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New Work, Data and Inclusion in the Digital Economy:
A Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Perspective



NEW WORK
and Inclusion in the Middle East
and North Africa



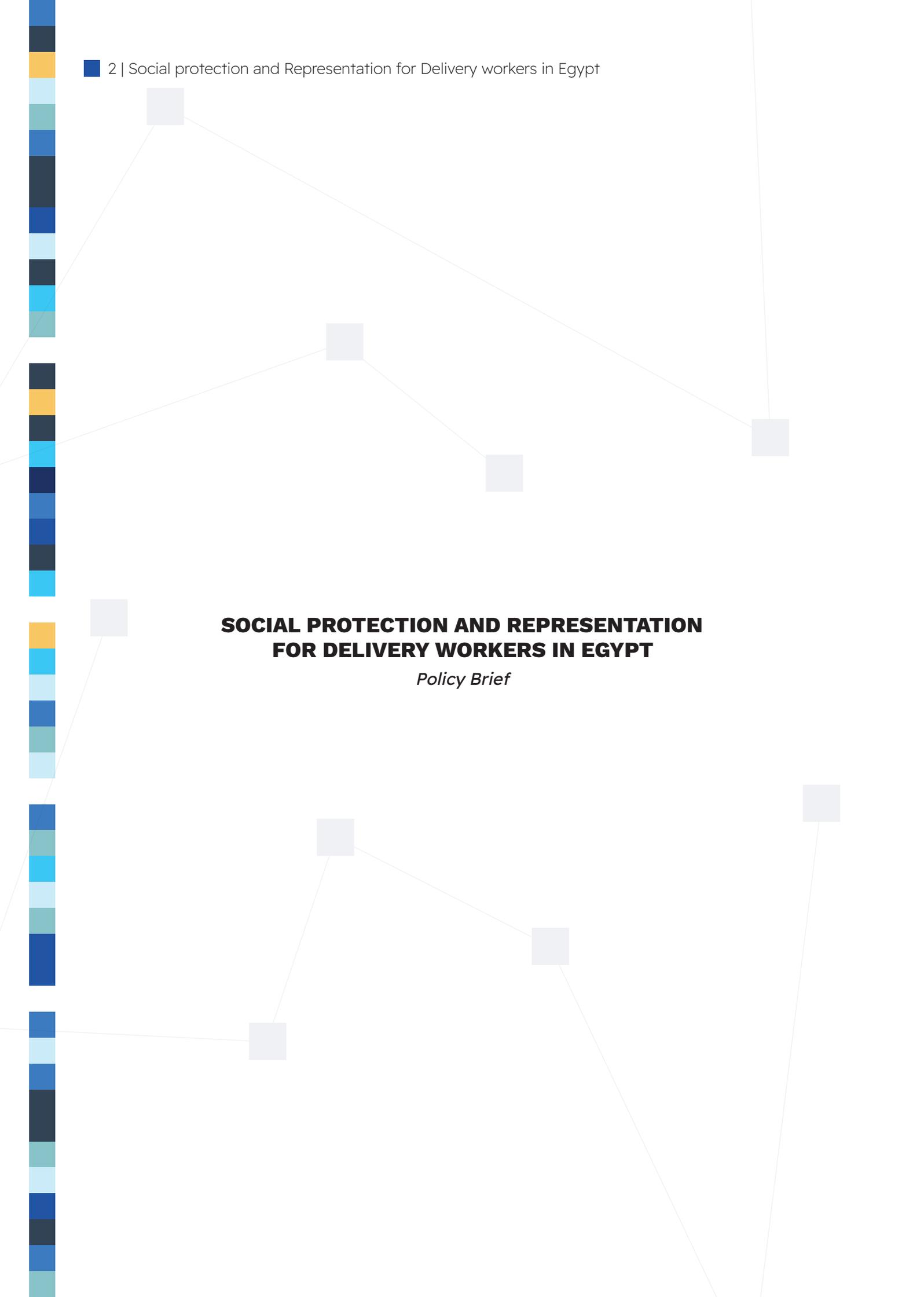
The American
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SOCIAL PROTECTION AND REPRESENTATION FOR DELIVERY WORKERS IN EGYPT POLICY BRIEF



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Policy Brief



This report was carried out with the support of the Access to Knowledge for Development Center (A2K4D) at the American University in Cairo's (AUC) Onsi Sawiris School of Business as part of the project titled "New Work, Data and Inclusion in the Digital Economy: A Middle East and North Africa Perspective," with the aid of a grant from the Ford Foundation. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of A2K4D and the Ford Foundation.



KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

■ **Problem:** Platform workers in Egypt often face challenging working conditions, including long working hours, lack of protection from road hazards, low pay and exclusion from legal and social protection measures. They generally fall outside of Egypt’s data, legal and policy landscape. As economic conditions worsen, the nation’s structural gaps pertaining to platform work have become more discernible, necessitating urgent action to ensure the protection of platform workers’ rights.

This report outlines 4 policy recommendations key to addressing platform workers’ rights:

■ **Recommendation 1:** Develop Regulatory Frameworks to Govern Platform Work

■ **Recommendation 2:** Facilitate Workers’ and Employers’ Representation

■ **Recommendation 3:** Improve Data Collection

■ **Recommendation 4:** Social Dialogue

INTRODUCTION

Egypt has experienced a proliferation in platform-mediated services, particularly in the delivery work sector.¹ Platform-mediated groundwork (PMGW), as defined by Eric Tucker, involves “the provision of local services such as transportation and food delivery to consumers.”² The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed the country’s digital transformation, accelerating the growth of digitally enabled businesses as consumption patterns adapted to lockdown measures.³ Digital labor platforms

continue to absorb a significant percentage of Egypt’s unemployed.

Evidence from previous research⁴ has shown that Egyptian platform workers face working conditions that are far from ideal. For example, they tend to be severely underpaid and experience unsafe working conditions, and limited training and equipment to prevent road hazards. Much like informal workers, they are also excluded from state employment records and lack access to benefits including social and health insurance.

By providing an overview of Egypt’s platform-mediated groundwork economy, particularly in the delivery sector, this policy brief aims to present relevant stakeholders with necessary policies to improve working conditions of platform workers. The recommended policies are informed by best country examples and a set of findings from field data collected through survey questionnaires with platform workers, interviews with experts, and focus groups with a variety of stakeholders.

PMGW IN EGYPT: FINDINGS

Our findings in “Platform Work, Social Protection and Representation: A Case of Delivery Workers in Egypt” suggest that young and educated workers are overrepresented in the delivery platform labor force the majority of whom are men. Out of a total sample of 40 interviewees, half were married and all were the sole breadwinners of their household. Even though each delivery platform worker’s monthly earnings surpassed the national minimum wage⁵ — they took home an average of LE3,904 per month after work-related expenses— they worked 15 hours longer on average than the legally stipulated work week (48 hours).

All interviewees said that delivery platform work is their primary source of income.

Nearly none of those surveyed had health or social insurance, and most did not receive social assistance from the government. Many said they no longer seek out government assistance as it is far from enough to cover expenses, despite a nearly universal emphasis on the need for social protection measures and worry about the sustainability of delivery platform work.

1 Nagla Rizk et al., “Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2022/23: Platform workers amidst Egypt’s Economic Crisis,” Fairwork, 2023,

2 Eric Tucker, “Towards a political economy of platform-mediated work,” *Studies in Political Economy*, 101:3 (2020): 185-207, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07078552.2020.1848499>

3 *ibid.*

4 A2K4D, within the Fairwork network, in partnership with the Oxford Internet Institute with financial support from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), conducted research on the platform economy in Egypt.

5 LE3,000/month at time of fieldwork (May–September 2023)

CONCLUSION & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving forward, it is necessary that delivery platform labor conditions are improved to better protect workers in the sector. Based on our findings and analysis, we propose the following recommendations:

Regulate Platform Work

It is necessary that labor and social insurance laws are updated and amended to capture the nature of platform work in their definitions of labor. This would require the involvement of civil society organizations, labor rights groups, and syndicates to facilitate lobbying of parliamentarians.

The unique challenges faced by workers in the digital platform economy and the specificities of each sector must be properly addressed to guarantee and protect labor rights in such varying contexts. Policies should strike a balance between maintaining the favorable aspects of platform work — like worker’s flexibility — and guaranteeing access to social protection. Sector-specific regulations, like the ride-hailing act, can also be considered to simplify the regulation process.

Successful country example:

- **Spain and the EU:** In 2021, the Spanish supreme court ruled in favor of Glovo workers recognized as employees, . Spain adopted a driver’s law, which extended employee status to all food delivery workers. This came as a response to a supreme court decision that ruled in favor of Glovo workers to recognize them as employees. Today, delivery workers in Spain have access to the same benefits and protections as their counterparts in the formal sector. Following Spain’s lead, the European Parliament and European Council are in the process of passing a directive to regulate digital platform work. The directive would grant employment rights to all digital platform workers if they meet three out of seven criteria.⁶

Facilitate Workers and Employers’ Representation

The creation of an entity to represent the rights and demands of workers in the sector is necessary to move forward. Delivery platform workers must have the means to organize, lobby and represent their needs and concerns to governmental bodies. However, there remains the question of the appropriate form of representation for this purpose — a trade union or a syndicate?

According to this report’s research findings, a union is generally more suited for platform workers. While a syndicate requires workers to provide academic qualifications pertaining to a specific form of work in a singular profession, unions only require proof of employment in a profession represented by the union. The majority of platform workers resort to the irregular sector due to deteriorating economic conditions and often conduct work that does not match their academic qualifications, making it difficult for them to join syndicates. However, the formation of unions is a lengthy and complicated process. As such, while the formation of a trade union is an optimal long-term solution, a possible solution for the interim period would be the formation of a community organization to provide basic health and social services, financial support, and safety equipment to delivery platform workers.

It is also necessary for online delivery platforms to create an entity that represents them. Currently, online platforms are not a consolidated sector under the Federation of Egyptian Industries or the Chamber of Commerce, making it challenging for workers to negotiate with them. A representative entity would also guarantee the rights of workers employed on multiple platforms simultaneously.

Successful country example:

- **Georgia:** Following efforts to self-organize, demonstrate and protest their work conditions, food delivery app workers employed in Glovo, Wolt, Bolt Food, and Elvis formed a trade union. The goal was to secure themselves employment contracts as couriers that include health insurance, overtime compensation and paid holidays.⁷

6 International Social Security Association. “Platform Workers and Social Security: Recent Developments in Europe,” November 2023, retrieved from <https://www.issa.int/analysis/platform-workers-and-social-security-recent-developments-europe>

7 Felix Hadwiger, “Realizing the opportunities of the platform economy through freedom of association and collective bargaining” International Labour Organization. Retrieved January 14, 2024, from <https://www.ilo.org/stafic/english/intserv/working-papers/wp080/index.html#ID0E63BI>

- **Australia:** A rideshare driver network that started out as a private Facebook group devised an innovative alternative for workers' representation, forming a not-for-profit organization to work for fair conditions for rideshare drivers.⁸
- **Indonesia:** The governmental agency responsible for social security partners with delivery platforms to facilitate workers' registration and contribution payments. The payments extend employees' work injury coverage and death benefits.⁹

Improve Data Collection

Data is key for policy making. The invisibility of platform delivery workers from official data registries translates into their invisibility in relevant laws and policies. It is impossible for policymakers to lobby for the rights of platform workers without data to back their claims.

Until surveys like CAPMAS's Egyptian Labor Market Panel Survey are updated to include data on non-standard forms of employment like digital platform work, initiative has to be taken to devise innovative data collection methods. This can happen through entities like the National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA), or through coordination with digital platform management personnel, which already have access to big data. For the former to happen, a collaboration with the NTRA would entail access to data provided by telecom companies on unique usernames that use the different delivery platform apps. A collaboration would ensure that the data remains anonymous and that any data sharing is in accordance with Egyptian data privacy laws.

An alternative method is to request that these companies provide a roundup of the number of workers registered and active on their app. However, some digital platforms may lack interest in cooperating. In which case, the aggregate data provided might only reflect a few platform companies, rather than the delivery platforms ecosystem as a whole.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ International Labour Organization, "International Social Security Association, & Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development," 2023, retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---ddg_p/documents/publication/wcms_867535.pdf

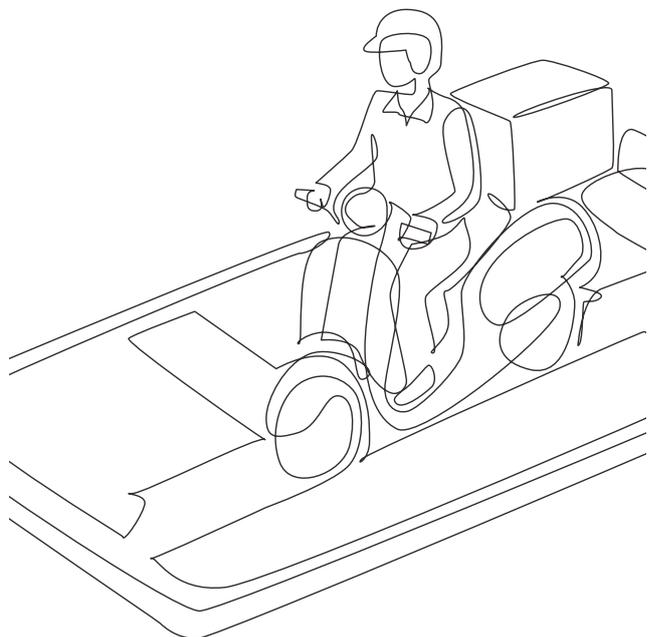
Successful country example:

- **France:** Detailed information on workers' income is shared by digital work platforms with France's social security agencies. Workers can also authorize platforms to transfer their contributions on their behalf to the contribution collection agency ACOSS. This data serves a dual purpose: facilitating the collection of information and the quantification of the platform economy, and serving as an innovative and effective approach to integrating workers into the social security system.¹⁰

SOCIAL DIALOGUE

To enable social dialogue, a number of steps are necessary. First, the creation of entities that represent platform workers and employers respectively. Then, representatives from these entities can be brought into dialogue with government policy makers. This would create the space for all stakeholders to converse, allowing them to reach a policy formula that can uphold decent work and ensure social justice.

¹⁰ *ibid.*





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