
Migrant Workers in the Digital Labour Platform: Examining and Analysing Precarity in Indian Labour Market

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Abstract

Over 70 percent of people working as on-demand platform workers are migrants (ILO, 2024). With the advent of technology, the world of work and structure is changing rapidly, and witnessed a drastic shift from a high-wage-high productive work to a low-wage-low-productive at on-demand based task over the last two decades (De Groen et. al 2017). This is possible because the digital platform reduces transaction costs of entry. However, lack of institutional framework to hold accountable and transparent on Digital Labour Platforms result in dirt and inhuman conditions (Gandini, 2019). The paper aims to map and understand the precarious condition of migrant workers in an on-demand digital labour platform. Using the broader theoretical approach, as underpinned in the critical labour studies, namely the labour process theory and social reproduction of labour, this study examines the determinants of contributing to the indecent working conditions. To map the contours of precarious working situation, our study uses the Injustices Ecosystems Framework proposed by Riordan et. al (2022) from the lens of labour process theory and social reproduction. We employ convergent mixed-method to present both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Data was collected from 203 respondents using closed and semi-structure survey; and in-depth enquiries in the city of Guwahati, India. It was collected using random sampling (Natural Setting)- KFC and Restaurants where food delivery workers wait for task; and Railway station, Airport where ride hailing workers either take rest or waits for trips. We mapped socio-demographic profile of respondents using variables like age, education, religion, social category, migration status, working experience, nature of job, dependent, and motivation for migration. The study observes a rise in the unique nature of labour demand for digital labour platforms within an underdeveloped Northeastern State of Assam, that specifically uses circular migrant workers which has low collective bargaining, lack of legal protection and higher cultural immersion with the local labour market. This peculiarity allows the rising on-demand platform workers within the state to adapt and adjust to the social constraints and to be subservient to the labour processes which are capital intensive in the labour-capital relations and hence contribute to precarious situation. Though institutional barriers, lack of job opportunities, regulations, and other factors compel migrants to take up platform work in urban centres, but it is the logic of employability and lack of alternative job opportunities that triggers higher tolerance and internalisation of platforms' exploitative practices.

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