

Implications of the Rise of Platform Economy on The Gendered Labour Parity in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the usage of Platform economy as a mode of inclusion of more women into the workforce of India. The paper aims to explore the strategic position of platform economy in a highly evolving world, taking into account both post pandemic trends as well as the historical social and economic situation of the region. It accounts for the possible road blocks, policy and social issues in implementation of a platform setup, whilst seriously considering it as a means of women empowerment and inclusion. The case study on Platform economy and women of India by NITI Ayog is also delved into to gauge the existing relationship between working women and platform economy.

Introduction

Integration of the current female population into the work force could lead to a 27 percent increase in Indian GDP (Gross domestic product), hence finding a method to ensure participation has become quintessential for sustained economic growth. This paper discusses the use of Platform Economy as a possible mean to achieve so, taking into account the merits, demerits and recommending a changed and better adapted policy framework.

Method

This paper is based on the secondary research of papers, books, and newspaper/magazine articles on the topic. Research conducted by NITI Ayog on this topic has also been further delved into.

Platform Economy

The platform economy is a subpart of a broader term called ‘Gig Economy’ (meaning ‘work on demand’). The platform economy is a medium of facilitation of economic and social activity through online spaces and tools. The digital platforms act as intermediaries between service providers and consumers. According to Deloitte ‘The role of the platform business is to provide a governance structure and a set of standards and protocols that facilitate interactions at scale so that network effects can be unleashed’. The interactions can be short-term or long-term collaboration.

There are mainly three types of platforms within the platform economy

- Transaction platform (digital matchmakers)- serves as a virtual marketplace, where people can carry out monetary transactions in return for services. Example- Amazon
- Innovation platform- is a tool for building and fostering ideas. It promotes collaboration by connecting individuals. Example- Oracle
- Integration platform- a combination of innovation and transaction platforms. For a business to work it needs to consolidate various functions. Example- App store

Two examples of platform economy in India are Uber and Amazon. Uber is a ride-hailing platform which connects drivers with riders; Amazon is an online shopping and delivery platform that connects sellers to buyers.

The Rise of Platform Economy

In platform economies, there exists a triangular relationship between the consumer, the platform and the workers. The consumers are supposed to provide the demand and the workers the supply, while the platform acts as a means of this connection. This method of generating economic gains is still relatively new but has seen an exponential rise in the past few years. In 2016 there were about 8.5 million service providers, 11.7 million in 2017, and the number stood at 15 million in 2018. Research by McKinsey Global Institute found in a 2018 survey that companies with any kind of platform can boost their growth earnings significantly when compared to companies with no platform presence. An increasing number of companies have started creating online alternatives for providing their services to remain competitive in this fast-changing market. McKinsey predicts digital platforms will be mediating more than 30% or around \$60 trillion dollars in global economic activity in the coming six years.

The pandemic was a significant contributor to this fast pace growth. This was majorly due to the record-high unemployment rates seen during the pandemic and lifestyle changes (work from

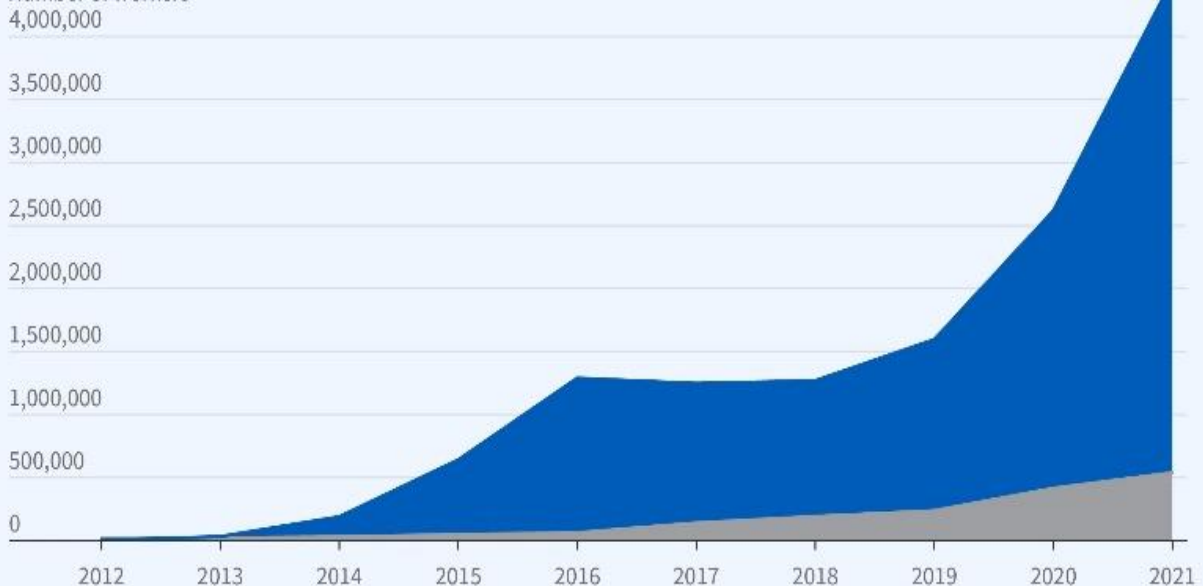
home, online shopping) brought on by social distancing. Successive lockdowns saw a period of slowdown in human activity, a phenomenon termed Anthro-pause. To survive, businesses had to come up with new and creative ways of utilising digital technologies to remain engaged with their consumer base. These ways came in the form of digital marketing, online customer relationship management, and digital payment and delivery. The Wall Street Journal reported that Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tiktok saw a rise in monthly visits from 2019 to 2021 by 3%, 36%, 43% and 576% respectively. The pandemic brought 24% rise in aggregate profits for big-platform firms: Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google. These statistics showcase how the Coronavirus Pandemic was crucial in the increase in the pace of phasing into a digital economy. Post pandemic, they changes still remain: Worldwide revenue in the Platform as a Service market is projected to reach US\$171.80bn in 2024. In India the growth in revenue would amount to US\$1.45bn in 2024.

Growth in Gig Workers with Platform Payments Reported on a 1099 Return, 2012–2021

Restricted to workers earning at least \$600 in gross receipts.

— Transportation and delivery — All other platforms

Number of workers



Source: Researchers' calculations using data from the IRS

Women’s Share in the Labour Market

India

Table 3: Breakdowns for Rural Females

	2017-18	2021-22
Female in Labour Force (%)	24.6	36.6
<i>as Self-Employed</i>	13.6	24.2
<i>as Regular wage/ Salaried employees</i>	2.5	2.9
<i>as Casual Labour</i>	7.5	8.7
Unemployed	0.9	0.8
Female outside the Labour Force (%)	75.4	63.4
<i>Attended domestic duties only</i>	40.8	28.3
<i>Attended to domestic duties also engaged in free collection of goods, sewing, tailoring, weaving, etc. for household use</i>	17.0	17.4
<i>Attended educational institutions</i>	10.3	10.9
<i>Rentiers, Pensioners, Remittance Recipients, etc</i>	4.4	4.6
<i>Not able to work owing to disability</i>	1.1	1.0
<i>Others (including beggars, prostitutes, etc.)</i>	1.8	1.3

Source: PLFS Report, MoSPI

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of India (most recent survey taken in 2021 and published in 2023) reports that 32.8% female of working age (15 years and above) were in labour force in 2021-22 compared to just 23.3% in 2017-18. The major push has come from the rural sector rather than the urban sector, where it increased by 12.0 and 3.4 percentage points, respectively. In rural areas, female LFPR has increased to 36.6% during 2021-22 as compared to 24.6% in 2017-18, an increase of 12.0% points. Female participation in urban areas was significantly lower than the rural areas. Female LFPR was 23.8% in 2021-22 as compared to 20.4% in 2017-18 in urban areas, showed an increase of just 3.4% points. Although these statistics show an increasing trend in the contribution of women to the labour force, India still remains in the bottom as compared to the world.

In India , according to the PLFS report , to majority of the women working in rural areas are either casual labourers or self employed while in urban area women are more likely to be involved in regular

World

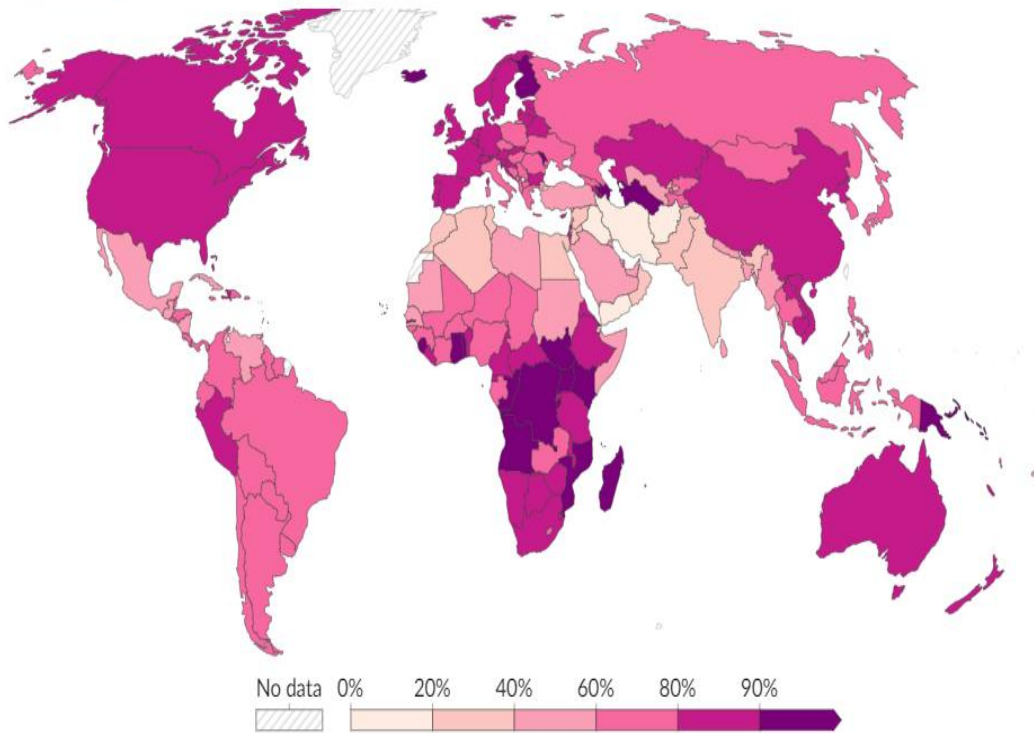
Ratio of female to male labor force participation rates, 2022



This ratio is calculated by dividing the labor force participation rate among women, by the corresponding rate for men. The labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population aged 15 years and older that is economically active.

Table Map Chart

World



1991 2022

Data source: Multiple sources compiled by World Bank (2024) – [Learn more about this data](#)

OurWorldInData.org/female-labor-supply | CC BY

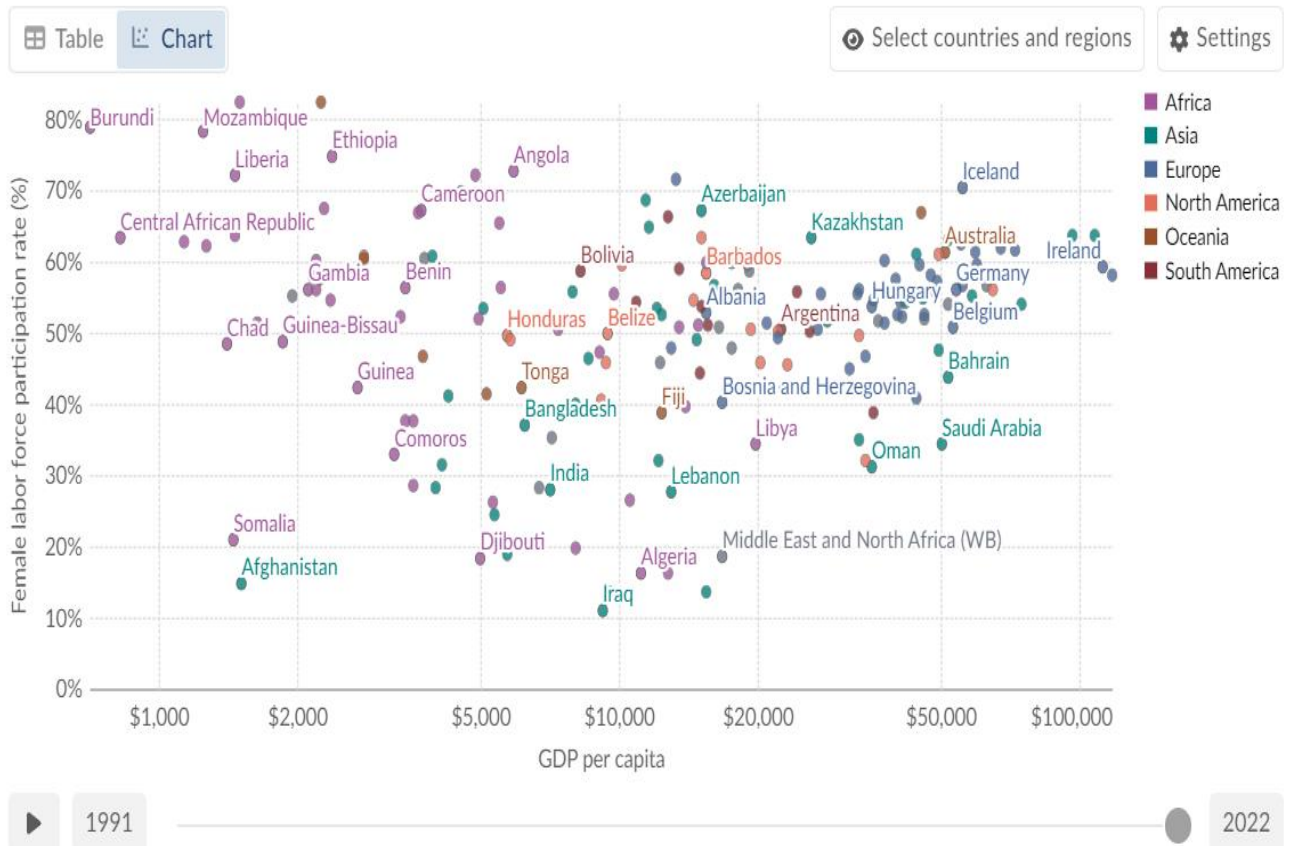
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The above figure by OurWorldInData also shows that Female labour force participation is highest in the poorest and richest countries. The relationship between female labour force participation and GDP per capita follows a U-shaped graph. This can be better seen in the scatter plot below, which shows that in Europe there is a positive correlation (the richer the country, the more the involvement of women in the workforce) whereas in African countries there is a negative correlation (the poorer the country, the more the involvement of women)

Female labor force participation rates by national per capita income, 2022



The labor force participation rate corresponds to the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active. National income levels correspond to GDP per capita in constant international dollars. This means figures are adjusted for inflation and cross-country price differences.

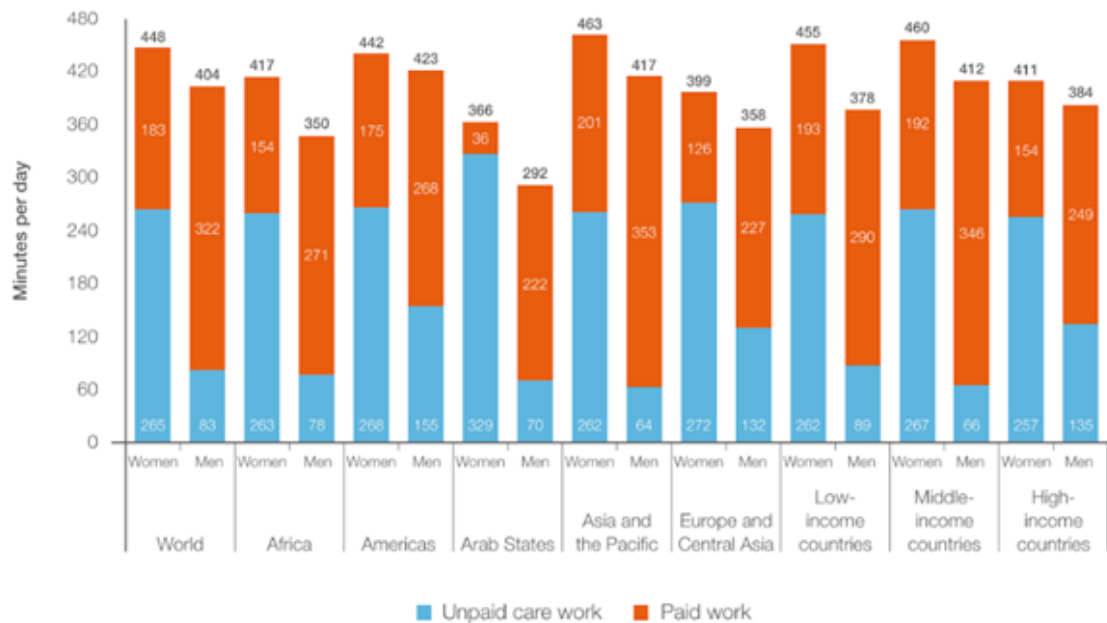


Data source: Data compiled from multiple sources by World Bank - [Learn more about this data](#)
 OurWorldInData.org/female-labor-force-participation-key-facts | CC BY

Unpaid Labour

It is the labour and work performed by a person for which they receive no direct remuneration, examples would be childcare, subsistence farming and household activities. The division between unpaid labour based on gender is heavily skewed towards women. This is mainly because of the patriarchal notions of society and sexual division of labour. As per an United Nations report 75% of unpaid labour is performed by women. SBI reports that women’s unpaid work plays an important role in the economy. being responsible for 7.5% of GDP.

Time spent on paid, unpaid and total work by region, latest year



ILO calculations, based on study by Charmes, 2018

On an average women in India spend 352 minutes a day on unpaid work while men spend only 51.8 minutes a day.

Factors Influencing Women’s Share in the Labour Market in India

1. **Sexual division of labour/ Patriarchal notions of society/Social and cultural stigma** - Women bear the brunt of household duties in India. They are not given the same opportunities and even pay as their male counterparts. The gender pay gap is a big issue. The global Gender Gap (GGG) Index for 2022 estimates that men earn 82 % of labour income whereas women earn only 18%. A study by the CFA Institute, 2023 released showed that women holding key management positions makes just half the money of their male counterpart, the median remuneration ratio of women to men was found to be 0.52 for key managerial personnel (KMP) and 0.64 for directors.

Women are often seen as secondary earners and hence passed up for promotions in favour of their male colleagues. Many firms discriminate against female candidates as they assume that there is a high chance they wouldn’t take their work seriously due to familial obligations (child rearing and birth). Many women are forced to leave their careers to

focus on household activities. Even when women work, the household responsibilities remain on their shoulders, a phenomenon coined as the double burden of work.

2. **High Illiteracy rates for women** - Literacy rate according to the World Health Organisation is defined as “The proportion of the adult population aged 15 years and over which is literate, expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population, total or for a given sex, in a given country, territory, or geographic area, at a specific point in time, usually mid-year. For statistical purposes, a person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his/her everyday life.” All India literacy rate in 2023 for men was 84.7% and for women 70.3%, with the lowest literacy rate being in Rajasthan with only 57.6% for women as compared to 80% for men. This literacy parity arises between men and women for many reasons in India such as...

- Infrastructural issues and safety- for example, the unavailability of separate, functioning washrooms discourages female students from attending school.
- Gender-based stereotypes- household work is often seen as a girl's/woman's responsibility, hence their education is placed secondary. Due to financial problems, some households prioritise providing their male offspring with educational opportunities.
- Child marriage- Child marriage is a crime in India, Under India's Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006. However, according to a UNICEF report in 2015-2016, an estimated 1.5 million girls under the age of 18 get married in India every year.

women's inaccessibility to educational opportunities, especially higher educational opportunities, force them away from the labour market. They are often forced to join the informal sector, where they don't reap the health and protection benefits of the formal sector.

3. **Violence against women at home and workplaces**-National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) annual report reported that nearly 4,45,256 cases of crime against women were registered in 2022 alone, equivalent to nearly 51 FIRs every hour. The majority of crimes against women under the Indian Penal Code were of cruelty by husband or his relatives (31.4 per cent) followed by kidnapping and abduction of women (19.2 per cent), assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (18.7 per cent), and rape (7.1 per cent). In a country where a woman remains unsafe in her own, outside is no more safer. In India, the prevalence of Work Sexual Harassment is around 33–53%, and it is prevalent across all sectors and in all designations in women.

Women and Platform Economy

Digital labour has gained popularity in recent years because of the flexibility it provides and the growing demand of having a part-time or additional income sources, but it does come with some drawbacks.

Opportunities

- The phenomenon of ‘Hour Gap’, a term coined by Claudia Goldin (Noble Prize-winning economist), explains that women are more likely to work in jobs with flexible hours.

Platform work comes along as an attractive opportunity for women to get paid for flexible labour, from where they can manage household obligations whilst simultaneously working towards bettering their financial standing.

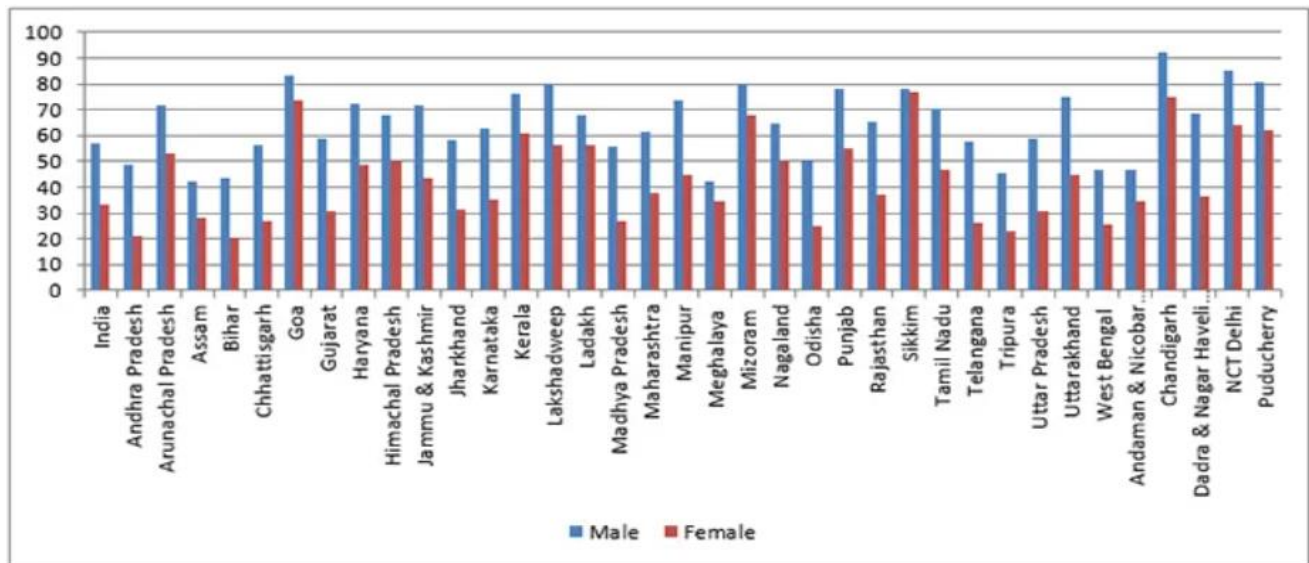
- Women can market their products through social marketing, can perform tasks of freelancing and microtasking.
- Female-dominated sectors of housekeeping and beauty can provide job opportunities to many. As per the 73rd round of NSSO, 20% of MSMEs are owned by women, whom face barriers due to lack of access to market and capital. A solution to this problem can lie in the digitalisation of markets, allowing them to set up infrastructural facilities in locations away from and cheaper than the locations near the target markets.
- According to the study ‘Financial Services for Platform Workers: The Current State and Work Ahead’, quote “some aspects of platforms have allowed women to circumvent social and normative barriers to work, either through the anonymity they provide or by the halo of legitimacy conferred by an app and branded uniforms/supplies.” unquote.
- It can also pave the way for business models specifically targeted towards women, such as all women ride hailing platforms, or all women delivery platforms.
- A vast majority of the informal sector is composed women. Platform work can serve as way to formalise the ever-growing informal sector of India.

Challenges

1. **Double burden of work**- Working women as are often met with the expectation of remaining in charge of domestic duties while supplementing their family income. Putting unnecessary burden on them while further increasing their time poverty.

2. **Digital divide-** ITU’s World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database found that only 43 percent of the population in India uses the internet. While IAMAI-Kantar Report ICUBE 2020 shows that the division between male and female was 58 percent and 42 percent internet users respectively (due to the pandemic the figures might have seen a slight increase).

(%) individuals who have ever used the internet- State-wise gender divide



Source: Exploring India’s Digital Divide, Author : Basu Chandola

Chandigarh has the highest proportion of male individuals who ever used the internet while Sikkim has the highest proportion of female individuals who have used the internet.

Sikkim also has almost equal proportion of internet access for both men and women.

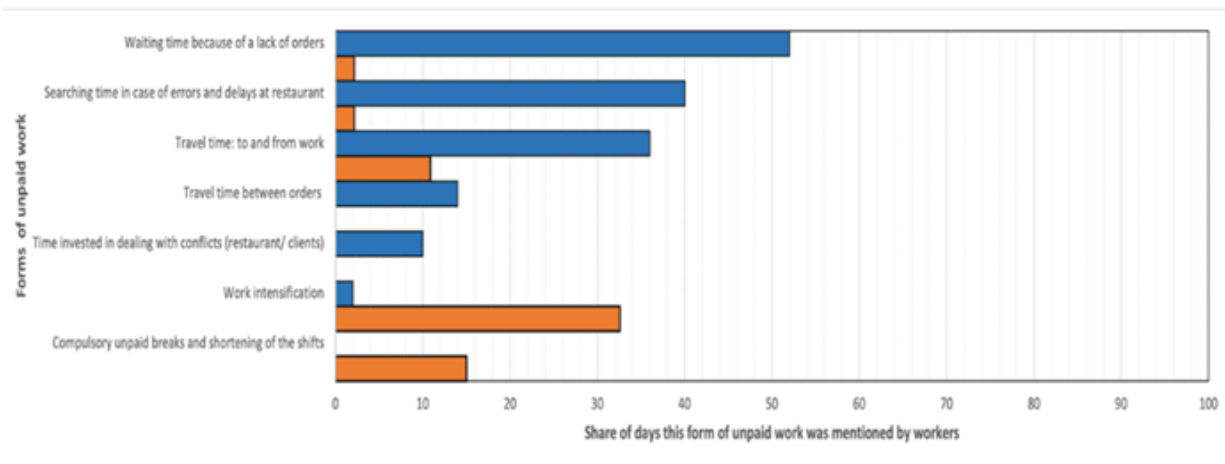
Internet access is quintessential for a platform economy to function. There are many other reasons for the digital divide in India, geographical differences and financial constraints also factor in.

3. **Occupational segregation-** The development of the platform economy is seeing the rise in concentration of women in particular sectors (ie. beauty, wellness and domestic). This is not encouraging; the saturation of a particular gender in an industry leads to a loss in diversity and additional outlier skill-building. This is detrimental to the society as a whole, since a scenario of the dominance of one gender in various industries already exists. In microeconomics, women and men are seen as perfect substitutes, but an IMF study which takes in account from macroeconomic, sectoral, and firm-level data—shows

that women and men complement each other in the production process, hence the elasticity of substitution between men and women in production is low.

4. **Wages/absence of Unions** (Include wage determination)- Due to absence of any strong legislation, irregular pay, health and safety responsibility and working hours have become matter of great concern. Another of type of unpaid labour can emerge, this includes the time spent waiting for a gig, or customer, time spent on travelling to job location; the intensification of labour (reducing the time allowed to be spent on each task, overburdening the workers), and platform fees paid by the worker. Work is assigned to the workers of the platform using algorithm-based optimisation, meaning a software that creates job opportunities taking in account the user rating, efficiency and etc. This creates a power unbalance, workers our sometimes expected to go an extra mile in the fear of getting banned from the platform or getting low client ratings.

Figure 1: prevalence of unpaid labour on on-location labour platforms, Deliveroo and Takeaway (share of person-days, by form of unpaid labour)



Source: authors' elaboration based on working-time diaries of platform workers; N=100 working days

Blue- Diliveroo and Orange- Takeaway

5. **No regulations, the need for formalisation**- 82 per cent (about 151 million) of the total working women in India are concentrated in the informal sector. Platform economy can help reduce the number of women directly involved in the informal sector if its formalisation is ensured. Without the necessary policy changes recommended (discussed in the next subpoint), platform work can too become a part of the informal sector. The informal sector is often linked with low productivity, reduced tax revenues, poor

governance, excessive regulations, exploitation, poverty and income inequality. Acts like POSH Act 2013, an act to provide women protection against sexual harassment in workplace remain abysmal due to the absence of funds from the centre.

6. **Safety-** Predators can take advantage of home-to-home services, which require workers to visit unknown places. This event can possibly lead to social expulsion, victim blaming, and mental instability, proving detrimental for women.

Case Study Analysis

The case study focused on ‘delineating the facilitators and barriers for women's participation in platform economy’

Data was taken from online surveys and in-person interviews of 626 female Indian platform workers and aspirational women (women who would be interested in working).

The two primary targets were the women already involved in platform activities and women who were interested in entering the workforce through the means of platform work.

The main findings were most women ...

1. Prefer platform work after their marriage and education.
2. Choose Platform work to support their dependents.
3. Report having higher income through Platform work compared to traditional job opportunities or methods available to them

Women outside Platform work were most likely to join Platform work because of flexibility in work, the opportunity to be an entrepreneur, the ability to monetise assets including skills, and assured income.

From the case study above, it can be understood that a substantial amount of women in India are aware of opportunities in the platform work industry, and are keen to be a part of it. For women it serves as a chance to remain available in both labour and familial spheres of life, with flexibility being the most attractive benefit. Many do consider it to be a better source of income than probably their established or their would be established job networks. In families where women are bread winners, this acts as an additional source of income to support their dependents.

This showcases that Indian women are open to these new job opportunities.

As stated in the same Niti Ayog report ‘Platforms businesses can play a significant role towards value creation in terms of skilling, digital literacy, financial literacy and inculcating entrepreneurial spirit.’

Attached below is the Case Study conducted by NITI Ayog.

5.4.1. Case Study: Impact of platforms on women's economic empowerment

Source: Adapted from Raman, Ramachandran & Sindhu, 2021

This case study presents evidence from a mixed methods study conducted in 2020-21. The study focused on delineating the facilitators and barriers for women's participation in the platform economy.

Primary data was collected through both online surveys and in-person interviews for two distinct sets of respondents: Individual Platform Workers and, and Aspirational Women. 84 platform workers affiliated to platforms offering professional home services, hyperlocal deliveries, and passenger mobility were interviewed from October 2020 to February 2021. A survey of 624 women participants – termed “Aspirational Women” outside the platform economy was conducted in late 2020 across Bengaluru, Mysuru, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, and Delhi. Further, a series of telephonic and virtual interviews were conducted with select individuals representing organisations relevant to the Indian platform economy in both the private and public spheres. Experts from over 40 organisations belonging to governmental, civil society, and private sector organisations across the domains of public policy, skill development, entrepreneurship, finance, etc. were interviewed. Government stakeholders at the Government of India, and Governments of Delhi, Rajasthan, and Karnataka provided invaluable insights. Platform businesses engaging women workers too were systematically studied and engaged with.

a. Women are more likely to take up platform jobs after their education and marriage.

80% of the respondents are in the age group 26-45 years, followed by 18-24 years (18%) and 46-65 years (2%). Of the women surveyed, 72% are married.

19% are unmarried while 5% of them are divorced and 4% widowed. A majority of the respondents reported having completed high school and higher secondary (61%), with a sizeable number holding diploma or undergraduate degree (25%).



Chart 10: Distribution of women platform workers by age



Chart 11: Distribution of women platform workers by marital status

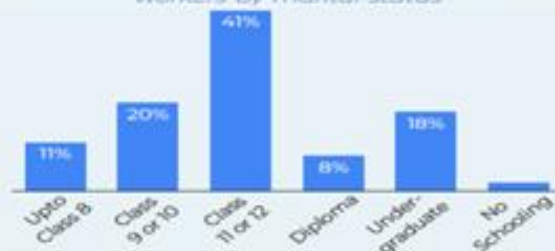


Chart 12: Distribution of women platform workers by educational qualifications

The findings suggest a trend where women are more likely to take up platform jobs after their education and marriage. This is a positive finding, contrary to the macro-economic trend where married Indian women withdraw from the labour force on account of caregiving responsibilities and for enabling family's upward social mobility.

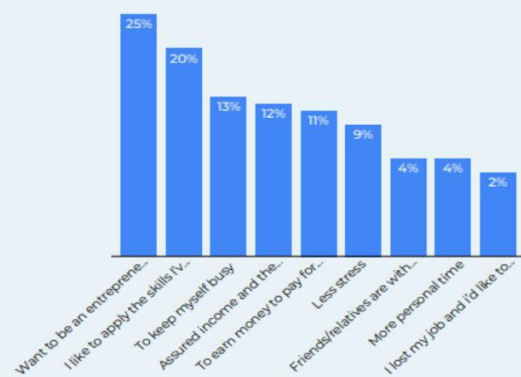


Chart 13: Primary reasons for choosing platform work

Chart 13: Primary reasons for choosing platform work

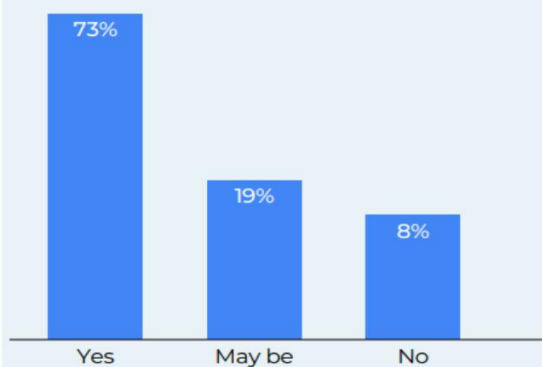


Chart 14: Preference for platform work over other jobs

b. **Women opt for platform work out of the need to participate in economic activities to support dependents.**

In the study, over 90% of the respondents reported supporting two or more dependents. Over 80% had dependents younger than 18 years of age.

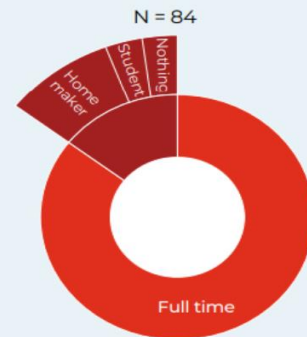


Chart 15: Women choosing platform work as a full-time opportunity

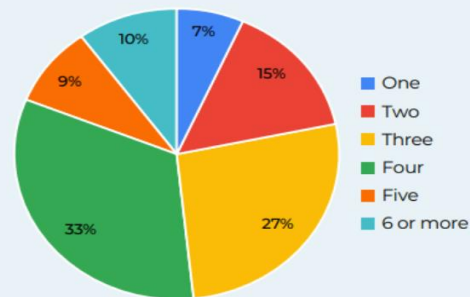


Chart 16: Distribution of respondents by number of dependents

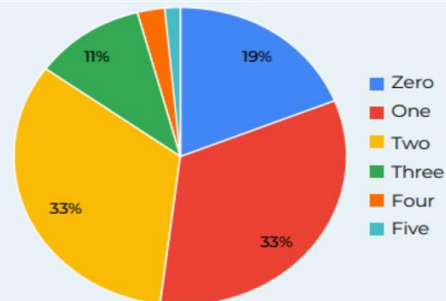


Chart 17: Distribution of respondents by number of dependents under 18 years of age

c. **Platform labour forms a primary source of income for the majority of the women interviewed.**

Preference for platform work can also be seen as it was the primary source of income for 75% of the total respondents.

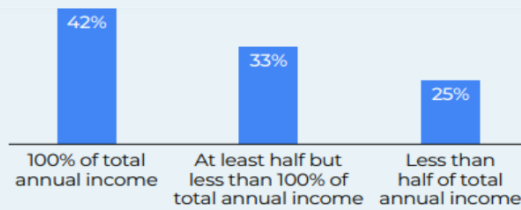


Chart 18: Platform as primary source of income

Overall, platform work finds a strong preference among women, providing them opportunities that are otherwise absent in conventional jobs.

d. **Platforms offer high earning opportunities for women.**

About 38% of the respondents work between 5 and 25 hours a week and 29% of them spend more than 40 hours in platform work. The flexibility of work timings results in a unique advantage for workers to choose how many hours to put in a typical workday. Whereas a traditional beautician/ driver is expected to spend at least 40 hours on-job, a majority of these platform workers spend less than half that time, while earning much more.

The monthly income of 39% of the respondents falls in the range of INR 10,000 to 25,000. Of these, 48% of women cite this as their only source of income. About 34% respondents report a monthly income of between INR 25,000 to 40,000 while another 20% of them earn around INR 40,000 to 75,000 per month.

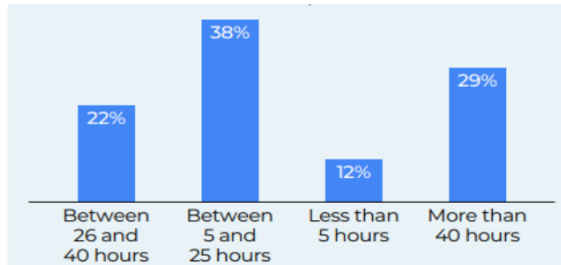


Chart 19: Hours spent in platform work (per week)

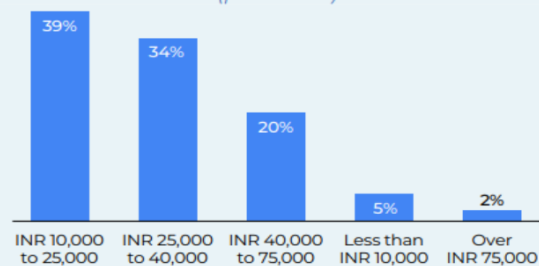


Chart 20: Monthly Income from Platform work

e. **Women platform workers are more likely to continue in this workforce due to the flexibility offered**

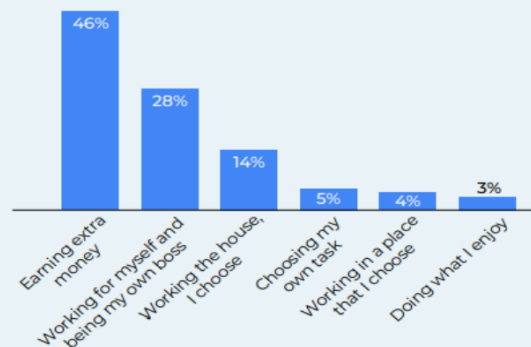


Chart 21: Motivation to continue in the platform economy

Women participants in platform businesses are more likely to continue in this workforce due to the flexibility offered, which allows them to manage their unpaid care work at home and paid work in their occupation.

This is reinforced by analysis of the reason for willingness to join platforms as reported by women outside the platform economy. Upon being informed of platform jobs, 624 women outside the platform economy were asked if they would be willing to participate in the platform economy and the reasons for the same. Flexibility, ability to be an entrepreneur, ability to monetise assets including skills, assured income, etc. were the top reasons cited by women outside the platform economy.

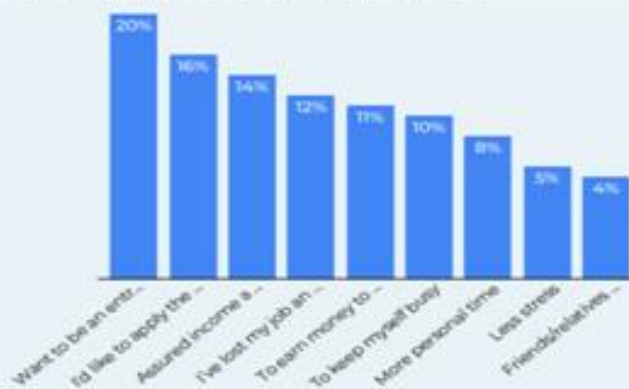


Chart 22: Reasons of non-platform women for willingness to participate in the platform economy

Indeed, platforms are helping reframe the role of women in private and public life. Labour force participation is no longer a binary decision between household duties and economic aspirations, but women now have the choice to work at will.

Possible Steps to Truly Utilise Benefits Offered by Platforms

In order to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the platform economy and the gig economy in general, the unique socio-economic landscape of India should be taken into account. India's policies would need to account for gig work/platform work becoming a source of full-time employment for people rather than supplementary employment, a trend seen in other countries.

A new worker plan for platform economy should touch on topics of social security, worker classification, benefits, job security, and fair wages. As per the Niti Ayog Report on Platform and Gig economy 2022 “e-commerce platforms and online aggregators of goods and services are registered first under the Companies Act, 2013, and are regulated as technology companies under the Information Technology Act, 2000”. Still there isn't much clarity on whether platform economy worker comes under the self-employed, employed or casual labour category. This categorisation is important to ensure the safety of the workers whilst promoting the growth of innovation in Gig economy.

At the same time, steps need to be taken to ensure that gig or platform work doesn't become part of the informal sector. Most opportunities offered through these means require fewer skills and hence methods for workers to upskill should also be looked upon and implemented under the Skill India Act 2015.

Financial assistance should provide to gig/platform startups and there should be a frame work in place to ensure transparency in the sharing of data. Schemes like Prime Minister Street Vendor AtmaNirbhar Nidhi Yojana (PM SVANidhi Scheme), a step to connect street vendors and consumers through online platforms, can be an example. The introduction of schemes for companies to hire more women and provide them with reskilling opportunities can be useful.

Unionization of platform workers- to ensure reasonable standard of working conditions and addressal of issues of importance ,a member body is necessary to hold the corporations accountable. Integration of unions such as self-help groups, which have proved themselves to be and crucial in the social and financial empowerment of women in states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra , with the platform framework could prove beneficial.

Conclusion

Platform economy-based work can provide women with various opportunities whilst providing them with their desired work flexibility, yet this wouldn't be possible without helpful government policies and schemes. The government would need to play a key role in shaping a digital economy which is both conducive to and empowering for women. The real aim should remain far from just keeping women inside their homes while they contribute to the economy, rather it should be centred around giving them a choice. They shouldn't have to choose between having a career and a family, it should instead come as an opportunity to gain financial independence and better support themselves and their dependents. For this to happen, major changes need to be brought into the social outlook of our country. More steps need to be taken to bridge the gendered digital divide, pay gap, and unequal access to education. To create a safe work environment for women, it is imperative to take in account the additional responsibilities

put on them, an example being childcare. A greater participation of women in the economy can lead to a 28 trillion dollar increase in India's global GDP. Platform work is an important opening towards bridging the gendered labour parity existing within the Indian economy, its effectiveness

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