cities of workers

*Understanding platform-based gig work and urban life*

## Fireside chat

This readback draws insights from a fireside chat and panel discussion on governing the gig economy. The event was hosted and moderated by the **Aapti Institute** at the **Bangalore International Centre** on October 1, 2022.



**Anand Gowdu**

- While the flexible nature of work on platforms is helpful, Anand faces challenges in earnings and incentives
- State-provided support mechanisms for insurance, financing, education and healthcare services is either absent or wholly inadequate
- As the sole breadwinner, it is exceedingly difficult to manage his family expenses
- Prefers accessing loans via non-banking financial companies and informal vendors over formalised credit through banks



**Irfan Ahmed**

- Irfan offers that certain platforms provide support call features, financial assistance and free hospital visits
- Rising fuel prices have emerged as a mounting concern for drivers
- Irfan expressed reservations about unions and their ability to bargain for better working conditions
- Irfan believes education is key to navigate platforms and the lack of it pre-disposes certain drivers as being more vulnerable to exploitation



### Key takeaways

- Flexibility that comes with ride-sharing has been helpful to spend more time with their families and plan their work
- However, drivers face issues around income and earnings. Further, expenses incurred in the nature of taxes, emission certificates and challans (fines) exacerbate the pressure on their precarious finances
- Access to formalised credit with regulated rates of interests, social security schemes and pre-determined, transparent platform commissions were some of the demands generated through this conversation



## Panel discussion



**Dr. Sakshi Khurana**

Senior Specialist,  
Skill Development, Labour &  
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**Ms. Athira Menon**

Head of Policy -  
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**Ms. Aditi Surie**

Senior Researcher,  
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*The nature of gig work is essentially urban and platforms tend to be concentrated in urban spaces. The discussion highlighted that the flexibility offered by the platform companies helped leverage India's demographic dividend to make it one of the fastest growing gig economies of the world. But, there is much to be done yet in the quest to build equitable futures for platform workers.*

### **Labour and the gig economy**

- The very nature of work on platforms is non-traditional/conventional with no clear employer/employee relationship
- Gig workers labelled as independent contractors, with platforms and public agencies alike failing to provide comprehensive welfare protections to workers
- The Code on Social Security (COSS) mentions gig and platform workers as a separate distinct category and surfaces the need for inclusive welfare schemes to be operationalised by platforms, in accordance with appropriate regulations
- Innovation in design of policy schemes are crucial to meet novel demands emerging from new paradigms of labour engagement

### **Demographics and inclusion within the gig economy**

- The intersection between platform work, national development and female labour participation rates in the economy hold interesting insights. With pay-per-task model and highly qualified remote work performed by women at home allowing for flexibility, it has huge ripple effects on the national development going forward
- Women still bear the double burden of managing household and caregiving duties alongside job responsibilities. Though remote work has helped them gain employment, patriarchal division of society still remain intact, resulting in burnout and exhaustion that ultimately force women to quit the workforce
- Few platforms have social welfare arms that conduct extensive studies on the far reaching impacts of equipping women with the right skills. However, such efforts needed to be anchored in policy, both at the level of platforms and public agencies

## Policy measures

- During the pandemic, frontline workers and platform workers were the lifeline for urban agglomerations. They are the most visible section of workers today, forming a critical layer of public infrastructure. It is imperative that we design policies to better recognise the rights of gig workers.
- Platforms within India came forward with unique policies during the pandemic – health insurance, corpus funds, among others. India should look at global best practices such as in Indonesia which has instituted digital mediation for access to insurance.
- Policy innovation should include measures such as designated lanes, parking spaces, and access to sanitised toilets, especially for female workers. Resident welfare associations (RWAs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and municipal corporations must come together to plan urban spaces in ways that address the needs of gig workers of the city

- *Skill development is crucial for workers for mobility. Outcome oriented skill development frameworks/programs are the need of the hour.*
- *Platform companies need to be more proactive when it comes to innovation. They need to align with government provisions in order to offer extensive forms of social welfare to workers*
- *It is imperative that platforms, the government and other concerned parties work in tandem to streamline this dynamic and quickly evolving sector.*

Video of the discussion is available [here](#)

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