

The ILO's Push for Decent Work in the Platform Economy

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The International Labour Organization (ILO) recently concluded its 113th International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva, held from June 2–13, 2025. Every year, government, employer, and worker representatives from 187 member states convene at the ILC to shape international labour standards and define the ILO's broad policy directions. One of the key highlights of this conference was the discussion on 'Decent Work in the Platform Economy,' which appeared as the fifth item on the agenda. This marked the first standard-setting discussion on this subject. The ILO Governing Body had initially proposed this agenda item in 2021, adopting a double discussion procedure, with the first session at the 113th ILC (2025) and the second scheduled for the 114th ILC in 2026. A major breakthrough of the 113th ILC was the consensus to develop binding global labour standards specifically for the platform economy. These discussions were grounded in an ILO report that outlined the types and scope of possible standards and addressed the critical issue of how to define both platform workers and digital labour platforms. It was officially agreed that the item would return to the 114th ILC for a second discussion, with the goal of adopting a new Convention, supplemented by a Recommendation.

The ILO's proposed Convention and Recommendation signify a major step toward regulating the rapidly expanding gig and platform economy. Notably, there is currently no internationally accepted definition of digital platform worker and digital labour platform. Also, there are no binding international standards specifically addressing the labour conditions in this sector. One of the most contentious issues in platform work remains the employment status of platform workers. Currently, most platform workers are classified as self-employed, which excludes them from the protections provided by labour laws. This misclassification has resulted in widespread decent work deficits, lack of social security, income insecurity, and limited worker rights. Many countries are now in the process of developing regulatory frameworks to address these challenges, particularly

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those related to algorithmic management, precarious working conditions, and the lack of social protections.

The proposed ILO Convention and Recommendation aim to comprehensively address these gaps by establishing internationally agreed definitions for key terms such as digital labour platforms, platform workers, intermediaries, and remuneration. It will mandate member states to ensure platform workers enjoy fundamental principles and rights at work, including freedom of association, protection from forced and child labour, non-discrimination, and occupational safety and health. The standards will also require the proper classification of digital platform workers to prevent misclassification. Enforcing social security protections for all platform workers. Including crucial provisions on algorithmic transparency, data privacy, account deactivation, and the use of automated systems.

The ILO's standard-setting proposal will provide a global reference point for countries currently shaping their own regulatory frameworks for platform work. Regulatory efforts to protect platform workers are relatively recent, mostly emerging since 2022, with governments' worldwide adopting three main approaches: (a) Amending existing labour laws to include platform workers. (b) Introducing stand-alone legislation specifically for gig and platform workers. (c) Clarifying the employment status of platform workers to extend existing protections. So far, most regulatory initiatives have come from high-income countries, particularly in Europe, North America, and Latin America.

While these discussions at the ILO are shaping global norms, India has also initiated significant national reforms to protect its platform workforce. The Code on Social Security (CSS) 2020 recognizes platform workers as a distinct category and lays the groundwork for comprehensive welfare measures, including life and disability insurance, accident coverage, health and maternity benefits, pension schemes, and crèche facilities. The CSS 2020 also envisages a Social Security Fund and the creation of a National Social Security Board for oversight. India's e-Shram portal, a national digital database, has already registered over 300 million unorganised workers, including gig and platform workers, enabling targeted delivery of welfare benefits. The Union Budget 2025–26 further supported this workforce with key announcements, including: Issuing unique identity cards to platform workers, Simplifying the registration process via e-Shram and Extending access to healthcare under the PM Jan Arogya Yojana. The Ministry of Labour & Employment's pilot

initiative is actively onboarding platform workers and aggregators onto the e-Shram portal. Major companies like Urban Company, Zomato, Blinkit, and Uncle Delivery have already joined this effort. Additionally, states such as Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Jharkhand have proposed draft bills specifically for gig workers.

The ongoing tripartite discussions at the ILO will likely contribute significantly to improving the working conditions of platform workers globally. The eventual adoption of a Convention and Recommendation will be pioneering in shaping the future of work and addressing the pressing regulatory gaps in the platform economy. Developing international labour standards for platform work is a crucial step toward ensuring that the rights and protections of this growing segment of the workforce are universally recognized and enforced.