IIGF 2025 SESSION

BUILDING A FAIR, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE PLATFORM ECONOMY

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Background

The Indian Governance & Policy Project *(IGAP)*, in partnership with The Dialogue and Chase Advisors, hosted a panel discussion titled **"Building a Fair, Accountable and Inclusive Platform Economy: Social Protection, Governance, and the Future of Digital Work"** as part of India Internet Governance Forum *(IIGF)* 2025 on 27 November at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. The conversation examined how gig-work in the platforms economy is reshaping labour markets, the regulatory response through recent labour codes, and what challenges remain in ensuring transparency, worker protections, and equitable access to opportunities within the sector.

The session opened with an overview from **Dedipyaman Shukla** (Associate Director, IGAP) of India's rapidly expanding gig workforce. It was noted that platform work is typically characterised by short-term contracts, flexible hours, and assignments that may not be tied to any physical location. Platforms help reduce information asymmetries between buyers and sellers, enabled by digital technologies that are increasingly central to India's growth story. As an emerging market, India now has one of the world's largest platform worker populations, with estimates suggesting up to **24 million gig workers by the end of this decade**, representing around **7 percent of the non-agricultural workforce.** Government efforts to modernise labour have resulted in the notification of new labour codes, including explicit recognition of gig and platform work.

Moderated by **Anirban Deb**, Account Director at Chase Advisors, the discussion brought together experts from policy, research, industry, and labour studies:

- Dr. Soan Ray, Visiting Fellow, ICRIER, reflected on economic implications of the new social security framework, including contributions, income, and labour market outcomes.

- Dr. Dhanya MB, Fellow and Faculty, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, shared findings from field studies on gig work, including gender aspects, barriers, and the need for national-level data.

- Kazim Rizvi, Founding Director, The Dialogue, examined governance, awareness, safety, and the role of intermediaries and the regulator in supporting gig workers.

- Meenu Maria Joseph, Deputy General Manager, Public Policy & Government Affairs, Porter, shared perspectives on compliance, turnover, state variations, grievance mechanisms, and digital literacy in the platform economy.

Issues Discussed

Deliberations among the panellists highlighted a complex domestic landscape, where platform work offers opportunity, flexibility, and income, yet presents new challenges for regulation, implementation, and equitable access. The discussion centred on how to align innovation, worker protection, and accountability within India's regulatory ecosystem for the platform economy.

1. Implementing Social Security Under the New Labour Codes

Speakers noted that the notification of the labour codes, especially the Code on Social Security, 2020 *(CoSS)*, marked a watershed moment for the protection of workers. However, major challenges remain in bringing the benefits to gig workers on the ground. These includes raising awareness, education on entitlements, and coordinating efforts between platforms and governments. This implementation requires clear mechanisms for outreach, grievance redressal, feedback, and support, as workers often operate across multiple distinct platforms.

2. Gaps in Data, Definitions, and Measurement

Panellists observed that no country currently has a national survey dedicated to gig and platform workers. In India, estimates relied on the Periodic Labour Force Survey *(PLFS)* and methodologies adapted for this sector. Without reliable data on actual workforce size, it was difficult to assess the contributions to employment, earnings, or national income. Additionally, it was noted that existing definitions of gig work may not capture the full diversity of digital platform-based business models. The CoSS provided a framework, but further details were needed in the implementation phase to reflect variations in sector, turnover, and state-level labour market realities.

3. Varied State-Level Approaches and Compliance Challenges

While the Central Government's Labour Codes created an umbrella framework, panellists noted that States were developing their own mechanisms. Karnataka, Telangana, Jharkhand, and Bihar, were cited as examples. For platforms operating across multiple states required significantly different approaches to compliance. Without clarity on the "basket" of schemes being pursued cumulatively, it was difficult to design compliance formulas or assess costs. The need for harmonisation and unified approaches was repeatedly stressed.

4. Worker Awareness, Grievances, and Digital Literacy

Speakers described persistent gaps in gig worker awareness on registration processes, code provisions, or benefits. With varied demographics, differences in digital literacy across age-groups were also noted. It was also noted that platforms had developed their own internal multi-tier grievance systems, combining customer care, walk-in city offices, and standard operating procedures for incidents. Workshops on financial literacy were noted as practices to strengthen support.

5. Gender Inclusion and Barriers to Participation

Although gig work offers autonomy and flexibility, panellists observed that women still faced barriers to entry due to digital literacy gaps, safety concerns, and socio-cultural factors. Survey findings showed that while women in gig work often earned higher incomes than those in traditional sectors, fears about safety, unfamiliar locations, and leadership representation in unions persist. The lack of women in leadership roles also limited their ability to engage in collective bargaining.

6. Skilling and Training

Panellists highlighted that informality brings challenges around job insecurity, working conditions, and lack of structured training. Skills development varied across sectors, and training needed to account for flexibility, caregiving responsibilities, and diverse worker needs. While international practices (such as the EU and UK approaches) offered useful reference points, Indian policies had be adapted to domestic realities.

Way Forward

The panel agreed that future efforts must focus on strengthening Labour Code implementation, building trust, and supporting workers through inclusive mechanisms. Several core suggestions emerged:

1. Harmonise Implementation Across States

A priority identified for the next phase of regulation was ensuring **seamless operationalisation** of the Labour Codes. With state-level variations in policies, procedures, and schemes, panellists emphasised the need for harmonisation at the basic level of regulatory design. Co-regulation and collaboration between workers, industry, and government were encouraged to avoid adversarial dynamics and ensure the law's intent was realised.

2. Strengthen Social Protection and Trust

Panellists emphasized the importance of activating social protection programs to bring new workers into the economic fold. Technology was identified as a means to support implementation. Trust-building was also seen as essential, particularly as platforms deploy workers in public spaces where safety risks (such as harassment or violence) could arise.

3. Build Strong Grievance and Feedback Systems

A robust grievance redressal framework and feedback loops were identified as crucial. Advisory councils, industry benchmarks, and structured support systems were highlighted as important tools to reduce attrition and ensure responsive action in cases of grievance.

4. Enable Portability Through Digital Platforms

With workers moving across states, portability of benefits was viewed as critical. The discussion noted that the e-Shram portal could support registration and connect central social security schemes, while consultations were underway to integrate state-level programs. This would make it easier to access benefits irrespective of location.