

**Platform Operator and Platform Worker Definitions, Subcontracting Scenario and Platform Operators' Duties Regarding Safety and Health:  
AWARE's submission to the Ministry of Manpower's consultation**

AWARE welcomes the public consultation on Platform Operator and Platform Worker Definitions, Subcontracting Scenario and Platform Operators' Duties Regarding Safety and Health. The economy of digital platforms is expanding rapidly. Between 2021 to 2022, the number of platform workers increased by 21%, from 73,200 to 88,400. (Ministry of Manpower's annual Comprehensive Labour Force Survey)<sup>1</sup>. Platform workers are among the most vulnerable groups of workers in Singapore and other countries due to the lack of basic employment protection. According to the Ministry of Manpower's 2022 Labour Force Survey, resident regular platform workers are most concerned about the lack of healthcare benefits and retirement security<sup>2</sup>.

Platform work can be an attractive option due to the relatively low barriers to entry, more control over their work schedules, and the opportunity to earn extra income. However, the landscape of platform work is constantly changing, resulting in new types of employment and business models that challenge current norms.

It is crucial to ensure that those who perform platform work are protected, regardless of their employment status, and that such safeguards extend to protection against discrimination and harassment. It is also important to note that platform work blurs the lines between traditional employment and self-employment, which can complicate the responsibilities of employers and workers. Classifying platform workers as self-employed can limit their access to health and safety rights, which can have severe consequences for them.

In this submission, we highlight the issues relating to the proposed definitions of platform operators and platform workers, and the health and safety of platform workers.

Our recommendations addressing these issues are as follows:

1. Expanding the definition of Platform Operators and Platform Workers to include a wider range of digital platforms;
2. Protection against discrimination and harassment;
3. Transparent and fair payment systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Manpower, *LABOUR FORCE IN SINGAPORE 2022* (Singapore: Ministry of Manpower, 2023), 26, [https://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS\\_PdfLibrary/mrds\\_2022LabourForce\\_survey\\_findings.pdf](https://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS_PdfLibrary/mrds_2022LabourForce_survey_findings.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Manpower, *LABOUR FORCE IN SINGAPORE 2022* (Singapore: Ministry of Manpower, 2023), 26, [https://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS\\_PdfLibrary/mrds\\_2022LabourForce\\_survey\\_findings.pdf](https://stats.mom.gov.sg/iMAS_PdfLibrary/mrds_2022LabourForce_survey_findings.pdf).

## **1. Expanding the definition of Platform Operators and Platform Workers to include a wider range of digital platforms**

People working on digital platforms perform various on-site and remote tasks, such as delivery, data entry, babysitting, elderly care, taxi driving, etc. Platform work is also characterised by gender segregation. Gender trends in the platform economy mirror those in the traditional job market and the overall economy. Women tend to hold more freelance, microtasking, and on-site service positions, such as those offered by domestic and care work platforms<sup>3</sup>.

According to the [consultation paper](#) (page 5), the “*protections are to be provided to Platform Workers in only ride-hail and delivery services*”. It appears that these services tend to have primarily male platform workers<sup>4</sup>. The economy of digital platforms is expanding rapidly, and there are many different platforms. In Singapore, we have several such platforms providing cleaning services (e.g., Helpling), beauty and therapeutic services (e.g., Urban Company) and elderly caregiving services (e.g., Homage)<sup>5</sup>, which tend to have more female platform workers.

The proposal to limit the definition of Platform Operators and Platform Workers exclusively to ride-hail and delivery services has the consequence of excluding workers in other predominantly female-dominated platforms from the protections that will be extended to their counterparts in the predominantly male-dominated ride-hailing and delivery sectors.

### **Recommendation: Avoid limiting the coverage of the legislation only to ride-hail and delivery services**

Instead of stipulating which services will be covered by the legislation, we recommend that the legislation not be restricted only to ride-hail and delivery service platforms and enable all undertakings that meet the three prongs outlined in the definition of Platform Worker in the consultation paper to be afforded the protection of the legislation. The three prongs clearly demarcate the ambit of the operations that are intended to be covered and will enable the identification of platforms that fall within it. These will include platforms that offer cleaning services, beauty and therapeutic services and caregiving services.

We urge the government to widen the group of platform services that will be covered under this legislation to include cleaning services, beauty and therapeutic services and caregiving services. This provision will facilitate the expansion of the protective measures outlined in this legislation to include a larger demographic of female platform workers, who form the majority of workers

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<sup>3</sup> Rodríguez-Modroño, P. & Pesole, A. & López-Igual, P. (2022). Assessing gender inequality in digital labour platforms in Europe. *Internet Policy Review*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2022.1.1622>

<sup>4</sup> Blackbox Research Pte Ltd, (March 2022), *Inside the Singapore Gig Economy*, <https://blackbox.com.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Blackbox-Research-Whitepaper-Inside-the-Singapore-Gig-Economy.pdf>

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkang/2022/11/08/new-technology-for-old-age-singapore-caregiving-platform-homage-hustles-to-keep-up-with-demand-for-care-as-asia-ages/?sh=7e3dfd56ff29>

in the cleaning services, beauty and therapeutic services, and caregiving services, but only the minority of ride-hail and delivery workers. Women platform workers in particular face safety risks (as will be discussed below), and therefore it is critical that they be protected under this legislation.

## **2. Protection against discrimination and harassment**

Various studies highlight the issue of harassment and discrimination faced by platform workers, including but not limited to female workers. For instance, drivers—especially female drivers—have reported feeling judged by their passengers on aspects such as driving skills and appearance, leading to a sense of discomfort and vulnerability. Instances of unwanted sexual harassment from passengers are not uncommon<sup>6</sup>.

Ride-hail platforms generally prioritize job assignments based on driver ratings. This system can discourage all drivers, including those who are women, from confronting problematic customers due to fear of receiving lower ratings. By placing a premium on customer satisfaction through this rating system, the platforms inadvertently compromise the safety and well-being of their diverse workforce<sup>7</sup>.

The platform economy sees a significant contribution from women in areas such as beauty, care, and domestic work. This type of work, often considered "feminine", is usually carried out within private households. However, inadequate monetisation and recognition of this work by many platforms result in workers performing unpaid work and facing a lack of protection against harassment and abuse in the workplace<sup>8</sup>.

### **Recommendation: Include protections for Platform Workers against harassment and discrimination by Platform Operators and service consumers (customers) in the legislation**

We recommend that the legislation places obligations on Platform Operators to have in place policies on anti-discrimination and anti-harassment of Platform Workers and grievance procedures to manage complaints. Platform Operators, Platform Workers and service consumers (customers) should all be bound by such policies, procedures, and protections.

In addition, Platform Workers should be protected against retaliation when complaints are raised, whether against Platform Operators or customers. In the case of errant customers, they should not be allowed to give poor ratings that will affect the job opportunities and income of Platform Workers; Platform Workers should be able to rate customers as well.

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<sup>6</sup> Ma, Ning and Yoon, Dongwook (2022) Delay and deflect: How women gig workers respond to sexual harassment - Beyond. [Online]. Available from: <https://beyond.ubc.ca/how-women-gig-workers-respond-to-sexual-harassment/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ma, Ning and Yoon, Dongwook, loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Fairwork (2023) Gender and Platform Work: Beyond Technosolutionism. Oxford, United Kingdom; Berlin, Germany.

Legislation should include liability for harassment and discrimination, including compensation for the affected Platform Workers.

### **3. Gender-sensitive algorithms and rating systems for fairer pay outcomes**

Several studies have found that rating systems give customers excessive influence, which can lead to biased findings, particularly for female platform employees, who are often concerned about their safety.

In platform services, the prices for services are usually transparent, which theoretically should ensure a fair salary for all genders. However, if the platform's algorithms are not created with gender equality in mind, they may inadvertently create a gender wage gap. For instance, a study of Uber drivers in the US<sup>9</sup> found that female drivers are less likely to work in areas with higher crime rates and bars, contributing to the gender pay gap. Another study conducted in EU<sup>10</sup> also pointed out that a pay gap can be observed in the case of algorithm-based job intermediaries (i.e., platforms), despite a transparent price/remuneration policy. Women do not dare provide a courier or ride-sharing service late at night or in areas where it is dangerous. Since the algorithm is built in such a way that where there are fewer bidders, the prices are higher, this leads to a situation where men get paid more for the same work.

Algorithmic management has the potential to amplify gender inequalities by perpetuating gender bias and discrimination. As stated in Section 2 above, negative outcomes for women platform workers have also been observed in platform work where workers interact with customers in closed spaces where they may encounter harassment. These female platform workers risk lower ratings if they take issue with the harassment they face, which can lead to lower job opportunities and income.

Sometimes, platform work may not be as flexible as it seems. Workers often have limited control over their shift schedules and may face penalties from algorithms if they decline work assignments, with no opportunity for mediation. This can be especially challenging for women who have caregiving responsibilities, as they may have less flexibility in terms of their working hours. When algorithms do not consider the differences in outside responsibilities, they end up perpetuating gender inequality<sup>11</sup>.

Various algorithms and buyer evaluations based on gender can also affect salaries. For example, platform operators rely on algorithms to rank and assign tasks to their workers based on

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<sup>9</sup> Westhoff, Leonie (2023) The gender-equal platform economy is a myth - fixing it requires firm action. [Online]. 8 March 2023. CEPS. Available from:

<https://www.ceps.eu/the-gender-equal-platform-economy-is-a-myth-fixing-it-requires-firm-action/>

<sup>10</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (2021) Artificial intelligence, platform work and gender equality [Online] Available from: [https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0921386ena\\_002.pdf](https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0921386ena_002.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Westhoff, loc. cit.

customer ratings. However, studies have shown that women tend to receive lower ratings than men<sup>12</sup>, which leads to gender discrimination in the assignment of tasks. Quality control measures using rating and reward systems, which shift the balance of control to the customer, can lead to more biased results for women platform workers.

**Recommendation: Mandate that algorithms and rating systems be designed in a gender-sensitive way**

While we may assume that platforms are gender-blind and merely match customers and workers, the fact is that how these platforms are designed plays a big role in the outcomes for platform workers, in particular women.

Algorithms and rating systems that do not take into account the safety issues and concerns of women, that do not factor in external considerations like caregiving responsibilities (which are still primarily shouldered by women) that affect their flexibility to accept job assignments, that do not account for the tendency of customers to rate men platform workers more highly than women platform workers, and other such gendered differences will result in platforms that discriminate against women platform workers.

To ensure fairer access to job opportunities and fairer pay outcomes for all platform workers, there must be an analysis of the gender impact of algorithms and rating systems.

We recommend that Platform Operators be mandated to ensure that platforms are designed in a gender-sensitive way, not a gender-blind way, which reinforces and perpetuates gender inequalities.

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<sup>12</sup> Westhoff, loc. cit.