



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



PLATFORM WORK, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND REPRESENTATION: A CASE OF DELIVERY WORKERS IN EGYPT

Case Study



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ABSTRACT

Recent years have witnessed the rise of new forms of work in large part due to fast and wide-ranging developments in technology. One of the defining forms of this shift has been the introduction of work mediated via digital platforms. The proliferation of platform labor across the globe has brought with it a series of cross cutting challenges and opportunities, some global, and others context specific. In order to fully understand the situation regarding platform work in any particular country, it is necessary to look at context-specific nuances.

The present research looks at the working conditions of platform-mediated ground workers in Egypt and presents an account that is cognizant of the country's specific socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Specifically, the study zooms in on the challenges and opportunities faced by platform-mediated delivery workers and provides an assessment of initiatives taken to mitigate the challenges and to capitalize on the opportunities. One of the key initiatives that this study engages with is the strategy laid out by Egypt's Ministry of Social Solidarity, emphasizing the recognition of informal workers to ensure they are represented in ministry data and hence brought under the umbrella of social protection programs.

To gain insight into the aims outlined above, this study is based on one-on-one interviews with platform workers and with subject experts, organized focus group discussions and desk research on the legal environment. The findings show that the ongoing polycrisis in Egypt has pushed many young, educated workers into platform-mediated work as they look for additional or primary sources of income. They often work long hours to barely make ends meet and are faced with rising job costs and little increases in their wages. They remain largely unprotected, both physically and socially, and have thus had to create their own safety nets. Women, in particular, are at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to safety. Women also have to juggle between their work and their care responsibilities. This limits their access to work compared to men, as the latter, not confined by care responsibilities, can better leverage the opportunities provided by platform work.

Platform workers are barely present in Egypt's existing data landscape, a fact that renders them invisible to policy making and absent from the current legal landscape. As such, they largely lack legal and social protections. The issue is further compounded by the lack of a representative entity for platform workers. It is therefore necessary to collect data on platform workers, to amend legislation to regulate emerging forms of work, and to create a representative body to advocate for workers to secure better working conditions. It is equally important that platforms collaborate to create a cross-platform entity that represents them, given that some workers work for multiple platforms simultaneously.

After the introduction, the second section of this report lays out the research methodology. The third section offers a review of background information on new forms of work, sets out definitions, and contextualizes both of these in Egypt's current economy and demographic makeup. The fourth section looks into the emergence of new forms of work in Egypt and the benefits of data collected from the ground, namely inclusion in the legislative environment, social insurance and protection programs. The fifth section explores existing literature on platform work, highlighting the opportunities and challenges facing the sector. The sixth section analyzes the findings along five themes: income and employment, equality of opportunity, road safety, social protection, and workers' future plans. The seventh and final section synthesizes the results of the study and proposes policy recommendations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed a rise in new forms of work in large part due to fast and wide-ranging developments in technology. One of the defining forms of this shift has been the introduction of work mediated via digital platforms. The proliferation of platform labor across the globe has brought with it a series of cross cutting challenges and opportunities, some global, and others context specific. In order to fully understand the situation regarding platform work in any particular country, it is necessary to look at context-specific details.

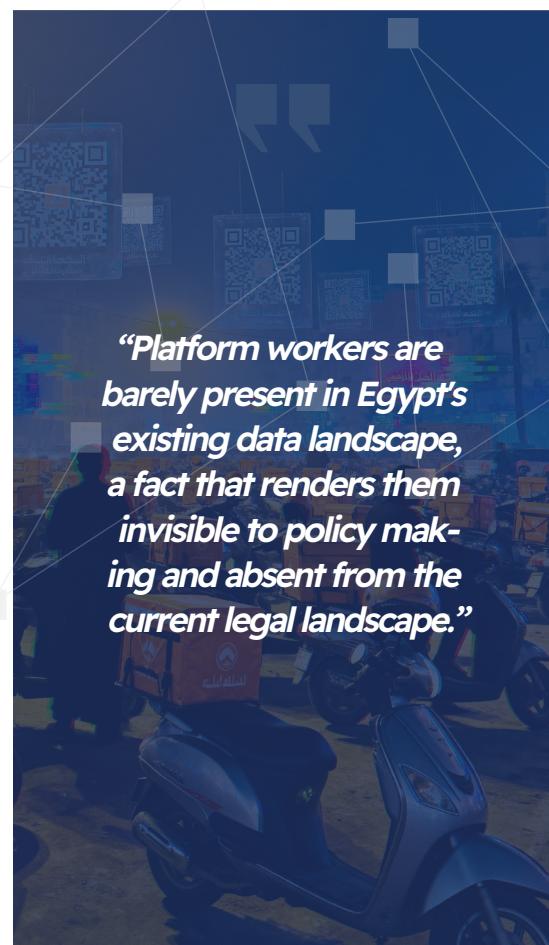
Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for platform-mediated work has surged, and, with it, there has been an increase in the number

of platform workers. Although platform-mediated work offers work opportunities to thousands of individuals in countries with surging unemployment and other economic difficulties, research shows that this type of work is riddled with challenges of low wages, precarity and poor working conditions.

Research on this subject in Egypt is limited. Our review of extant literature found only a few reports on platform work in Egypt: two Fairwork Egypt reports (2022; 2023) and an ILO report focused on work arrangements in the informal sector and gig economy (Hassan, 2023). There is a pressing need for more research on the sector.

In light of this, the purpose of this research is to provide evidence-based research to inform policy making aiming at inclusion and improving the working conditions for platform workers in Egypt. To achieve that, this research explores the working conditions of these workers and presents an account that is cognizant of the country's specific socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Specifically, the study zooms in on the challenges and opportunities faced by platform-mediated delivery workers and assesses initiatives taken to mitigate the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities. One of the key initiatives that this study will engage with is the strategy laid out by Egypt's Ministry of Social Solidarity, emphasizing the recognition of informal workers to ensure they are represented in the Ministry's data and hence bring them under the umbrella of social protection programs.

After the introduction, the second section of this report lays out the research methodology. The third section offers a review of background information on new forms of work, sets out definitions, and contextualizes both of these in Egypt's current economy and demographic makeup. The fourth section looks into the emergence of new forms of work in Egypt and the benefits of data collected from the ground, namely inclusion in the legislative environment, social insurance and protection programs. The fifth section explores existing literature on platform work, highlighting the opportunities and challenges facing the sector. The sixth section analyzes the findings along five themes: income and employment, equality of opportunity, road safety, social protection, and workers' future plans. The seventh and final section synthesizes the results of the study and proposes policy recommendations.



II. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to better understand the nature of platform delivery workers' work as well as the policy and legal landscape they operate within in order to provide evidence-based analysis of the economic and social challenges they face. The evidence and analysis were then used to formulate recommendations for government and other relevant stakeholder action points.

The research was conducted over the course of one year in Cairo, Egypt along four main steps: desk research, one-one interviews, focus group discussions then final data and feedback analysis. In the first step, the research team did extensive desk research on the existing literature on platform work at a national, regional and global level. This research also focused on key terms such as: new work (mainly referring to new forms of work), new poor, ground platform work, and cloud work. The team also mapped the current data landscape, taking note of the different sources available, existing

gaps and civil society actors working in the field. To help guide the team conceptualize the scope and focus of the study, a workshop was held with regional stakeholders to discuss key research themes within the MENA context. With outcomes of these various points of inquiry in hand, the team moved into the second step: data collection.

The second step was field research. After designing research questions and creating an interview guide for interviews with platform workers, subject experts, and focus groups, the research team conducted a total of 40 one-on-one interviews with platform workers, five interviews with experts and two focus groups, with four and five participants respectively. All platform workers interviewed were anonymized to ensure their privacy. The experts interviewed included an academic focused on labor markets, a delivery platform country manager, an International Labour Organization (ILO) Bureau for Workers 'Activities expert, a representative from the Social Solidarity Ministry, and the co-founder and chairman of an employment website.

In the third step, data and information collected in the course of the interviews were analyzed, and

the findings were presented for discussion on policy recommendations in a meeting attended by representatives from the Social Solidarity Ministry, Parliament, platform application management, platform workers, and academia.

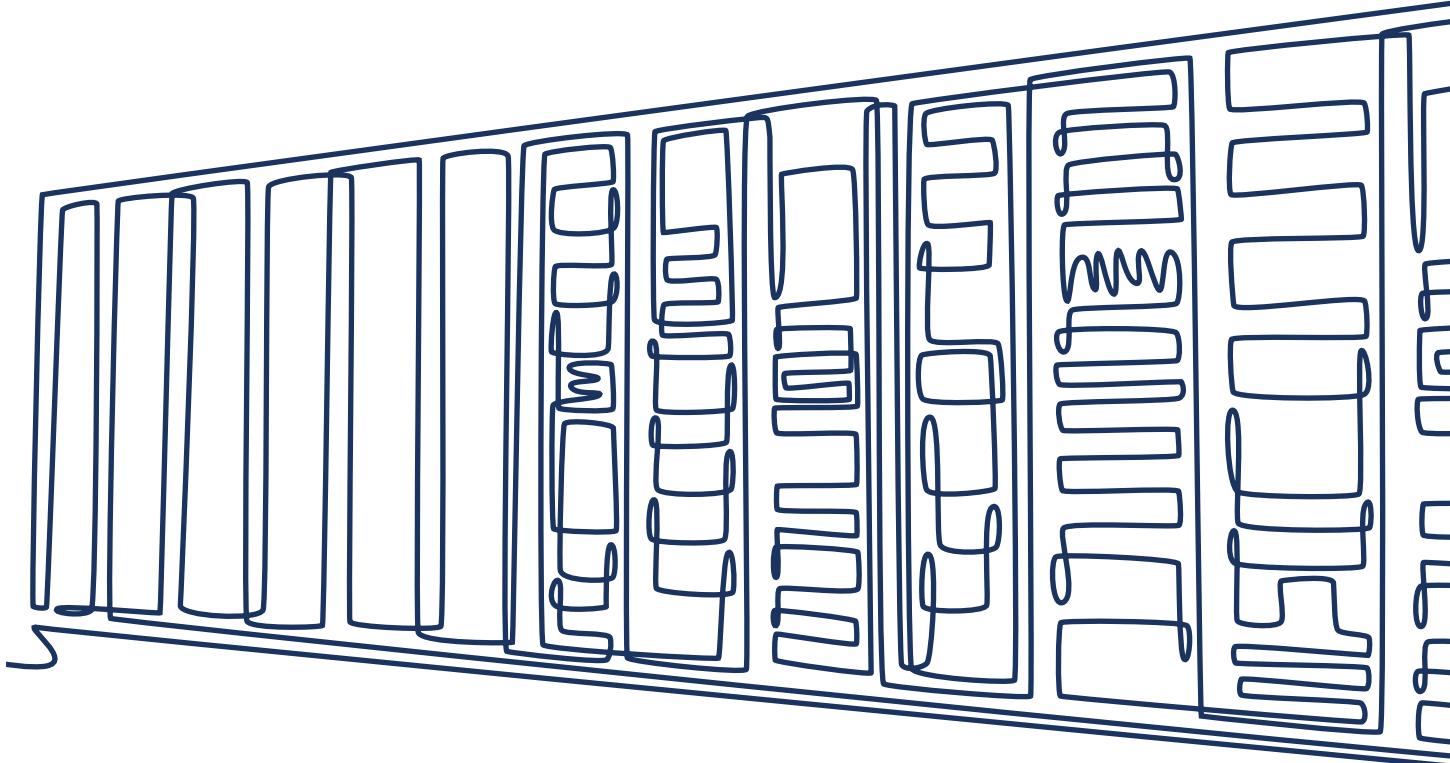
In the fourth, and final, step, feedback from the meeting and the evidence from the data were used to write this report.

III. BACKGROUND

Expanded access to the internet alongside advances in artificial intelligence and big data have transformed the way work is organized and perceived in the last decade.² The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these existing trends, and long-lasting transformations set in as remote work, e-commerce, and automation became more prevalent.³ These changes have fostered new forms of work and em-

2 Alejandro Guizar, "The future of work in the digital economy." April 2022, <https://latamlist.com/the-future-of-work-in-the-digital-economy/>

3 Alejandro Guizar, "The future of work in the digital economy." April 2022, <https://latamlist.com/the-future-of-work-in-the-digital-economy/>



ployment, which often reproduce dynamics in the informal economy especially as they rely on digital technologies.⁴ To better understand these dynamics, it is important to unpack these new forms of work and analyze the specific nuances associated with them.⁵

3.1 Definition of “New Work” and “Platform Mediated Work” Adopted in this Research

The term “new work” is taken to refer to new *forms* of work, which itself assumes a multiplicity of forms. The ILO has coined the term “non-standard forms of employment” to describe employment arrangements that deviate from the norm. These include employment relations that have long existed, like

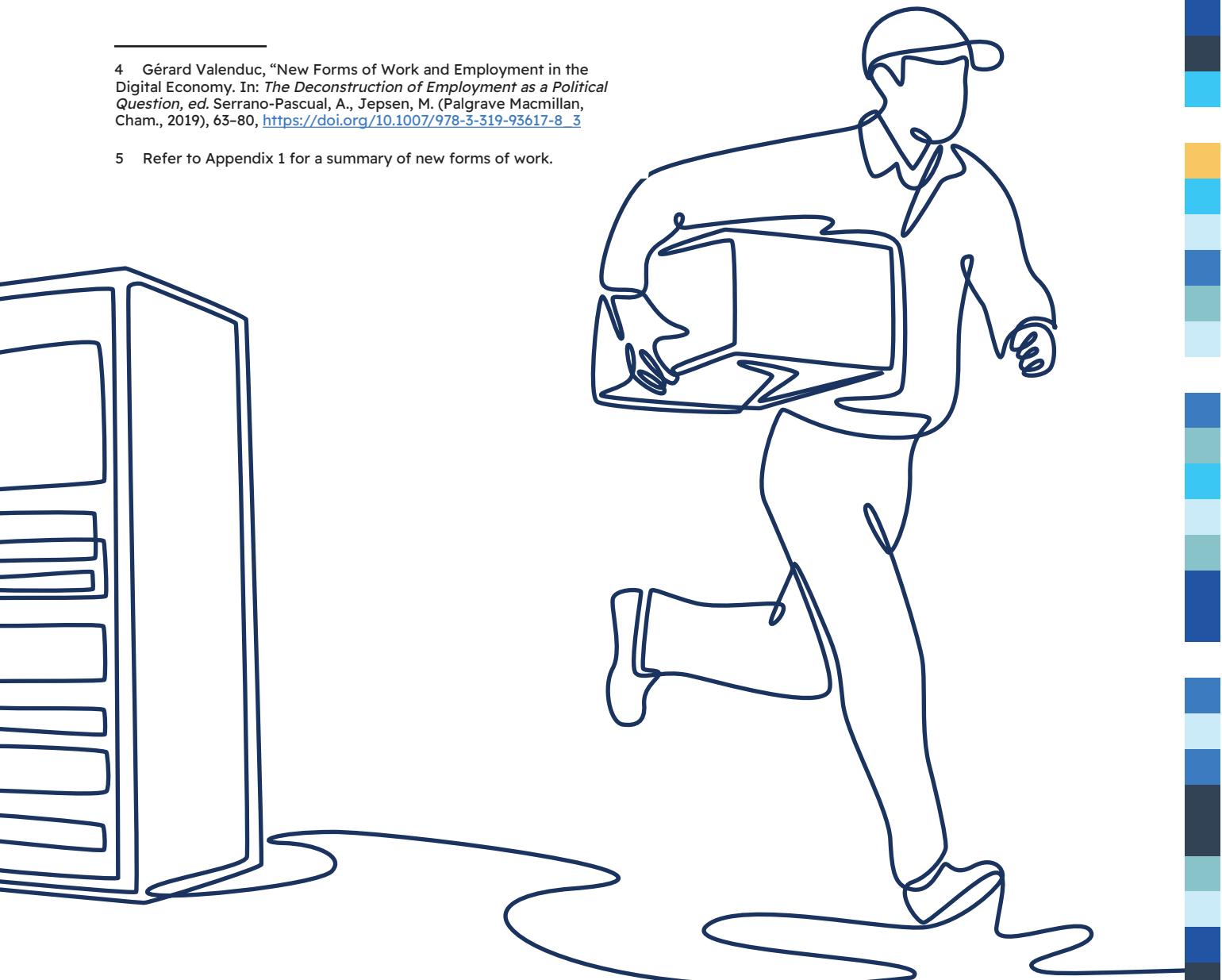
part-time employment, and other, newly emergent forms — such as work on digital labor platforms.⁶

For the purpose of this research, the definition of new work that is the focus of analysis is platform-mediated work. Platform-mediated work, as defined by Eric Tucker (2020) is classified into “platform-mediated ground work (PMGW)” and “platform-mediated cloud work (PMCW).” Tucker defines PMGW as involving “the provision of local services such as transportation and food delivery to consumers” that is often carried out in public

4 Gérard Valenduc, “New Forms of Work and Employment in the Digital Economy, In: *The Deconstruction of Employment as a Political Question*, ed. Serrano-Pascual, A., Jepsen, M. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham., 2019), 63–80, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93617-8_3

5 Refer to Appendix 1 for a summary of new forms of work.

6 ILO. Non-standard forms of employment. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/non-standard-employment/lang--en/index.htm>. Refer to Appendix 2 for a summary of the ILO’s non-standard forms of employment.



spaces.⁷ It can, however, also be carried out in private spaces.⁸ Examples of this would be ride sharing and domestic work platforms. PMCW, on the other hand, is defined as involving “the provision of online services to business clients.”⁹ It could include micro-tasks, such as data entry or content creation, or larger projects, such as website development, all mediated via a digital platform.

3.2 Definition of “Decent Work” in Context of this Research

This research adopts the ILO’s definition of decent work as “opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, key interviews showed that there are multiple operational definitions of “decent work” in use by various stakeholders wherein they emphasize or neglect some aspects of the ILO definition.

For the Egyptian government, represented by the Social Solidarity Ministry, decent work metrics include wages higher than minimum wages, a less than ten-hour working day (which is higher than the ILO eight-hour workday that is based on a 40-hour work week), access to maternity, sick and annual leave, and fair contracts. Dr. Ragui Assad, an academic and expert on Egypt’s labor market, especially social protection, laid out three aspects that he considered indicative of good working conditions. These are: (1) being well paid, (2) having some degree of social protection, and (3) having a say in one’s work conditions.

While some private sector representatives argued for the necessity of redefining the concept of well

paid work and fair treatment beyond the provision of social security and insurance, others spoke about the significance of non-discrimination and work-life balance. Hence, it is clear that there is a conceptual gap among stakeholders in the implementation of decent work parameters that needs to be bridged. Dialogue among stakeholders could be one way to align these divergent views. Such a dialogue could then serve as a stepping stone for workers to have an organized arena to voice their concerns and engage in productive discussions to ensure their rights are met.

3.3 Egypt’s Economic Environment

Just as Egypt’s economy was beginning to recover from the effects of the pandemic, it faced a number of setbacks. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 triggered a food security crisis as shortages of wheat and oil imports hit the country.¹¹ Global bottlenecks in wheat supplies put a strain on Egypt, the world’s largest importer of wheat, especially at the level of its national bread subsidy program which provides the country’s poorest with a vital food staple.¹² The war also resulted in a significant drop in Egypt’s tourism revenues as over a third of all visitors to Egypt come from Russia and Ukraine, bringing the sector’s post-pandemic recovery to a sudden halt.¹³ This has been exacerbated by Israel’s assault on Gaza as well as Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea, which have also been detrimental to Egypt’s revenues as income from the Suez Canal has decreased by nearly 65 percent following a 68.5 percent fall in cargo volume compared to the same period last year.¹⁴

These factors, however, are only the tip of the iceberg of Egypt’s economic woes. Egypt is currently going through one of its worst economic crises,

⁷ 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>

⁸ “The definition of worker in the platform economy Exploring workers’ risks and regulatory solutions,” The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), 2021, https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-05-21-286-en-n_0.pdf

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ “Decent Work,” ILO, <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

¹¹ “Ukraine and Russia Cover 85% of Egypt’s Wheat Demand,” APK Inform, August 2021, <https://www.apk-inform.com/en/news/1521865>

¹² Kibrom Abay, Clemens Breisinger, David Laborde Debucquet, Joseph Glauber, and Lina Alaaeldin Abdelfattah. “Russia-Ukraine Crisis Poses a Serious Threat to Egypt – the World’s Largest Wheat Importer.” *The Conversation*, December 13, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/russia-ukraine-crisis-poses-a-serious-threat-to-egypt-the-worlds-largest-wheat-importer-179242>.

¹³ “Tourism Growth Will Stall After Hit to Key Russian + Ukrainian Markets-Tourism Ministry.” *Enterprise*, April 19, 2022, <https://enterprise.press/stories/2022/04/19/tourism-growth-will-stall-after-hit-to-key-russian-ukrainian-markets-tourism-ministry-69731/>

¹⁴ Michele Labrüt, “Suez Canal revenue drops by almost half due to Red Sea crisis,” *SeaTrade Maritime News*, June 18, 2024, <https://www.seatrade-maritime.com/shipping-finance/suez-canal-revenue-drops-by-almost-half-due-to-red-sea-crisis>

marked by an acute foreign currency shortage, indebtedness and inflation. The threat of hyperinflation looms over the Egyptian economy, primarily driven by skyrocketing food prices. As the global economy experienced supply bottlenecks, the vulnerabilities of Egypt's food security were exposed. These vulnerabilities largely stem from Egypt's reliance on food imports to meet the demands of its over 100 million-person population, particularly imports of grains, wheat and corn. The foreign currency crunch put a strain on import procedures, leaving significant amounts of food stuck in holding at Egypt's ports. Food scarcity ensued, driving up food prices by as much as 64.9 percent as of June 2023. These dynamics effectively turned a food security crisis into "an existential threat to the economy."¹⁵

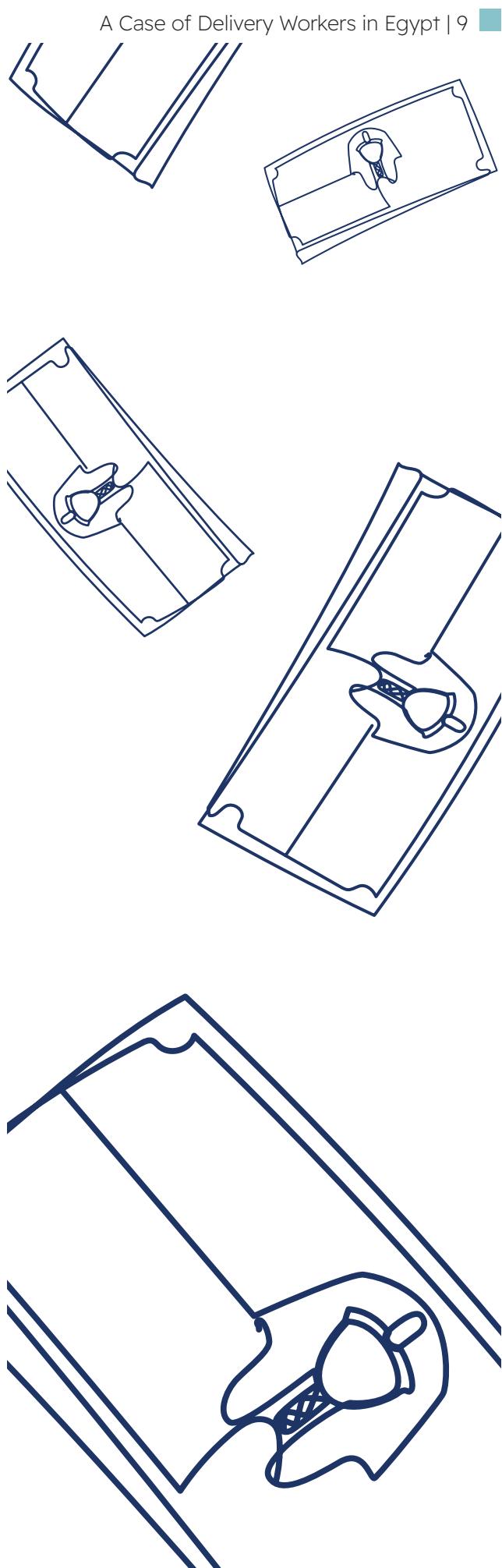
Inflation has also been exacerbated by the fall in the value of the Egyptian pound to the US dollar, which was precipitated by the dwindling dollar supplies to meet import needs, significant capital flight on the back of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a developing currency black market, and demands by the International Monetary Fund to adopt a flexible exchange rate as a condition of its December 2022 loan agreement.¹⁶ This has resulted in the tripling of the value of the one US dollar to the Egyptian pound — from LE15.6 to the dollar in 2022 to LE47.4 as of April 2024, exceeding L.E. 50.00 in December 2024. The nation's foreign currency resources have been further depleted by the spillover effect from Israel's war on Gaza, which have caused a plunge in tourism revenues, Suez Canal revenues, and gas re-exports.¹⁷

In the face of the economic fallout wrought by these co-implicating factors, the government introduced a social protection package that included increases in the minimum wage for employees in the private and public sector on multiple occasions. Employ-

¹⁵ Michael Tanchem, "The Russia-Ukraine war forces Egypt to face the need to feed itself: Infrastructure, international partnerships, and agritech can provide the solutions," Middle East Institute, July 25, 2023, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/russia-ukraine-war-forces-egypt-face-need-feed-itself-infrastructure-international>

¹⁶ "Egypt Inflation Jumps to Five-year High in November." *Asharq Al-Awsat*, December 9, 2022, <https://english.awsat.com/home/article/4033646/egypt-inflation-jumps-five-year-high-november>

¹⁷ Giorgio Cafiero, "How Israel's war on Gaza is bleeding Egypt's economy," *Al Jazeera*, 24 February 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/24/how-israels-war-on-gaza-is-bleeding-egypts-economy>



ees in the private sector received an increase in the minimum wage from LE2700¹⁸ to LE3500¹⁹ (effective as of January 2024) since July 2023. Public sector employees received an increase in the minimum wage from LE3000²⁰ to LE7000²¹ (effective March 2025) since July 2023. While a difference remains between the two sectors, with those in the public sector being much better off, all Egyptians remain under immense economic pressure as the prices of all goods and services (including metro tickets, electricity and telecommunication services²²) continue to rise at unprecedented rates.

Limited foreign investment outside of the oil and gas sector and an oversized dependence on remittances have prevented Egypt from building a more robust economy.²³ This is especially because remittances by Egyptians working abroad dropped nearly a quarter, from \$15.6 billion to \$12 billion in the first half of FY 2022/23.²⁴ The economic pressures pushed the government in December 2022, once again, to seek support from the IMF. A fourth loan in the last six years makes Egypt the second most indebted country to the IMF after Argentina.²⁵ In exchange for \$3 billion, the IMF demanded Egypt implement structural reforms to shrink the role of the state in the economy, as well as a “permanent shift to a flexible exchange rate.”²⁶ The IMF has also warned of potential “political and social push-

¹⁸ US\$87 (as of time of fieldwork (May-October 2023), exchange rate US\$1 = LE30.9)

¹⁹ US\$113 (as of time of fieldwork (May-October 2023), exchange rate US\$1 = LE30.9)

²⁰ US\$97 (as of time of fieldwork (May-October 2023), exchange rate US\$1 = LE30.9)

²¹ US\$194 (as of time of fieldwork (May-October 2023), exchange rate US\$1 = LE30.9)

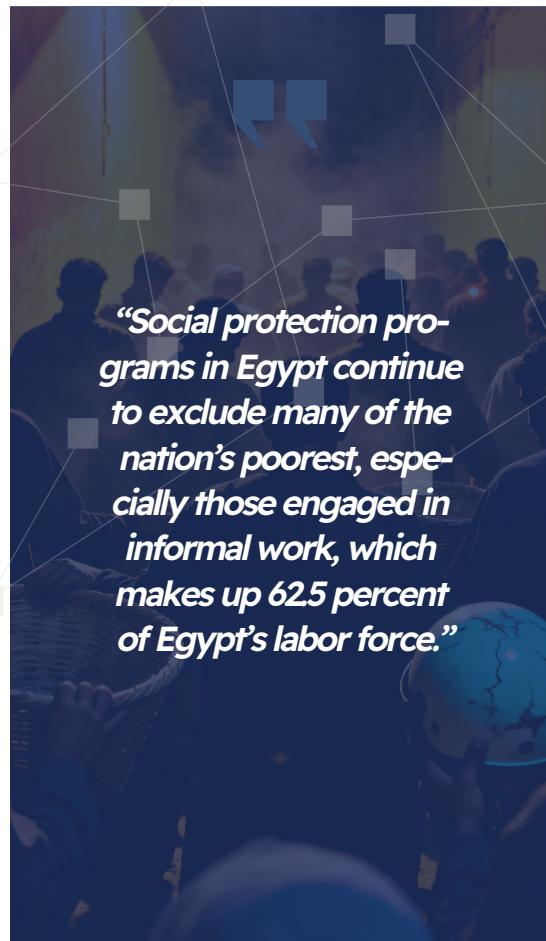
²² “Egypt raises minimum wage by 50% as part of ‘urgent’ package.” *Reuters*, February 7, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/egypt-s-president-sisi-raises-minimum-wage-by-50-6000-pounds-statement-2024-02-07/>

²³ Marco Matters, “How deep are Egypt’s economic troubles?” *Reuters*, March 3, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-deep-are-egypt-s-economic-troubles-2023-03-03/>

²⁴ “Egypt ranks 6th for remittances among middle-income nations in 2022: World Bank.” *Ahram Online*, June 19, 2023. [https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/503321.aspx#:~:text=Remittances%20by%20Egyptians%20working%20abroad,Egypt%20\(CBE\)%20in%20May.](https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/503321.aspx#:~:text=Remittances%20by%20Egyptians%20working%20abroad,Egypt%20(CBE)%20in%20May.)

²⁵ Andrew England, “Egypt and the IMF: Will Sisi Take the Economy out of the Military’s Hands?” *Financial Times*, October 31, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/03533d92-4a71-43fc-b885-27dcb962d4e8.>

²⁶ Tommy Stubbington et. al., “Egypt’s Pound Plunges to New Low as Authorities Try to Stem Currency Crisis.” *Financial Times*, January 11, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/fa457ac5-2c92-4348-b686-3a04df721f4b.>



back,”²⁷ particularly because, for months before the adoption of a flexible exchange rate, many Egyptians had already been struggling with the effects of inflation.

The government has resorted back to the IMF again, increasing the 2022 loan to US\$8 billion in March 2024. In the announcement of the additional loan, Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli indicated that the state would be seeking out \$1.2 billion in additional funds through the IMF’s Resilience and Sustainability Fund, bringing the total amount to just over \$9 billion.²⁸ The state’s agreement with the IMF opened the door to more “soft loans” from other lending bodies, including the World Bank.²⁹ It

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ “Egypt, IMF set to sign multi-billion dollar loan agreement ‘in coming hours’: Senior source.” *Ahram Online*, March 6, 2024. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/518953/Business/Economy/Egypt-IMF-set-to-sign-multibillion-dollar-loan-ag.aspx>

²⁹ “Egypt, IMF sign agreement to extend present loan deal to \$8 billion.” State Information System, March 6, 2024. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/191929/Egypt%2C-IMF-sign-agreement-to-extend-present-loan-deal-to-%248-billion?lang=en-us#:~:text=Egypt%20and%20International%20Monetary,a%20press%20conference%20in%20Cairo.>

also came with its own set of policy proscriptions, including a doubling down on the pillars of the original loan: implementing a flexible exchange rate and a “new framework to slow down infrastructure spending including projects that have so far operated outside regular budget oversight.”³⁰

This has all taken place against the backdrop of a slowdown in global economic recovery, which has further strained an Egyptian economy that had already been suffering due to the repercussions of COVID-19. This has resulted in a rise of poverty in the nation—with official data classifying about 30 percent of the population as falling before the poverty line before the COVID-19 outbreak, and as many as 60 percent after.³¹

Throughout these developments, a “new poor” class has gradually emerged and mushroomed. This is defined as including “those who were expected to be non-poor in 2020 prior to the COVID-19 outbreak but are now expected to be poor in 2020.”³² Reduced business operation hours during the pandemic and lower revenues resulted, for many in Egypt, in reduced household incomes,³³ a situation which has not changed since the return to “normal” operations as the economic situation worsened.

The emergence — and expansion — of a new poor cohort has had serious social and economic repercussions. Many Egyptians have been pushed out of the middle class and into poverty. Those who were already among the 30 percent below the poverty line have begun cutting back on essentials.³⁴ Proteins have become prohibitively expensive, reserved only for the nation’s wealthiest. Once pantry staples have started appearing less and less in

³⁰ Aidan Lewis. “Egypt Signs Expanded \$8 billion loan deal with IMF.” *Reuters*, March 6, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/egypt-signs-expanded-8-billion-loan-deal-with-imf-2024-03-06/>

³¹ Aidan Lewis & Patrick Werr, “Explainer: How big are Egypt’s economic challenges?” *Reuters*, March 6, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/how-big-are-egypt-s-economic-challenges-2024-03-06/#:~:text=As%20many%20as%2060%25%20of,in%20a%20state%20of%20collapse>.

³² Minh Cong Nguyen et. al (2020), “Profiles of the new poor due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” *Poverty & Equity Global Practice*, Global Unit, World Bank.

³³ Caroline Kraft et. al., “Vulnerable workers in MENA a year into the pandemic,” June 2021, <https://theforum.erf.org.eg/2021/06/06/vulnerable-workers-mena-year-pandemic/>

³⁴ Samy Magdy, “In Egypt, government and poor struggle with troubled economy.” *AP News*, March 1, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/egypt-economic-crisis-inflation-russia-ukraine-war-0bf22bb11d5b7fe2060eac52279b9df3>

Egyptian kitchens. While some have started borrowing to make ends meet, others worry that crime and theft will become familiar as “people won’t have enough money to feed themselves.”³⁵

The government, in a move to “ease the burden on citizens,” announced a substantial increase in the budget for social protection programs in FY 2023/24.³⁶ In a press release in 2023, former Finance Minister Mohamed Maeit announced that the budget for subsidies and social protection would be increased by nearly 50 percent, from LE358.4 billion (US\$7.4 billion³⁷) to LE529.7 billion (US\$17.15 billion). Funding for the Takaful and Karama cash transfer programs was increased to LE35.5 billion (US\$1.15 billion) from LE12.1 billion in FY2014/15. This followed a late 2023 decree where President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi increased the Takaful and Karama benefits paid out to 5 million families by 15 percent.³⁸

The figures for social protection programs in Egypt may be impressive. A quarter of the nation’s poorest households receive government assistance and over 50 percent of the population is registered for social protection.³⁹ Nevertheless, it is important to note social protection programs in Egypt continue to exclude many of the nation’s poorest, especially those engaged in informal work, which makes up 62.5 percent of Egypt’s labor force.⁴⁰

³⁵ Aya Batrawy, “Poverty and Inflation: Egypt’s Economy Hit by Global Turmoil.” *AP News*, September 25, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-inflation-health-africa-68436d736c70ad3c93681ce41187b1a3>

³⁶ “Egypt announces substantial increase in budget for social protection programs in FY 2023/2024.” *Ahram Online*, April 23, 2023, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/496306/Business/Economy/Egypt-announces-substantial-increase-in-budget-for.aspx>

³⁷ Calculated at exchange rate as of February 2024, US\$1 = LE30.9

³⁸ “Maait confirms Egypt’s commitment to update its social protection system.” *Ahram Online*, October 15, 2023, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/510222.aspx>

³⁹ “Egypt among MENA’s leading countries in social protection: World Bank.” *Ahram Online*, June 9, 2023, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/502602.aspx>

⁴⁰ The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, “Views On News (Views On The Crisis)–Edition 7: Informal Sector.” The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (ECES), 2020, [http://www.eces.org.eg/cms/NewsUploads/Pdf/2020_4_9-13_8_27informal%20sector-%20final%20-%20English%20%20\(ebrahim\).pdf](http://www.eces.org.eg/cms/NewsUploads/Pdf/2020_4_9-13_8_27informal%20sector-%20final%20-%20English%20%20(ebrahim).pdf); Lopez-Acevedo, Gladys, Marco Ranzani, Nistha Sinha, and Adam Elsheikhi. 2023. *Informality and Inclusive Growth in the Middle East and North Africa*. Middle East and North Africa Development Report. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1988-9. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

3.4 Egypt's Demographic Specificities

Labor force participation in Egypt stands at 45.5 percent⁴¹ of the total population, below the global average figure of 67 percent,⁴² and at 17.8 percent for women.⁴³ Egypt is included among the countries with the lowest female labor force participation rates globally.⁴⁴ Total unemployment currently hovers around 7 percent,⁴⁵ while unemployment rates for women and youth stand at 17.9 percent⁴⁶ and 19 percent⁴⁷ respectively.

The impact of unemployment becomes more critical when viewed against Egypt's demographics. Recent estimates indicate that Egypt hosts one of the fastest growing youth populations in the world. However, the share of youth in education, employment, or vocational training stood at 29 percent in 2023.⁴⁸ Unemployment among the educated (understood as those who have tertiary education, a bachelor's degree or equivalent education level, a master's degree or equivalent education level, or doctoral degree) stood at 11 percent.⁴⁹

Recent statistics estimate that the informal sector represents 62.5 percent of Egypt's labor force,⁵⁰ with 39.6 percent of informal workers working in

41 "Labor force participation rate, total (% of total population ages 15-64) (modeled ILO estimate)-Egypt, Arab Rep.," World Bank, 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.ZS?locations=EG>.

42 *ibid*

43 "Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15-64) (modeled ILO estimate)-Egypt, Arab Rep.," World Bank, 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.FE.ZS?locations=EG>.

44 "Labor force participation rate, total (% of total population ages 15-64) (modeled ILO estimate)", <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sl-tlf-acti-zs>

45 Future of Jobs Report 2023. World Economic Forum, May 2023, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2023.pdf

46 "Unemployment, female (% of female labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)-Egypt, Arab Rep." World Bank, 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=EG>

47 "Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate)-Egypt, Arab Rep." World Bank, 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=EG>

48 Future of Jobs Report 2023. World Economic Forum, May 2023, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2023.pdf

49 *ibid*

50 The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, "Views On News (Views On The Crisis)-Edition 7: Informal Sector." The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (ECES), 2020, [http://www.eces.org.eg/cms/NewsUploads/Pdf/2020_4_9-13_8_27informal%20sector-%20final%20-%20English%20%20\(ebrahim\).pdf](http://www.eces.org.eg/cms/NewsUploads/Pdf/2020_4_9-13_8_27informal%20sector-%20final%20-%20English%20%20(ebrahim).pdf)

the formal sector but with informal arrangements.⁵¹ Work in the informal sector, especially for young individuals, prevents them from gaining the skills, experience, and income necessary to secure a decent job that provides better working conditions and access to social protection.⁵² Working in the informal sector also renders people invisible in national statistics data. This further marginalizes and excludes them from broader policy making.⁵³ Although the government has been actively taking steps to support informal workers, beginning with creating a database to take account of the irregular workforce,⁵⁴ informal workers continue to lack access to social security. Many of those workers did not benefit from income support programs during COVID-19⁵⁵ and continue to remain unsupported during the country's current economic crisis.

IV. PLATFORM WORK IN EGYPT-CONTEXT

Beginning with the launch of Uber in 2014, platforms have served as a vital ride provider in Egypt's largest cities. And with increasing reliance on platforms, those looking for work have increasingly taken on platform work alongside or instead of mainstream employment. This change in the labor market was only furthered by shifts in demand resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed for a surge in digitally enabled business models. In an interview conducted during the course of this research, Ameer Sherif, an expert from the private sector, noted that the pandemic allowed for an economy built around platform work to flourish, as people resorted to platform ground and cloud work as an

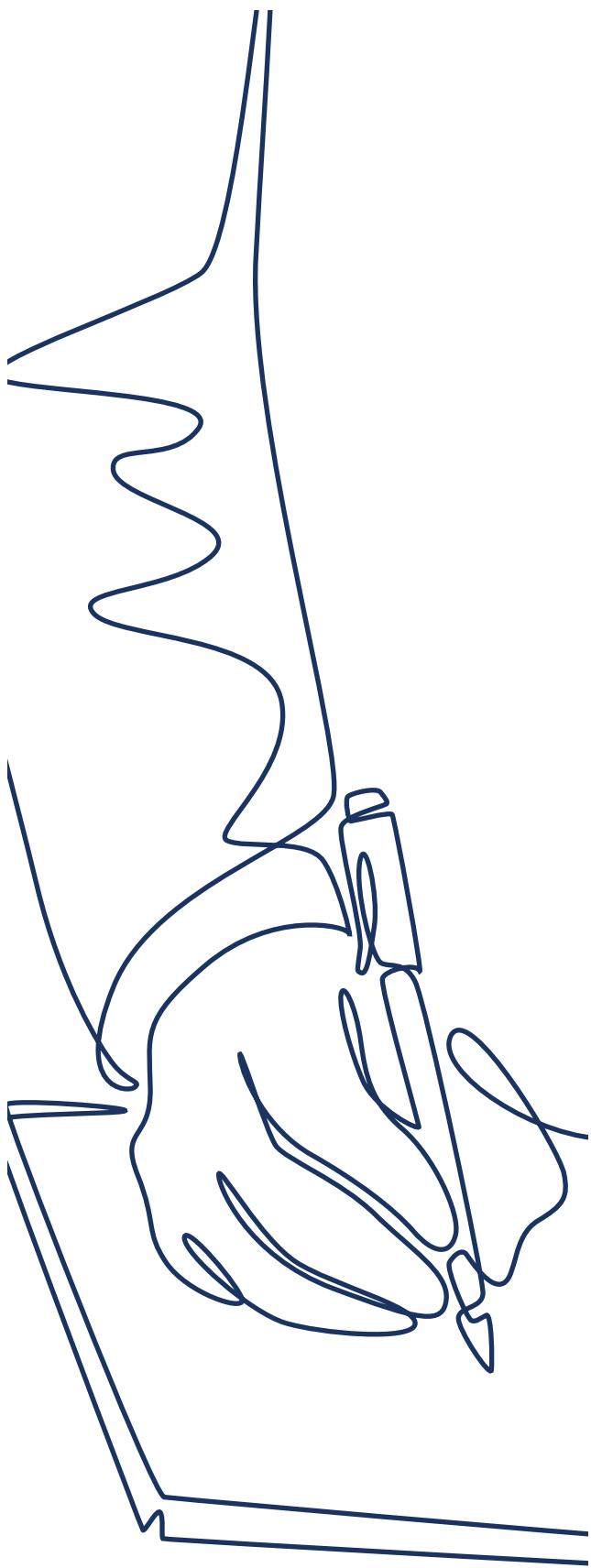
51 "Views On News (Views On The Crisis)-Edition 7: Informal Sector." The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (ECES), 2020, [http://www.eces.org.eg/cms/NewsUploads/Pdf/2020_4_9-13_8_27informal%20sector-%20final%20-%20English%20%20\(ebrahim\).pdf](http://www.eces.org.eg/cms/NewsUploads/Pdf/2020_4_9-13_8_27informal%20sector-%20final%20-%20English%20%20(ebrahim).pdf)

52 "Decent Jobs for Egypt's Young People: Tackling the Challenge Together in Qalyoubia and Menoufia." International Labour Organization, January 2014-January 2017. https://www.ilo.org/africa/technical-cooperation/WCMS_329911/lang--en/index.htm

53 Nagla Rizk, "Vulnerabilities Exposed: COVID-19 and Informal Livelihoods in Egypt," KnowledgeMaze, 2020. <https://knowledgemaze.wordpress.com/2020/06/29/vulnerabilities-exposed-covid-19-and-informal-livelihoods-in-egypt/>

54 Hesham Fouad, "Irregular Employment in Egypt: Multiple Initiatives, Meager Results." Alternative Policy Solutions, May 2023. <https://aps.auegypt.edu/en/articles/993/irregular-employment-in-egypt-multiple-initiatives-meager-results>

55 World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021 International Labour Organization (ILO)-Geneva, 2021.



alternative source of income, especially those who were affected by mass layoffs during the pandemic.

Despite the rising prominence of platform work, Egypt's current data landscape does not capture the types or size of "new" forms of work in the country. An exception is a relatively recent CAPMAS survey conducted in 2022, which estimated that 60 percent of Egyptians under the age of 30 had sought out platform-mediated work to bridge income gaps.⁵⁶

To better understand these new forms of work vis-a-vis the legal, social and data landscape, the sections below explore how and if these new forms are captured in relevant laws, such as the labor law and the social insurance law as well as social protection programs and in governmental, civil society and private sector data sources.

4.1 Legislative Environment

In a rapidly changing economic context, Egypt's legislative environment has had to adapt. Increasing digitalization has led to the implementation of laws to govern the use of technology, whether for commercial or personal purposes. Many of the laws, however, have focused more on corporate regulation than on labor relations. It is important to note that the executive regulations — a list of provisions accompanying laws to govern their implementation — for the personal data protection law have not yet been released. Against this legal context, platform workers are often considered self-employed or independent contractors, very rarely receiving any kind of social benefits.

This is true for all sectors in the platform economy, except for the ride-hailing sector, which has received some legal recognition through the ride-hailing law passed in 2019. The law contains 19 articles that govern services provided by land transportation companies, including ride-hailing services.⁵⁷ It mandates all ride-hailing companies to pay taxes, formally register their workers at the

⁵⁶ Raneem Mangoud, "Convenience vs Exploitation: Egypt's Informal Labour Market," The Startup Scene, November 6, 2024, <https://thestartupscene.me/MenaEcosystems/Convenience-vs-Exploitation-Egypt-s-Informal-Labour-Market>

⁵⁷ "Egypt: Ministerial Resolution Issued to Regulate Activities of Ride-Sharing Companies." The Library of Congress, 2019. Accessed February 21, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2019-10-22/egypt-ministerial-resolution-issued-to-regulate-activities-of-ride-sharing-companies/#text=The%20Law%20bans%20ride%20sharing,operate%20legally%20in%20the%20country.>

social insurance authority and pay social insurance contributions in accordance with the social insurance law.⁵⁸ Platform workers in other sectors, however, including food and on-demand delivery, who are the focus of this research, continue to lack legal recognition and protection.

While the current labor law, issued in 2003, does not capture the changes resulting from the digitalization of labor relations, a new labor law has officially been passed by the Egyptian Parliament's House of Representatives, introducing key reforms aimed at modernizing employment relations and aligning Egypt's labor market with international standards. Coming into force September 1, 2025, Labor Law No. 14/2025 will include several gains for workers, including the recognition of new forms of work, like platform-based work, a development which would have not been made possible without the consistent engagement of multiple stakeholders, including academia and civil society, with law and policy makers.⁵⁹ Recognition of new forms of work would occur even in the absence of a formal employment

contract, as is usually the case, given that there is an intermediary. It also entitles workers to "one month's salary for every year worked" in the case that their employer terminates a contract that had previously been renewed a few times.⁶⁰ The new law also requires that employers ensure a safe and respectful work environment that is free from harassment, bullying, and violence by implementing the necessary preventative measures and policies that protect employees against such behavior.⁶¹

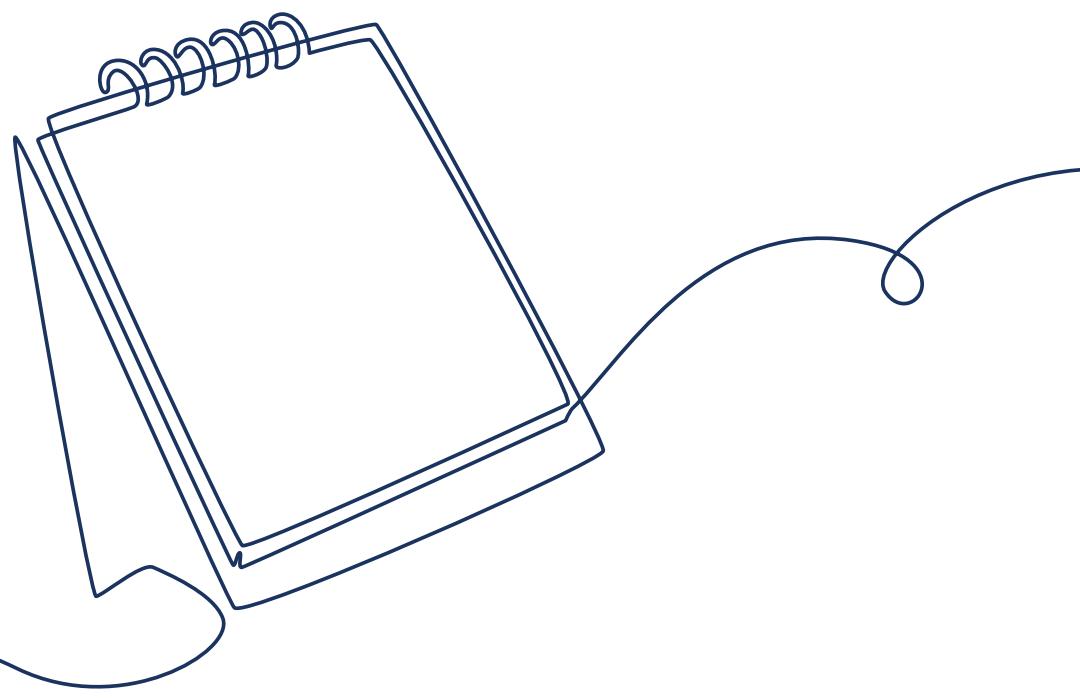
The new law further tightens restrictions on strikes, upholding provisions from the existing law and introducing a ban on strikes "during all stages of mediation and arbitration," which can take place over periods as long as several months.⁶² Strikes are also banned during "exceptional circumstances,"⁶³ with no specification of what qualifies as such. The law also notes that, for the right to strike, workers must

60 "Translation of Labor Law No. 14 of 2025," Andersen, May 15, 2025, <https://eg.andersen.com/translation-labor-law-14-2025/>

61 "A New Era for Labor Relations in Egypt: Insights into the 2025 Labor Law," Matouk Bassiouny, May 12, 2025, <https://matoukbassiouny.com/a-new-era-for-labor-relations-in-egypt-insights-into-the-2025-labor-law/>

62 "Translation of Labor Law No. 14 of 2025," Andersen, May 15, 2025, <https://eg.andersen.com/translation-labor-law-14-2025/>

63 Ibid.



exhaust “amicable settlement methods for disputes”⁶⁴, which include, as outlined in the law, collective bargaining, conciliation, mediation and arbitration. The law also states that a strike shall lead to the suspension of obligations arising from the employment contract during the duration of the strike, thereby allowing employers to not pay employees their wages during a strike. The law, however, relaxes one strike requirement, allowing for strikes to be “declared and organized by the relevant labor union or labor commissioner,”⁶⁵ rather than approved by two-thirds of the union’s members.

The new law enforces a minimum wage set by the National Wages Council and allows women longer and more frequent periods of maternity leave and certain workers longer annual paid leave.⁶⁶ It also attempts to prevent forced dismissals by requiring resignations to be written and signed by the worker and approved by the administrative authority, and it prohibits employee shifts from stretching beyond twelve hours per day.⁶⁷

While the law proposes beneficial regulations, some may not be in the favor of workers. For instance, it decreases annual paid leave during the first year of employment from 21 to 15 days and decreases the minimum annual salary rise from seven percent to three percent. It also obstructs collective action by regulating workers’ right to strike, demanding that they resort to the relevant trade union organization and notify their employer and the relevant administrative authority 10 days prior to any strike action; the notice must include the length of the strike and when it is expected to end.⁶⁸ In the event that workers have a “valid” collective agreement with an institution, the law bans strikes “with the aim of rectifying this agreement until it expires.”⁶⁹

The 2017 law governing workers unions and the protection of the right to union association⁷⁰ also

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Translation of Labor Law No. 14 of 2025,” Andersen, May 15, 2025, <https://eg.andersen.com/translation-labor-law-14-2025/>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ The executive provisions of the law were issued by the labor minister under the number 35/2018, published in the Official Gazette, 61 (attachment), on March 14, 2018.

restricts platform workers’ right to union representation. Despite amendments introduced in 2019⁷¹ following criticism of the 2017 law, workers continue to be restricted in “the application of the executive regulations in creating new trade unions or workers’ organizations.”⁷² In practice, this can be seen in the executive authority’s refusal to receive incorporation documents, with no possibility of amendments from representatives.⁷³ This violates the law’s stipulation that, from the moment of filing, workers organizations have the liberty to start practicing their activities.⁷⁴

The nature of platform work — atomised and loosely regulated — also complicates the possibility of a worker-led organization at the company level.⁷⁵ Progress, however, has been made toward forming a union committee for platform workers in certain sectors at the city or governorate level. Following amendments to the law, the number of workers required to establish such a committee has decreased from 150 to 50, slightly easing the requirements.⁷⁶

Last but not least, although the new draft law aims to guarantee gender equality and to ban gender-based discrimination (articles 3 and 49), it still maintains the labor minister’s authority to determine the conditions, circumstances and timings in which and when women can work. It is worth noting, however, that the labor minister issued two decrees (43 and 44) in 2021 canceling a ban on women working in specific industries and during

⁷¹ “Egypt Freedom of Association, Collective Bargaining and Industrial Relations.” Egypt-Law No. 142 of 2019 which amends several provisions of the Trade Union Law and the Protection of Freedom of Association promulgated by Law No. 213 of 2017. International Labor Organization (ILO). Accessed February 21, 2023, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=10877&p_count=1&p_classification=02.

⁷² Fairwork (2023). “Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2022/23: Platform Workers Amidst Egypt’s Economic Crisis,” Oxford, United Kingdom; Berlin, Germany, Fairwork, 2023.

⁷³ Masaar — Technology & Law Community (March 30, 2023). “The Trade Union Law and the Protection of Freedom of Association in Egypt.” Knowledge Maze, <https://knowledgemaze.wordpress.com/2023/03/30/the-trade-union-law-and-the-protection-of-freedom-of-association-in-egypt/>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Masaar — Technology & Law Community (March 30, 2023). “Fairwork Principles and Labour Legislation in Egypt.” Knowledge Maze, <https://knowledgemaze.wordpress.com/2023/03/30/fairwork-principles-and-labour-legislation-in-egypt/>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

night shifts (albeit only in specific industries and with necessary permits obtained by an employer).⁷⁷

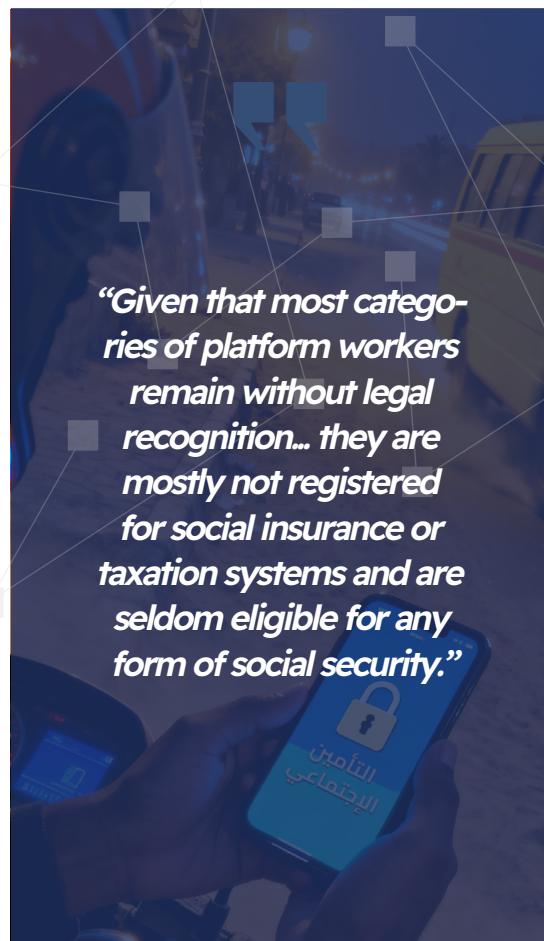
Dr. Ragui Assad, interviewed during this study, notes that the current labor law is better than the proposed draft law, particularly where flexibility and contract duration are concerned. As it stands, the draft labor law is set to turn a definite durational contract into an indefinite durational contract after four renewals. While this, in theory, may seem better for employees, the reality is that, in an economy marked by informality, the risk remains that employers tend to resort to hiring their workers informally when met with additional employment restrictions.

At its core, as emphasized by the Dr. Ragui Assad, the issue with the law is that it continues to turn a blind eye to new forms of work and their intricacies, especially in relation to platform work and platform workers' rights. The sentiment was echoed by the ILO expert at the Cairo office, Wafaa Osama, who noted that changes to the labor law should have been made after the COVID-19 pandemic to accommodate for the shifts in the labor market that occurred as a result, namely the emergence and expansion of non-traditional forms of work. The expert from the private sector, Ameer Sherif, agreed, saying that a "one size fits all" approach to labor legislation does not work. "Workers should not be treated through the same standards, as they have different conditions," the expert said.

4.2 Social Insurance

Given that most categories of platform workers remain without legal recognition, they are often classified as self-employed or contractors rather than employees. Subsequently, they are mostly not registered for social insurance or taxation systems and are seldom eligible for any form of social security.

In 2019, a social insurance law was passed to unify all social protection laws under one umbrella.⁷⁸ Those subject to the law's provisions were divided into four categories: employees working for others, employers, Egyptians working abroad, and irregu-



lar workers. Social insurance coverage expanded to include new employee categories, such as irregular workers and seasonal workers.⁷⁹ Fishermen, domestic workers, overland transportation employees and owners of sole proprietorships and familial businesses were covered by the law.⁸⁰ Casual workers were also entitled by the law to social insurance, given that they pay their own contributions. Payments would allow them to receive aging, death and disability insurance, as well as a minimum pension of LE900.⁸¹

Platform workers, however, do not fit into any of the law's four specific categories, even as irregular workers, because, to be eligible for consideration under the "regular employment" category, the law

⁷⁷ Masaar — Technology & Law Community (March 30, 2023). "The New Draft Labor Law in Egypt." Knowledge Maze, <https://knowledgemaze.wordpress.com/2023/03/30/the-new-draft-labor-law/>.

⁷⁸ "Social Insurance and Pensions Law," Law No. 148 of 2019, issued and published in the Official Gazette No. 33(A) on August 19, 2019.

⁷⁹ Masaar — Technology & Law Community (March 30, 2023). "Social Insurance and Pensions Law and Freelancing in Egypt." Knowledge Maze, <https://knowledgemaze.wordpress.com/2023/03/30/social-insurance-and-pensions-law-and-freelancing-in-egypt/>.

⁸⁰ ibid.

⁸¹ Lamiaa Youssef et al., "Egypt's New Social Insurance Law," Sharkawy & Sarhan, July 7, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20221121115604/https://www.sharkawylaw.com/egypts-new-social-insurance-law/>

stipulates that there must be a regular working relationship between the worker and the employer. This “regularity” is defined within a set of executive regulations as work that, in nature, belongs to the employer’s activity (the kind of business provided by the employer) and lasts for six months at the least. Whether or not platform workers satisfy these conditions is legally arguable, even when considering the exemptions that have been made for specific professions (e.g., fishing, construction and cargo and shipping workers).

Platform workers are also not considered to fall under the self-employment category given that the law “requires either regulation by special laws or licenses from competent authorities for workers to be registered, which is inapplicable to most freelance professions, with minimal exceptions (the ride-hailing law).”⁸² The irregular employment category is also not an option, given that the law clearly lists specific professions, and the National Authority for Social Insurance does not list platform workers under its self-employed category.⁸³ As such, platform workers remain outside the social insurance law.

This exclusion, however, is not limited to platform workers but extends to workers engaged in all new forms of work. As explained by Dr. Ragui Assad, the current legal framework is behind on developments in the labor market. In theory, according to him, some workers engaged in new forms of work can register themselves as informal workers and therefore receive social benefits, but the reality is that the process is complicated by the executive regulations’ requirements.

4.3 Social Protection

Many Egyptians depend on a number of governmental cash transfer and social assistance programs as well as food subsidies for sustenance. Although the government has amended its social protection policies to be more inclusive of informal workers, especially since COVID-19, current social policies remain mostly exclusive of new forms of work.

The invisibility of platform workers from data and subsequently from the social insurance law’s current structure and policies make it nearly impossible for platform workers to benefit from available social protection initiatives, further exacerbating their vulnerability in an already volatile economy.

Egypt’s social support initiatives include Takaful and Karama, a cash transfer program designed for some of Egypt’s most vulnerable citizens. Takaful and Karama include both conditional and unconditional cash transfers. Conditional cash transfers aim to provide income support to increase food intake and reduce poverty, while unconditional cash transfers aim to protect citizens over 65 in need of financial support, those with severe disabilities and diseases, and financially vulnerable orphans and widows.⁸⁴

Funding for the program has been increased to partially address the increase in the number of people who fall below the poverty line.⁸⁵ That said, Egypt remains concerned about too large of a social support bill. In order to graduate beneficiaries out of the Takaful and Karama programs, so that they no longer require assistance, the Social Solidarity Ministry launched in 2022 the Forsa (Opportunity) initiative, which focuses on “job placement, asset transfer, training and skills development.”⁸⁶

The Social Solidarity Ministry also launched the primary phase of a new emergency fund for irregular workers⁸⁷ that aims to provide small and micro projects in six governorates with loans. Only 2.1 million of 11.8 million irregular workers, however, are registered to receive social benefits from the ministry for social benefits. This low level of registration

⁸⁴ World Bank, “Takaful and Karama: A Social Safety Net Project That Promotes Egyptian Women Empowerment and Human Capital,” November 17, 2020,

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2020/11/17/takaful-and-karama-a-social-safety-net-project-that-promotes-egyptian-women-empowerment-and-human-capital>

⁸⁵ “Egypt announces substantial increase in budget for social protection programs in FY 2023/2024,” *Ahram Online*, April 23, 2023,

<https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/496306/Business/Economy/Egypt-announces-substantial-increase-in-budget-for.aspx>

⁸⁶ Atef El Shabrawy et. al., “Forsa Pilot Program and Evaluation Plan,” International Food Policy Research Institute, April 2022, <https://ebrary.ifpri.org/digital/collection/p15738coll2/id/135878>

⁸⁷ Hesham Fouad, “Irregular Employment in Egypt: Multiple Initiatives, Meager Results,” Alternative Policy Solutions, American University in Cairo, May 2023, <https://aps.aucegypt.edu/en/articles/993/irregular-employment-in-egypt-multiple-initiatives-meager-results>

⁸² Fairwork (2023). “Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2022/23: Platform Workers Amidst Egypt’s Economic Crisis,” Oxford, United Kingdom; Berlin, Germany, Fairwork, 2023.

⁸³ *ibid.*

puts irregular workers in a situation similar to when the COVID-19 fund was announced in April 2020, which entitled irregular workers to receive LE500 per month for three months to alleviate pressure caused by the pandemic.⁸⁸ The exclusion of workers from the data, however, entailed their exclusion from the scope of the government handouts.⁸⁹ It is also especially important to note that, in the context of the pandemic, any attempts made by workers to be included in the data put them under the risk of contracting the virus. It also meant that they would incur transportation and paperwork costs, as well as an opportunity cost in the form of missed income. Given that many workers depend on daily income to make ends meet, these risks were not worth the grant's added value for many.

Although not directly linked to digitally mediated platform work, the government launched two training initiatives to improve the link between demand and supply in the labor market. The first was the Communication and Information Technology Ministry's Future Work is Digital (FWD) initiative, which aims to equip 10,000 young people with the skills to improve Egypt's position on the global ICT map⁹⁰ and make a wide range of job opportunities accessible for young Egyptians by giving them the skills and tools to be competitive in the freelance digital job market.

Another initiative launched by the Planning and Economic Development Ministry and the National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development in 2021 saw a partnership protocol signed with the USAID Workforce Egypt project to establish a platform "for sectoral skills councils to represent an umbrella for all sectoral skills councils in Egypt."⁹¹

Despite deteriorating economic conditions and the government's increased effort to include more workers under its social protection umbrella, Dr. Ragui Assaad notes that there is a downward trend

⁸⁸ "Saafan: 2.5 mln beneficiaries of Sisi's grant for irregular workers." State Information Service, April 2020, <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/145817/Saa-fan-2.5-mln-beneficiaries-of-Sisi%27s-grant-for-irregu-lar-workers?lang=en-us>

⁸⁹ Fairwork (2021) Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2021: Labour Standards in the Gig Economy. Cairo, Egypt; Oxford, United Kingdom.

⁹⁰ "Egypt FutureWork is Digital," Information and Communication Technology Ministry, accessed February 15, 2024. <https://egfwd.com/about-egypt-fwd/#:~:text=Under%20the%20umbrella%20of%20Digital,an%20online%20learning%20platform%20for>

⁹¹ "Workforce Egypt," FY21- QUARTER 4 REPORT, USAID, 2021, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00Z8WP.pdf

in the extent of workers covered under Egypt's social insurance program. Based on empirical findings by Dr. Ragui Assaad, a plausible explanation for this low uptake is the fact that some micro and small enterprises, where the decline is the greatest,⁹² are dropping their social insurance coverage policies to make themselves eligible for the state's Takaful and Karama programs, which are perceived by recipients as more rewarding than social insurance schemes.

4.4 Data Landscape

As mentioned above, the current data landscape does not adequately capture the types or sizes of new forms of work in Egypt. Still, a number of data sources from different stakeholders attempt to mitigate this information gap. Their effectiveness, however, remains questionable. These include public data sources as well as private and alternative data sources.

In terms of public data sources, the Planning and Economic Development Ministry, in collaboration with TVET Egypt, UN ESCWA and Workforce Egypt (USAID), has begun creating a Labor Market Information System (LMIS).⁹³ The LMIS aims to map all sources of data concerned with the labor market, not just those on new forms of work. Through this system, the organizations aim to identify and fill the gap in the labor market. Theoretically, new forms of work would be included in such a system. But given their invisibility in data, this has proven to be difficult.

Another public data tool is the Egyptian Occupational Outlook (EOO), developed in cooperation with GIZ⁹⁴. The outlook launched in May 2025 and is a platform that aims to provide critical information on more than 400 occupations in the Egyptian labor market.⁹⁵ Drawing on data from the CAPMAS' Labour Force Survey and Employment, Wages, and Hours of Work Survey, the EOO includes informa-

⁹² Assaad, Ragui and Wahby, Sarah (2023). "Why is Social Insurance Coverage Declining in Egypt? A Decomposition Analysis". ERF Working Paper no. 1658, Economic Research Forum.

⁹³ "Egypt Labor Market Information System," Planning and Economic Development Ministry, accessed February 15, 2024. <https://hassan210360.github.io/lmis2eng/>

⁹⁴ <https://occupational-outlook.mped.gov.eg>

⁹⁵ Future of Work in Egypt, "FoW Session (2): Egypt Occupational Outlook, by Dr. Ragui Assaad", Youtube Video, 10:15, April 21, 22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iltjxZYLV0s>.

tion on growing occupations, including their regional distribution, mean salaries, and the skills and qualifications they require. It also includes information on essential market-driven skills, knowledge, and competencies, all tailored to the shift towards a green economy.

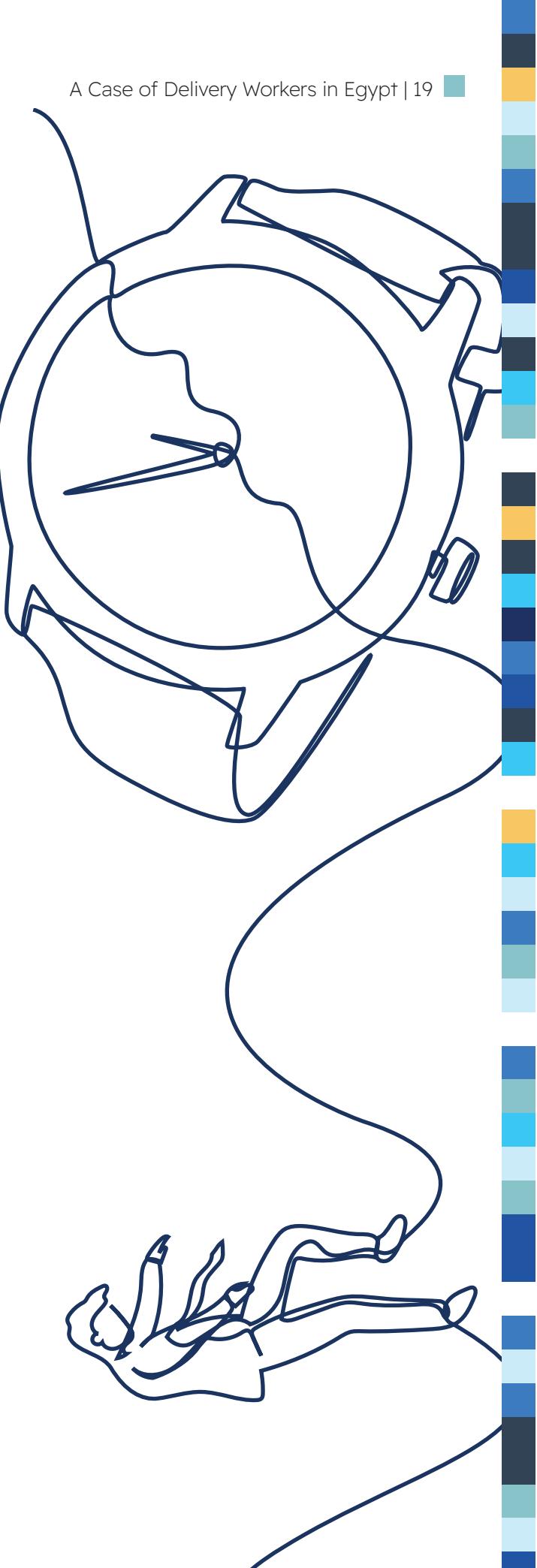
These are meant to include the fastest-growing occupations, occupations with the highest average wage, the skills and qualifications required for each occupation, and the expected growth of each occupation until 2030. The platform will focus on occupations in general, with no known emphasis on new forms of work.

Other available private or alternative data sources include the UN ESCWA's Regional Job Monitor, which focuses on online job-matching platforms that capture the supply side of the labor market. The goal of the monitor is to gather big and alternative data through these platforms. Indicators and data on gender and wages are included, with a focus on the future of work.⁹⁶ The data collected should feed into the LMIS. On the demand side, the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies is developing a similar job monitor that includes tabulations of occupations for both white and blue-collar workers, but unfortunately it does not include platform workers.⁹⁷

The invisibility of platform workers from public data sources is due to a number of reasons. It can, however, be primarily attributed to the absence of questions about digitally mediated platform work in national labor force surveys, such as CAPMAS's Egyptian Labor Market Panel Survey (ELMPS) and the Population Council's Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE). The Access to Knowledge for Development Center team has attempted to mitigate these oversights by reaching out to the responsible entities and proposing the addition of questions about platform work to future survey rounds. After a series of meetings with the respective teams, questions that detect the extent of platform workers in the economy and their access to training, as well as questions about pay mechanisms and other relevant questions about platform work, were

⁹⁶ ESCWA Skills Monitor, United Nations ESCWA, accessed February 15, 2024. <https://skillsmonitor.unescwa.org>

⁹⁷ Hisham Okasha et al. (November 10, 2021), "Demand in Egypt's Labor Market - Y1 Q1," Egyptian Center for Economic Studies. https://eces.org.eg/en/eces_event/demand-in-egypt's-labor-market/



added to surveys. This moves the future landscape toward more awareness and inclusivity of platform workers.

Until local labor surveys are updated, however, interviewed Social Solidarity Ministry and platform management experts have highlighted the need for collaboration between platforms and the ministry. Setting up a cross-platform database to take stock of those working on different platforms is an alternative data-collection mechanism to consider, especially given its potential in allowing workers to be included under the umbrella of social protection.

Data from initiatives like the Your Road is Safe initiative could be helpful in supplementing the ministry's database on irregular workers, which currently accounts for 2.2 million irregular workers. This number, however, deviates from that provided by the CAPMAS and other data gathering entities, a discrepancy that the ministry recognizes and says it sees the necessity for collaboration with the relevant entities to better capture the data required to make better policies.

The interviewed representative from the ministry acknowledged that workers may be wary of sharing their information in fear that their social assistance might be revoked, especially those receiving Takaful and Karama payments. However, he did emphasize that the ministry is currently working to build trust with workers by ensuring that their assistance status will not be affected by them sharing information on their work status.

The ministry is also working on furthering the financial visibility and inclusion of irregular workers, including platform workers, by encouraging banks to inform workers that opening a bank account will not affect their enrollment in the Takaful and Karama programs. Still, trust between workers and the government remains low, and, for many, the potential benefits of being seen and recognized do not outweigh the risk of losing assistance. They, thus, prefer to remain unseen.

V. FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD

To gain a better insight into the delivery platform economy and its opportunities and challenges, it is important to develop an understanding of workers' profiles. This includes their demographics, work ex-

perience in and outside of the platform economy, and reasons for choosing to update platform-mediated work. Below are some field insights on these factors.

The majority of workers interviewed across platforms were employed in the private sector before turning to platform-mediated work. The most commonly cited reason for joining platform-mediated work among the interviewees was necessity: they needed a work opportunity through which they could generate enough money to cover their expenses. Some workers' previous jobs paid too little. Others faced difficulties in securing jobs within their field and couldn't afford to remain unemployed throughout their search for a more suitable job.

One delivery driver said, "I graduated, got married and had no choice but to find a job because of the responsibility."⁹⁸

Many other workers resorted to platform work because of its perceived flexibility. They expressed feeling less pressure in platform-mediated work than in their previous jobs. For one worker, this flexibility translated into an ability to determine his own income to a large extent, whereby, if he needs more money, he can work for longer hours.

The vast majority of drivers interviewed in the study were men. Of the six platforms surveyed, women drivers were among the interviewee sample for only one platform. Some of the remaining platforms only hire men, while others, although open to hiring women, do not seem to have many women workers. Drivers interviewed ranged in age from 18 to 48 years old. The average age came in at 29. Of all the drivers interviewed, around half were originally from Cairo, while the other half were from rural cities across Egypt who had relocated to Cairo for work.

The vast majority of drivers said they worked full-time on their respective platforms. Most participants had some degree of schooling. Over half had obtained a vocational diploma, and nearly a fifth had a bachelor's degree. The demographics indicate a relatively educated but underemployed population, as consistent with national statistics. Limited economic opportunities and a turbulent economy have pushed many toward platform-mediated work.

5.1 Income and Employment Security

Digital labor platforms have transformed many facets of work. They have allowed more individuals access to work,⁹⁹ provided individuals with the flexibility to work in accordance with their own schedule¹⁰⁰ and presented an opportunity for formalization to workers in developing countries.¹⁰¹ At the time of their emergence, digital labor platforms were seen as “a revolutionary solution to unemployment problems”¹⁰² and a pathway for many to exit poverty. And indeed, platform-mediated work has played a vital role in filling employment gaps, particularly in developing countries, where many workers depend on platform-mediated work as their primary source of income.¹⁰³

As part of this study, interviewees were asked about the wages they receive, the frequency at which they receive payment of their wages, the quantity of work they perform on the platform and whether or not their income covers their expenses. Most drivers across all platforms indicated monthly earnings that surpass the national minimum wage. Most, however, were also unaware of the national minimum wage when asked. One driver explained that he didn’t care to know because he “knows it will not be sufficient to cover the bare cost of bread.”¹⁰⁴ It is also important to note that, while many drivers earned above the monthly national minimum wage, when considering their average weekly hours, their net hourly wage LE15.3 (US\$0.50) was lower than the hourly minimum wage LE15.625 (US\$0.51).¹⁰⁵ This is largely due to the fact that many of the drivers surveyed work, on average, 64 hours per week, which is 16 hours longer than the legal 48-hour Egyptian work week.. Drivers surveyed indicated

working six days per week, with 11-hour shifts on average. Many of the workers who are non-native to Cairo work every day to “save up days off” to go back to their hometowns once a month.

Clocking in over 64 hours a week, however, was not enough for many of the drivers surveyed. Many expressed needing more work to make ends meet because, as they stand now, their incomes only cover a portion of their expenses, and they cannot do anything but “make it work.” For some, this has meant giving up “luxuries,” like a gym membership or the more expensive brand of cigarettes. For others, it has had more grave consequences. One driver, for example, expressed having to forgo medical care for his chronically ill wife to pay for his daughter’s tuition.

All workers surveyed have indicated that they rely on platforms as their primary source of income, with over two thirds of interviewees not holding other jobs. Some drivers, however, indicated working on ride-hailing platforms after their long hours working on a delivery platform. Although that was uncommon. Others expressed working one-off jobs, when available, to generate additional income. When asked about how they’re dealing with rising costs of living, many workers indicated needing to work longer hours. For women working as drivers, however, that has been challenging. One woman driver explained that, despite needing the money, she has not been able to work longer hours due to her household and childcare responsibilities. She expressed that “men are able to better leverage the opportunities provided by platform work because they are not confined by their care responsibilities.”¹⁰⁶

In terms of flexibility, over half of the participants surveyed, including focus group participants, indicated that their decision to join platform work was largely driven by flexibility. Most of the workers surveyed, however, expressed working shifts pre-determined by their area manager or the office they work through. For some workers, that has not affected their experience on the platform. For others, the situation has been different. One woman who participated in a focus group works the night shift on a food delivery platform after her full-time job. Because of how late into the night the shift

⁹⁹ OECD, *Informality and Globalisation: In Search of a New Social Contract*, OECD Publishing (Paris), 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c945c24f-en>

¹⁰⁰ ILO, “Can Digital Labour Platforms Create Fair Competition and Decent Jobs?” ILO, February 2021, <https://www.ilo.org/digitalguides/en-gb/story/world-employment-social-outlook-2021#introduction>

¹⁰¹ OECD, *Informality and Globalisation: In Search of a New Social Contract*, OECD Publishing (Paris), 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c945c24f-en>

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Fairwork (2023). “Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2022/23: Platform Workers Amidst Egypt’s Economic Crisis,” Oxford, United Kingdom; Berlin, Germany, Fairwork, 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with driver, man

¹⁰⁵ Minimum wage at time of fieldwork research was LE3000/month.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with driver, woman



goes, she must go home before her shift ends. To work around that, she does not mark her last order as complete on the platform until her shift ends. A supposed long delivery time results in a lower rating and, therefore, a lower pay grade. For this driver, a rigid shift schedule has automatically meant lower income potential.

This is largely consistent with the literature, which shows that while platform work promises flexibility and autonomy for workers, platforms often restrict their workers. For instance, some platforms necessitate a minimum number of hours, sometimes during predetermined time slots, in order for workers to maintain an active profile on the platform.¹⁰⁷ The platform economy has also become relatively saturated due to an excess supply of labor, which is especially true on platforms that operate on a “gig” basis. This, in turn, has yielded disappointing job creation impacts in the platform economy due to the fact that not enough individ-

uals have been able to match their labor supply to the existing demand.¹⁰⁸

5.2 Equality of Opportunity

The accessibility of platform work is seen as one of its most significant selling points. Findings, however, show that platform work is not necessarily as accessible as it seems. More than half of the participants surveyed have had to buy new or used phones in order to access platform work, most of whom used installments to finance their purchases. One participant could not afford to buy a phone herself, so she had to join a friend on her orders until she could save up enough money to make the purchase. Access to the internet is also financed by drivers, most of whom had to buy add-on internet bundles after joining platform work. All participants reported that they received no contributions from their employers to finance internet access.

Connectivity also plays a major role in platform work. More than half of the participants complained of network connectivity problems impacting their work. Drivers complained of areas not being adequately covered by telecom networks, which results

¹⁰⁷ European Commission, “Study to Gather Evidence on the Working Conditions of Platform Workers,” 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9582&furtherNews=yes#navItem-1>

¹⁰⁸ OECD, *Informality and Globalisation: In Search of a New Social Contract*, OECD Publishing (Paris), 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c945c24f-en>

in them receiving lower pay due to the platform queuing orders that they must accept. Another driver highlighted connectivity issues leading to unpaid hours, explaining: "Sometimes hours will be unpaid because of connectivity issues. Platforms would label time spent 'offline' due to connectivity issues as off time, leading to some hours not being accounted for."¹⁰⁹ Other, more experienced drivers have found ways to work around connectivity issues through trial and error. One driver explained, "I have created a method to navigate connectivity issues well and maximize my efficiency. Before I leave for a delivery, I figure out the address and home number, so I don't have to depend on the network in case it is not good enough."¹¹⁰

Most drivers reported receiving a training session when first starting out with the platform. Others who did not receive training were helped by a friend or a manager. On rare occasions, some drivers taught themselves how to use the application. Training sessions, however, do not teach drivers everything they need to know about work on the platform. One driver reported feeling very confused when she first started out, explaining that whenever she received a notification, she would look for

someone who works for the platform on the street and ask for their help.

But training and assistance still do not outweigh the value of experience working on the platform. Many drivers expressed needing time to understand the intricacies of the platform they work for, with one driver even expressing that, with the right experience, platform work can be a great way to make a living: "it is about making the system work for you."¹¹¹ A few focus group participants noted that if you are able to navigate through the app properly, you are likely to be more efficient and make more money. Making use of multiple orders, understanding your pay vis-à-vis the distance of the order being delivered, and delivery time are all things participants have had to learn from experience.

5.3 Safety on the Road

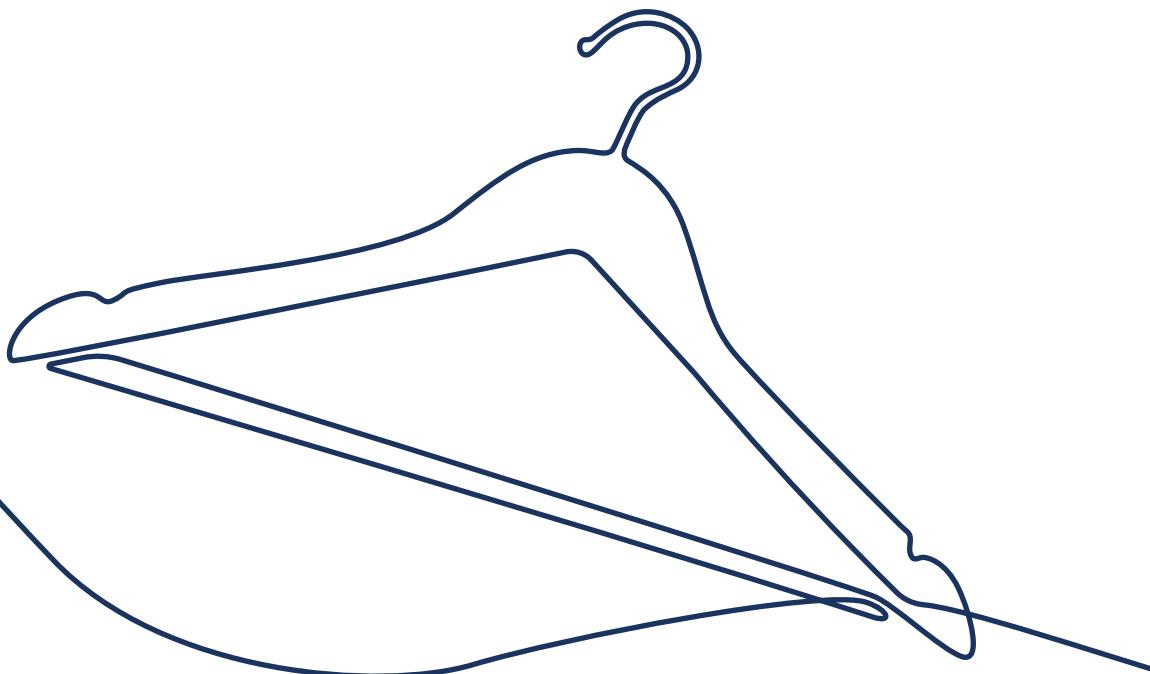
When asked about what they see as the main risk in delivery work, most drivers said road accidents. "When we're on the road, there are always dangers," one focus group participant said.¹¹² Still, over half of the drivers surveyed have stated that the platforms they work for do not provide any safety gear. Of the 40 participants, only six were provided with

109 Interview with driver, man

110 Interview with driver, man

111 Focus group participant, women

112 Focus group participant, man



helmets, two with vests. Two women drivers were asked to share their live location with a supervisor.

Most of the platforms surveyed made no efforts to protect their workers from the dangers of driving on Egyptian roads, and all of them do not provide protections for driving hazards. This is reflected in a lack of accident insurance, health insurance and sick pay. Of all the workers surveyed, none indicated having any kind of insurance, and only two indicated they had received sick pay. These conditions have forced some workers to push the boundaries of their health and safety. One driver told a story of getting into an accident on the job that resulted in multiple fractures on a Thursday, only to be back on the road on Sunday. Another driver put it simply: “In this line of work, being sick or tired does not mean anything.”¹¹³

This is consistent with the global experiences of platform workers, many of whom are made responsible for their own health and safety, despite occupational risks of fatigue from long hours and deadly traffic accidents. As per the literature, this is problematic for two reasons: the first is that many platform workers are “unaware of or unconcerned by health and safety risks.”¹¹⁴ One food delivery driver in France noted that, despite being concerned about traffic accidents, many delivery drivers “feel pressured to take risks.”¹¹⁵ This might be largely dependent on the second reason: platforms pressuring workers to take said risks. Food delivery platforms in particular are eager to attract and retain customers in a relatively saturated market.¹¹⁶ Therefore, some tend to set delivery times that overlook external conditions outside of a driver’s control, even going as far as imposing penalties for late deliveries, which “leads to risky traffic behavior, crashes and fatalities.”¹¹⁷

Workers in the field reiterated similar concerns, with some drivers having indicated feeling like the

platform values orders over their workers’ safety. One driver reported that, despite “being seriously hurt” in an accident on the job, “the platform made me pay for the order that was damaged in the process.”¹¹⁸

Many drivers also emphasized an urgent need for health insurance. A woman participating in one of the focus groups said that she will sometimes avoid going to the doctor because she cannot afford medical care. Another woman participant reported having been hospitalized multiple times and being unable to afford her medical expenses. This participant also indicated that her health has been gravely affected by her work on the platform: “Working for long hours in the heat has left me with a left kidney that works at a significantly reduced capacity. I am currently struggling with medical expenses. I need to undergo an operation, but I keep postponing it until I find the means to cover the expenses.”¹¹⁹

An indifference to worker safety is also reflected in the limited delivery times set by some platforms. Drivers for one platform indicated that they need to deliver orders in under 20 minutes, regardless of how far away the delivery location is. Drivers for another platform repeatedly emphasized the importance of delivering their orders quickly, even though it did not seem like the platform emphasized a certain time window.

Women working as drivers seem to be more vulnerable when it comes to safety. Two drivers reported having been knocked over by cars while delivering orders on their bikes. Another woman indicated having been followed by a car when delivering an order one time and being intimidated by microbuses another time.

“Microbuses try to race me on the street. One microbus knocked me over on purpose and damaged my bicycle. A man tried to help me out, but I was more concerned about my bicycle. The people on the street told him [the microbus driver] that he had to fix my bicycle, and his response was that he couldn’t afford it.”¹²⁰

¹¹³ Focus group participant, man

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ “The experience of platform livelihoods in the Global South: A literature review (V1.01),” (October 2020), Farnham, Surrey, United Kingdom: Caribou Digital Publishing).<https://www.platformlivelihoods.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/QYDEL-v1.01.pdf>

¹¹⁷ Minh Hieu Nguyen et al., “What if delivery riders quit? Challenges to last-mile logistics during the Covid-19 pandemic,” *Research in Transportation Business and Management*, vol. 47 (2023).

¹¹⁸ Interview with driver, man

¹¹⁹ Focus group participant, women

¹²⁰ Focus group participant, women

Stigma around women working on delivery platforms also introduces another layer of vulnerability. One participant reported being verbally harassed by customers due to her gender. Another reported safety concerns surrounding working on roads late at night.

This is consistent with the literature, which shows that while the platform economy has created a more gender inclusive labor force,¹²¹ women in the platform economy also tend to face a set of gendered challenges. Many of the jobs available in the platform economy are traditionally “masculine.” Thus, when women partake in these jobs, they are thought to be transgressing gender norms. This, to many of them, often carries the risks of social stigma and gender-based violence.¹²² A report issued in 2022, titled “Focus on Labour Exploitation,” found that 18 percent of app-based-delivery workers who were not men experienced sexual harassment.¹²³ In the MENA context, women platform workers are put under physical and emotional pressures that result in them receiving lower pay, and unfair representation. Biases are often reinforced by platform algorithms, ultimately widening the gender divide within the platform economy.¹²⁴ In the Egyptian context, women working as ride-hailing drivers also reported not feeling adequately protected by the platforms they worked for and feeling that passen-

ger safety was prioritized over their own — a sentiment exacerbated by the arbitrary rating system.¹²⁵

Meager safety measures have also contributed to the deaths of some platform workers. Focus group participants reported the death of their friend after an accident on the job: “Our friend died, and they [the platform] didn’t do anything,” one participant said.¹²⁶ The drivers set up a fund to send monthly donations to his family. Funds set up by workers were a recurrent theme in focus groups. Drivers for another platform reported a supervisor setting up a “Platform for Good” fund, where drivers can donate to other drivers in need. This, when considered within the larger financial context of many of these drivers, is simultaneously heartening and disheartening. Without proper safety nets, workers have had no choice but to depend on each other, even when their individual situations are only marginally better than those in need.

5.4 Social Protection

While having transformed many facets of work, platform work has also exposed already existing vulnerabilities and created a set of vulnerabilities of its own. Despite engaging millions of individuals globally, platform work remains largely unregulated, further perpetuating informality. Most platform workers are classified as either independent contractors or self-employed workers.¹²⁷ This maintains informality by excluding many of those workers from formally registering as employees and, therefore, from benefiting from social protection. This is true even in the case of self-employed workers, who should be capable of registering for social security in theory. This is evident in the case of Egypt, where less than 20 percent of irregular workers are registered at the Social Solidarity Ministry for social benefits.

The situation is only marginally better for registered self-employed workers, particularly because their self-employment, or independence, is misclas-

¹²¹ Platform work has also successfully created a more gender-inclusive labor market. In Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, India and Indonesia, women reported feeling that platforms had “created more work opportunities for them.” By connecting them to new markets, mitigating gendered mobility constraints, helping them get around exclusionary social and professional networks and providing them with proof of employment, women said they felt empowered by platform work. The situation is not much different in Egypt, where women working as drivers on ride-hailing applications cited platform work as a vital opportunity. They reported the importance of ride-hailing platforms in providing them with an income, which was either the family’s primary source of income or a crucial supplement. They praised the flexibility that allowed them to manage household responsibilities alongside their work and expressed a sense of the independence they had gained in taking on the job.#

¹²² Rani Deshpande et al., (May 2022). “Women in the Platform Economy: Emerging Insights,” CGAP, <https://www.cgap.org/research/reading-deck/women-platform-economy-emerging-insights>

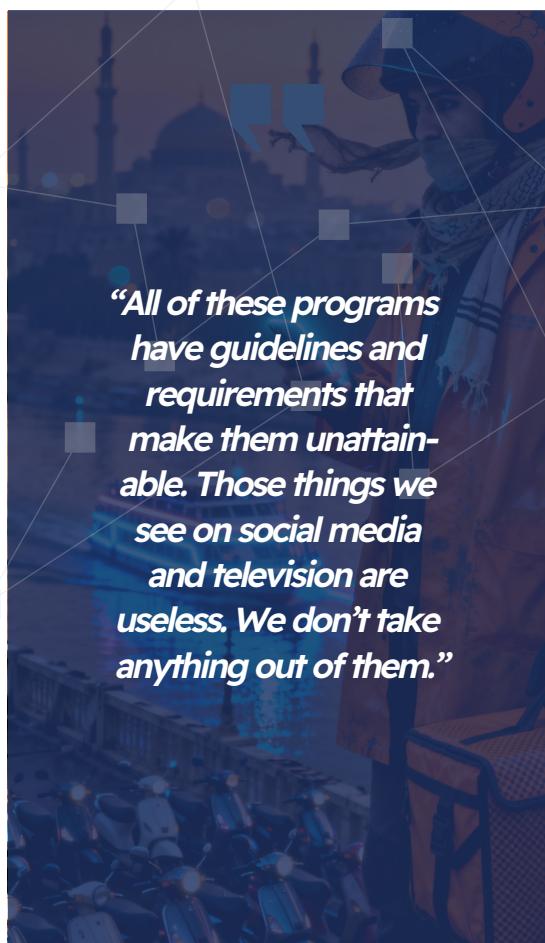
¹²³ Focus on Labour Exploitation, “Position paper: Tackling sexual harassment in low-paid and insecure work.” (London: FLEX, 2021), www.labourexploitation.org

¹²⁴ Rizk, Nagla (forthcoming). “Between a Rock and a Hard Place—Women Gig Workers in the Middle East and North Africa,”

¹²⁵ Nagla Rizk et al., “A Gendered Analysis of Ridesharing: Perspectives from Cairo, Egypt,” in *Urban Transport in the Sharing Economy Era: Collaborative cities*, Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth, https://www.cippec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/UrbanTransport-completo-web_CIPPEC.pdf

¹²⁶ Focus group participant, man

¹²⁷ OECD, *Informality and Globalisation: In Search of a New Social Contract*, OECD Publishing (Paris), 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c945c24f-en>



sified. Algorithmic management, rating systems, price-setting and similar platform practices strip workers of their independence, increasing their dependence on platforms and placing them in what is essentially a subordinate employment relationship. Simply put, “these workers share the vulnerabilities of employees and should benefit from labor protections, but they do not.”¹²⁸

This classification of platform workers also bars them from accessing the social protection they need: an inverse relationship exists between a worker’s dependence on platform work and their social protection coverage. This is particularly problematic in developing countries, where a majority of platform workers solely depend on platform work.¹²⁹ It is also particularly problematic because it is typically associated with higher occupational risk, as workers may continue to work when sick

128 *ibid.*

129 Fairwork (2023). “Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2022/23: Platform Workers Amidst Egypt’s Economic Crisis,” Oxford, United Kingdom; Berlin, Germany, Fairwork, 2023.

or injured.¹³⁰ This is exacerbated by most platforms’ questionable health and safety practices.

Of all participants surveyed, only three indicated receiving government assistance pre-COVID, one of whom no longer receives assistance. Post-COVID, only three drivers from those surveyed currently receive assistance as part of the Takaful and Karama programs. Some of those not receiving assistance have applied for programs only to be rejected or to receive no reply. Others are not even aware of the social assistance programs available to them, and most have reported being aware of programs but not having applied. One participant indicated having previously been part of the Takaful and Karama programs until payments stopped without explanation. Nearly all drivers surveyed were uninsured, with the exception of two who are currently insured by the platform they work for and another two who are insured by a non-platform job. Of all participants surveyed, most have never been insured, with only a fifth having been insured at a previous job.

Rising food insecurity has been a major concern in the country as food prices have climbed rapidly over the last year. This was reflected in the fact that nearly half of the participants surveyed indicated being worried about food in recent months,¹³¹ even when many of them had a food subsidy card. It is also highlighted by the fact that nearly all participants reported having reduced their protein intake. Some families have forgone proteins entirely, while others have reduced their intake and resorted to salads to keep full. Others have reserved proteins for children. It is important to contextualize this within meat consumption practices of poor Egyptian families before the beginning of this series of crises — average per capita meat consumption in Egypt annually reached a low of 7.3 kilograms in 2020,¹³² and this rate is expected to have fallen since. One participant, when asked about whether

130 European Commission. “Study to Gather Evidence on the Working Conditions of Platform Workers,” 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9582&furtherNews=yes#navItem-1>

131 Participants were asked if they had worried about food in the last 6 months at the time of the survey, which took place during the summer of 2023.

132 Mahmoud Hassan, “Who Can Afford Meat in Egypt Today?,” *Middle East Monitor*, May 30, 2022, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230530-who-can-afford-meat-in-egypt-today/>

his meat consumption had fallen recently said: “Not by much. It was not much to begin with.”¹³³

Without adequate safety nets to fall back on, platform workers have had to resort to creating their own. In addition to the funds set up by workers mentioned above, nearly half of the participants surveyed take part in *Gamayat* or money lending circles. For some, it is a good way to save money. For others, it is a mechanism in which they can ensure having a lump sum of cash when payments are due. For the other half of participants, however, participating in lending circles has not been possible, simply because they do not have enough extra income. As explained by one driver: “What comes is equal to what goes.”¹³⁴

For some drivers, working longer hours, forgoing unnecessary purchases and taking money out of savings has not been enough. Many of the workers surveyed indicated needing additional assistance — many, however, also reported being wary of government assistance. Multiple participants indicated thinking that the added value from seeking out government assistance is not enough to warrant going through the process. Others were critical of the red tape they must cut through to get government assistance. One driver explained: “All of these programs have guidelines and requirements that make them unattainable. Those things we see on social media and television are useless. We don’t take anything out of them.”¹³⁵

Other participants think that government assistance is a far-fetched dream, especially given the current economic situation. One participant explained: “I would want the government to help me by giving me seed money so I can start my own business. But how many other young men also want the government to help them in the same way? And with the current economic conditions? I don’t think it’s within the government’s ability to help all of us.”¹³⁶

Some participants, however, hold on to hope of government assistance, calling for the government

to “reduce the burdens and pressure of everyday life.”¹³⁷ To some, the most useful form of assistance would be a discount on their electricity bills. One participant reported that his bill had doubled in the last few months even though his consumption had stayed the same. To others, rent assistance or social housing would allow them to afford the basic necessities they’ve had to forgo to keep paying rent. For younger men especially, seed assistance money would “make a big difference,” as one participant put it.¹³⁸

Nearly all participants, however, emphasized their need for social protection. Some drivers even expressed interest in a contributory social insurance model. Many participants seemed aware of the fact that their work on platforms would not be sustainable as they get into older age, especially given how physically demanding the job can be. For many of those participants, social protection would lower the risk of their day-to-day work — notably because they would have something to fall back onto.

5.5 Future Plans

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, many participants noted that they view their work in the platform economy as temporary — a transitional phase rather than a career. Grueling economic circumstances have pushed many of them into this line of work — but they hope for stable and fulfilling jobs. Many young drivers are college students resorting to the platform economy to cover their tuition and expenses — some of them have highlighted the need for educational support, whether from the government or platform management. Without it, they may not be able to continue their education. One focus group participant noted: “We have a lot of ambitions. Delivery work is not the end for us. We were not made for that.”¹³⁹ Another participant added: “We don’t dream of staying on the streets.”¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Interview with driver, man

¹³⁴ Interview with driver, man

¹³⁵ Interview with driver, man

¹³⁶ Interview with driver, man

¹³⁷ Interview with driver, man

¹³⁸ Interview with driver, man

¹³⁹ Focus group participant, women

¹⁴⁰ Focus group participant, women

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Unfolding polycrises— from the global COVID 19 pandemic to the geopolitical fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war and Israel’s vicious attacks on Gaza— have led to increased turbulence in the region, exacerbating the economic crisis in Egypt. To cope with Egypt’s foreign currency crunch, unprecedented levels of inflation and the untenable rising cost of living, many (mostly male) young and educated workers were pushed to join the platform economy through platform-mediated work in lieu of private sector jobs. For many of them, platform work has become their primary, if not only, source of income.

This study has found that platform delivery workers in Egypt hardly make ends meet despite working long hours. Rising job costs and little increase in pay have made them vulnerable to looming economic threats. That vulnerability is furthered by their being physically and socially unprotected. Most of the platforms surveyed do not provide workers with the necessary safety gear despite the risk of accidents on the job, and nearly all workers interviewed do not have access to social insurance.

Many workers surveyed have indicated living hand to mouth— but not without compromise. Nearly half of those surveyed have reported worrying about food in recent months, and nearly all have indicated having reduced their protein intake, some even having foregone animal meat entirely. Without adequate safety nets, platform workers have had to resort to creating their own, setting up funds among themselves to help their sick or injured peers. Workers expressed an increasing distrust in the added value of social protection programs— still, nearly all of them emphasized the need for social protection.

For many workers, they do not perceive their work on the platform as sustainable in the long run. In the present, it is a means of necessary employment, providing a monthly income that surpasses minimum wage and the flexibility to set their own hours (even if some of them work more than 15 hours every day). Egyptian platform delivery workers are challenged by precarity, a lack of social protection, and poor working conditions. And these conditions, without the necessary action, will

persist, led by scant or non-existent data on these workers that renders their struggles and needs invisible to policy makers. Without data, a policy disconnect will persist, and platform workers will remain off the radar for new laws and legislative amendments. And without a voice for delivery platform workers, a representative entity to collectively bargain for their rights, these struggles will only be further compounded, and even more exacerbated by the fragmentation of platform operators too. With that outlook, the needed pillars for conducive tripartite social dialogue to ensure decent work are non-existent.

Post-pandemic, the future of work has been fast-forwarded. But the requisite structural transformations in Egypt, like other developing countries, have not kept pace to be able to drive growth and welfare¹⁴¹ as was the case with past transitions. Evidence is key to inform and guide policies that are better able to regulate platform work providing the necessary social protection mechanisms for workers, while giving them agency and a voice through a dialogue involving the concerned stakeholders.

As such, our findings highlight a need for reform in the delivery platform work sector to ensure that workers enjoy better working conditions, access to social protection and sustainable livelihoods. The recommendations below are informed by the fieldwork conducted with workers, the consultations held with field experts and dialogue with policymakers. Positive steps have already been taken toward much needed change, and examples from other countries show that such changes are possible.

6.1 Improve Data Collection

Data is key for policy making. The invisibility of workers in databases translates into their invisibility in relevant laws and policies. Until surveys like ELMPS and SYPE are updated to capture data on non-standard forms of employment like platform-mediated work, initiative needs to be taken to tap into innovative ways to generate data on these workers. This can happen through entities like the National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) or

¹⁴¹ Sarah Cook et al., “Platform work in developing economies: Can digitisation drive structural transformation?” Future of Work (ERS) SCIS Working Paper, December 2023, <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/items/f6853a0e-ca4d-48c4-a823-419711045f9e>

through platforms that 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. This collaboration would ensure that the data remains anonymous and the sharing of data is in accordance with the Egyptian data privacy law. In addition, data from the NTRA would encompass all platform companies. An alternative method could see a request made to platform companies to provide the number of workers registered and are active on their app. However, if some platforms do not participate, the aggregate data provided would only provide a partial picture rather than the delivery platform ecosystem as a whole.

6.2 Regulate Platform Work

This is an opportune moment to use the evidence that will be generated from the potential data captured to integrate “employment and social protection policy and programme approaches to maximize impact [and] create synergies”¹⁴² as recommended by the UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Green Transitions. While the new labor law (No. 14/2025) introduces mechanisms that govern new forms of work, more is needed to ensure that the protection of platform workers is extended. New dispute-settlement mechanisms need to be put in place, as well as appropriate capacity building for labor inspectors, bureaus and courts to ensure better adjudication in the platform economy. However, the issue of jurisdiction merits consideration in relation to multinational platforms.

Other important pieces of legislation need to be sensitive to platform-mediated ground and cloud-work. The social security law needs to extend and adapt social protection to platform work. The competition law also needs to mitigate unfair competition between global and local platforms.¹⁴³ It should not be a ride to the bottom in terms of pricing, but rather a race to the top in terms of better working conditions. This should entail strong commitment

¹⁴² “Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions High-level summary,” (n.d.) International Labour Organization, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/genericdocument/wcms_854428.pdf

¹⁴³ “World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021,” International Labor Organization, June 2, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/trends2021/WCMS_795453/lang--en/index.htm.

to the fundamental principles and rights of work as well as rigorous implementation of the UN Global Compact’s four labor-related principles which include: upholding the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labor, the effective abolition of child labor and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.¹⁴⁴ The review of the income tax law to a) increase exemption thresholds at the lower end and b) to apply a more progressive approach at the higher end provides an opportunity to also address platform-mediated work.

Last but not least, the long awaited executive regulations of the 2017 trade union law can also accommodate platform-mediated work. This would require lobbying parliamentarians to take up the issue. Also, better coherence and more coordination across government institutions is crucial given that platform work cuts across various jurisdictions. Perhaps the creation of a dedicated inter-ministerial body, taskforce, or initiative could be a viable option. Civil society involvement, and in particular labor rights groups and syndicates, is crucial as well. Issues around the availability, accessibility and affordability of Information Communication Technology need to be addressed at the policy and implementation level as a key enabler in platform-mediated work.

6.3 Facilitate Worker and Employers Representation

The creation of an entity to represent the rights and demands of workers in platform-mediated work is necessary to move the sector forward. Delivery platform workers must have the means to organize, lobby and represent their needs and concerns. There remains a question as to the form of representation that best fits this purpose — whether a trade union or a syndicate — as well as what are the means necessary to form such a representative body and the timeline for bringing it about.

A syndicate would require workers to provide an academic qualification pertaining to the work they are involved in and to only practice this specific profession. Research shows that the majority of

¹⁴⁴ “The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact,” United Nations Global Compact, <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>

platform workers resorted to platform work due to deteriorating economic conditions, without which they would have pursued other professions. As such, their work on platforms does not reflect their degrees and thus is not reflected in the occupation field on their IDs. A union, on the other hand, would just require that the worker works in the profession represented by the union. Although the union option is most applicable and feasible, the process and time for its formation is lengthy within the current policy landscape. While paving the way for long-term trade union aspirations, a possible short-term solution could be the formation of a community organization which would serve the purpose of providing basic health and social services, financial support and safety equipment.

It is also important that platforms gather to create an entity that represents them. Currently, platforms are not a consolidated sector under the Federation of Egyptian Industries or the Chambers of Commerce. Thus, it is often challenging for workers to negotiate with platforms. A representative entity is also necessary given that some workers, particularly in the ride-hailing sector, tend to work for multiple platforms simultaneously.

6.4 Foster and engage in Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue

With the establishment of an entity that represents platform workers and another that represents employers, it would be possible to stage much needed dialogue across stakeholders. Allowing representatives to engage with policy makers from the government creates more space for all stakeholders to reach consensus on policies and regulations that uphold decent work and ensure social justice. This would be a win-win scenario for all.

VII. WAY FORWARD

Building on two previous studies on fair work in the gig economy in Egypt¹⁴⁵, this research brings forth the challenges and needs specific to delivery platform workers in Egypt. Throughout the research process, as detailed above, initiative has been taken to improve the working conditions of delivery

platform workers across the country through collaboration with labor market survey conductors, private sector leaders, government personnel and civil society representatives. Steps forward have been taken, but more change is still possible.

The Access to Knowledge for Development Center will continue collaborating with all stakeholders—policy makers, civil society, businesses and academia, while listening to the workers, to ensure that delivery platform workers are provided with the protection they need. Emphasis will be placed on the revival and expansion of the safety initiatives, with the goal of enticing more change and ensuring the inclusion of delivery platform workers into the planned contributory social protection schemes. We will continue to engage with stakeholders to enhance the visibility of platform workers in national statistics and other worker data landscapes. We will also work closely with civil society organizations to raise public awareness on issues pertaining to platform workers to ensure longevity of the project's impact, so that platform workers, on the long run, remain protected.

We will engage with our regional partners in the Middle East and North Africa, as they are collaborating with us on similar research in their respective countries.

Previous, current and future research on new forms of work in Egypt (and the rest of the MENA Region) will be furthered and disseminated via the Access to Knowledge for Development Center's flagship platform: The MENA Observatory on Responsible AI.¹⁴⁶ The Observatory has a permanent window for publishing research of our "Platform Work MENA (PW-MENA)" Network on new forms of work and inclusion in the region.

¹⁴⁵ Fairwork (2021) Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2021: Labour Standards in the Gig Economy. Cairo, Egypt; Oxford, United Kingdom; Fairwork (2023) Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2022/23: Platform workers amidst Egypt's Economic Crisis. Oxford, United Kingdom; Berlin, Germany

¹⁴⁶ <https://menaobservatory.ai/en/home>

APPENDIX 1

EMERGING FORMS OF WORK IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY	
On-demand work through digital platforms ¹⁴⁷	<p>“On-demand work relies on a continuous employment relationship with an employer but without the employee having a continuous job, pre-defined working hours or volume of remuneration; the employer calls on the worker only when needed.”</p>
Crowd work ¹⁴⁸	<p>“Crowd working (or the crowd sourcing of work) refers to work carried out through online platforms which allow organizations or individuals access to an undefined and unknown group of other organizations or individuals prepared to solve specific problems or supply specific services or products in exchange for payment.”¹⁴⁹</p> <p>“‘Crowdwork’ entails the development of online or remote tasks through the online digital platform. ‘Crowdwork’ is also diverse in terms of: the content of the tasks (micro-tasks vs larger projects) and the qualifications required; the selection and hiring process; and the form of matching work demand and supply through the platforms.”¹⁵⁰</p>
Prosumer work ¹⁵¹	<p>“The business model of digital platforms has introduced the concept of ‘prosumers’ or, in other words, individuals who both produce and consume digitized information. They are rarely paid, but prosumers carry out work by supplying data and services for which salaried employees were previously at least partly responsible, such as amateur reviews of services or products, the rating of services, supplying user-generated content and data entry.”</p>

¹⁴⁷ Gérard Valenduc, “New Forms of Work and Employment in the Digital Economy,” in *The Deconstruction of Employment as a Political Question*, ed. Amparo Serrano-Pascual, Maria Jepsen (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham., 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93617-8_3

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Green, A., M. de Hoyos, S.-A. Barnes, B. Baldauf, and H. Behle. (2013). CrowdEmploy: Crowdsourcing Case Studies. An Empirical Investigation into the Impact of Crowdsourcing on Employability. European Commission Joint Research Centre. Institute for Prospective Technological Studies. JRC Technical Reports EUR 26351. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

ICT-based mobile work and digital nomadism	<p>“Digital nomads are characterized by two specific work practices. First, they make extensive use of computers, smartphones, cloud services, the Internet and email in the course of their professional activity. Second, their working time is not spent solely on the premises of the employer (and neither is it spent on their own premises if they are self-employed) as they work mainly from other locations such as their home, client premises, external sites, modes of transport, hotels, co-working spaces or any other.”¹⁵²</p>
Platform-mediated cloud/ground work	<p>“Here it is useful to distinguish between “cloud workers,” who provide labour online and so can work from anywhere in the world, as long as they have access to a computer and an internet connection, and “ground workers,” who perform physical tasks in a local area.”¹⁵³</p> <p>“Platform-mediated ground work (PMGW) involves the provision of local services such as transportation and food delivery to consumers.”¹⁵⁴</p> <p>“Platform-mediated cloud work (PMCW): involves the provision of online services to business clients.”¹⁵⁵</p> <p>“Work on-demand via app’ (also known as ‘on-location platform work’) is work provided by a labour platform or ‘app’ that is executed locally and primarily offline. It covers different activities carried out either in public spaces (transport, food-delivery) or private spaces (cleaning, clerical services) and with different levels of specialization and qualification.”¹⁵⁶</p>

¹⁵² Eurofound (2015). (Mandi Irene et al)] New Forms of Employment. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU.

¹⁵³ 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>

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Pablo Sanz de Miguel et al., (2021) “The definition of worker in the platform economy: Exploring workers’ risks and regulatory solutions,” European Economic and Social Committee, https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-05-21-286-en-n_0.pdf

APPENDIX 2

ILO NON STANDARD FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT ¹⁵⁷	
Temporary employment	Fixed-term contracts, , including project- or task-based contracts; seasonal work; casual work, including daily work. (Not open ended)
Part-time and on-call work	Normal working hours fewer than full-time equivalents; marginal part-time employment; on-call work, including zero-hours contracts. (not full time).
Multi-party employment relationship	Also known as “dispatch,” “brokerage” and “labour hire.” Temporary agency work; subcontracted labour. (Not direct, subordinate relationship with end user).
Disguised employment/dependent self-employment	Disguised employment, dependent self-employment, sham or misclassified self-employment. (Not part of employment relationship).

¹⁵⁷ *Non-standard employment around the world: Understanding challenges, shaping prospects*, (Geneva: International Labor Organization, 2016), https://www.ilo.org/wcms5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_534326.pdf



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