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## Research Report

# Women in the gig economy: Paid work, care and flexibility in Kenya and South Africa

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Report

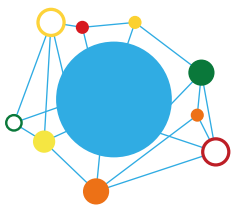
# Women in the gig economy

## Paid work, care and flexibility in Kenya and South Africa

Abigail Hunt, Emma Samman, Sherry Tapfuma,  
Grace Mwaura and Rhoda Omenya with Kay Kim,  
Sara Stevano and Aida Roumer

November 2019





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# Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>AVR</b>	automated voice response
<b>BPO</b>	business processes outsourcing
<b>COTU</b>	Central Organization of Trade Unions
<b>DTF</b>	Digital Taxi Forum
<b>FGD</b>	focus group discussion
<b>HICs</b>	high-income countries
<b>KII</b>	key informant interview
<b>KUDHEIHA</b>	Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers
<b>LICs</b>	low-income countries
<b>MICs</b>	middle-income countries
<b>NGOs</b>	non-profit organisations
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>PPP</b>	purchasing power parity
<b>SADSAWU</b>	South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union
<b>SASSA</b>	South African Social Security Agency
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UIF</b>	Unemployment Insurance Fund (South Africa)
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>ZAR</b>	South African Rand

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# Executive summary

The gig economy, in which digital platforms bring together workers and the purchasers of their services, is expanding globally. Though exponential growth is forecast in traditionally female-dominated sectors – notably on-demand household services including cooking, cleaning and care work – little research to date has focused on gendered experiences of gig work or on gig workers outside of North America and Europe.

This report presents findings from an in-depth study of women’s engagement in the gig economy in Kenya and South Africa, two middle-income countries at the forefront of developments in digitally mediated work in sub-Saharan Africa. It aims to understand the impact of this engagement on workers’ lives, considering the quality of work on offer and its implications for workers’ management of paid work and unpaid care and domestic work. Our novel research methods in South Africa include a longitudinal survey of gig workers combined with analysis of platform data. In both countries, our findings are based on interviews with workers and other key informants.

We find that many gig workers face significant financial precarity and engage in a patchwork of income-generating activities to survive. This includes work on more than one platform and other types of employment, largely in the informal economy. Gig workers typically perceive that platform work offers better options than they would have otherwise, though many would prefer the stability afforded by a more regular engagement.

Our exploration of the quality of gig work focuses on earnings and income stability; flexibility in the location and timing of work; safety and security; social protection; opportunities for learning and the professionalisation of service provision; and possibilities for collective organisation and bargaining. Relative to other options open to them, platforms offer workers some positive features that they value (and which improve their working conditions). However, workers also identified significant difficulties,

underscoring that improvements are needed if the gig economy is to provide high-quality jobs. More broadly, adverse economic conditions limit the availability and quality of work accessible to marginalised women in both countries who face widespread unemployment and informality. The physical urban environment presents further obstacles, distinguished by long distances, poor transport links and, notably in South Africa, extremely high levels of crime and insecurity. There may be little that gig platforms can contribute to alleviate these deeply rooted challenges at present, given their current small scale. However, we argue that, at times, these challenges are experienced in new ways during gig work and that platforms have a responsibility to respond to workers’ concerns as well as to ensure the realisation of worker rights and social protections.

The picture in relation to gig workers’ unpaid work is mixed. In line with existing evidence, our findings suggest that unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities are strongly gendered – with women taking on the bulk of related tasks and engaging in a range of strategies to manage unpaid care. Many workers identified childcare as the biggest challenge to their economic opportunities and work–life balance. We identified a strong reliance on informal childcare, notably by family, neighbours and friends, but when such support was lacking, a sizeable share relied on high-risk strategies, such as leaving young children alone or in the care of slightly older children.

Again, gig work appears to affect the strategies that (mostly) women use in combining paid work with unpaid care. Although many workers viewed gig work as more flexible and conducive to a manageable work–life balance than other paid work available to them, they were nonetheless still forced to make difficult trade-offs between their time-use, income-generation and caring roles. Moreover, in practice, the extent to which the platforms can offer flexible working schedules that facilitate the management of paid and unpaid work is often

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limited. Therefore, while flexible work modalities may be one means to manage paid and unpaid work, a broader approach is needed.

The gig economy looks set to grow in the years to come, making it critical to ensure it works for all involved. There are grounds to believe this can be achieved: a long history of improving conditions in the informal economy and increasing access to care support for marginalised workers, often through informal worker organisation and collective action, offer positive examples to draw on as the gig economy grows. An increase in gig work will boost the impetus for policy-makers and workers' groups to ensure the policy and regulatory environment is fit for purpose and strongly implemented. And reaching scale can provide platforms with more leverage to develop supportive modalities – from better-designed platform technology, to training, certification and increased worker access to protections, to

developing partnerships with complementary financial, care or transport services.

We make specific recommendations to those seeking to support the economic empowerment of women gig workers. Notably, we argue that policy-makers and platform companies should play a central role in ensuring quality work, which includes improving economic security, supporting unpaid work, giving workers more control over schedules, ensuring their safety, and basing policy and practice on worker preferences – which also requires fostering collective action. Governments also have a key role in tackling the broader structural constraints to better work (through better infrastructure for transport, childcare, etc.) and in implementing regulation that ensures platform companies provide a minimum set of rights to their workers, in line with relevant national labour regulation and social protections.

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# 1 Introduction

The gig economy, characterised by digital platforms bringing together workers and the purchasers of their services, is expanding globally (see Box 1). Exponential growth is forecast in traditionally female-dominated sectors, notably on-demand household services including cooking, cleaning and care work.<sup>1</sup> In turn, women's increasing participation in gig work carries potentially significant implications for their working conditions and ability to negotiate paid work and unpaid care responsibilities (Hunt and Samman, 2019). However, little research to date has focused on gendered experiences of gig work nor on gig workers outside of North America and Europe. Through an in-depth study of women's engagement in the gig economy in Kenya and South Africa – two middle-income countries where the gig economy is rapidly taking hold – we seek to understand its impact on their working lives.

Our review of the global evidence identified two pivotal debates over the gig economy. The first concerns whether gig work signifies a retrenchment in working conditions in low- and middle-income countries (LICs and MICs), given that in high-income countries (HICs) it is described as reinforcing an erosion of workers' access to labour and social protections (Standing, 2016; Carré, 2017). Platform companies in lower-income settings challenge this narrative, arguing that they are trying to expand economic opportunities and improve on the poor labour conditions traditionally associated with informal and casual work.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, recent research points to some ways that gig platforms may help to improve working conditions – e.g. through design features that increase workers' ability to track their earnings and which promote

financial inclusion (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Surie, 2017).

The second debate addresses women's motivations for participating in gig work and whether the flexible working arrangements that platforms highlight afford them greater choice and independence than other forms of labour-market participation. It is argued that women's ability to engage in gig work at their preferred time (and place, in the case of online gig work) enhances their ability to balance remunerated activity with other work, study or leisure (Hall and Krueger, 2015; Harris and Krueger, 2016; Manyika et al., 2016). Therefore, the flexible, ad hoc nature of gig employment can support women in balancing unpaid and paid work, as the following quote exemplifies:

... women handle a disproportionate share of household work, childcare, and care for elderly dependents, so flexible independent work helps them juggle these other responsibilities. (Manyika et al., 2016: 43)

But this debate is problematic for several reasons. First, it fails to recognise or challenge women's disproportionate unpaid care and domestic workload relative to that of men, and therefore accepts a situation in which the gig economy simply offers women a way to fit in still more hours of work. Yet the redistribution of unpaid care is a prerequisite for women's economic empowerment. Second, it presumes that women decide to enter the gig economy to manage their work–life balance. While some workers may desire flexibility in the timing and structure of their paid work, and find this through gig work, many

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1 For example, PwC projections forecast that on-demand household services will be the fastest growing sector of the gig economy in the European Union (EU), with revenues estimated to expand at roughly 50% yearly through 2025 (Hawksworth and Vaughn, 2014 and Vaughn and Davario, 2016, cited in Hunt and Samman, 2019: 10).

2 See, for example, Lync founder Adam Grunewald at <https://vimeo.com/166649277>.

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### Box 1 Gender and the gig economy: opportunity or challenge?

The **gig economy** refers to labour-market activities that link supply and demand via digital/mobile platforms. Companies operating these platforms act as intermediaries, enabling purchasers to order tasks at an agreed price from an available worker (and which can be time-based), usually taking a fee or commission when the service is paid for or completed. Workers take on individual ‘gigs’ without any guarantee of further employment, and they are invariably classified by platform companies as independent contractors, rather than employees.

**On-demand work** – on which this report focuses – refers to services that are provided physically, with the purchaser and the provider in geographic proximity (as opposed to **crowdwork**, in which tasks are carried out online). These tasks are generally organised via mobile platforms, by companies that set the terms of service (including fees, commissions and minimum quality standards) and have some role in worker selection and management (De Stefano, 2016). In some contexts, notably in poorer countries, workers also engage with work platforms using lower-tech methods, such as text messages or phone calls, instead of via a smartphone app.

While the gig economy offers consumers access to services at the touch of a button, and economic opportunities to workers, it can also reproduce gendered divides in ‘traditional’ labour markets. Notably, in Africa, women are, on average, 15% less likely to own a mobile phone than men are, and 41% less likely to use the mobile internet (Rowntree, 2019).<sup>3</sup> Gendered social norms that constrain women’s mobility and entry into the labour market may also be experienced in new, digitally enabled ways, e.g. where male relatives restrict women relatives’ use of digital technologies (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Hunt et al., 2017). Moreover, existing intersecting inequalities, discrimination and power differentials – including those based on gender, race/ethnicity, class and migrant status – can be reinforced in the on-demand economy, a dynamic which has been documented on domestic work and care platforms in the United States (US), India, Kenya, Mexico and South Africa (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; van Doorn, 2017; Ticona and Mateescu, 2018).

Source: Hunt and Samman (2019)

women do not engage in part-time or temporary gigs out of choice, but owing to a lack of better jobs and social services (Balakrishnan et al., 2016).

To date, the extent to which gig employment affects women’s total workloads, their working conditions, their choices over work–life balance, and therefore their economic empowerment, remains unclear. In their study of domestic workers in the gig economy, Hunt and Machingura (2016) identified significant trade-offs, especially for women in low-paid sectors, i.e. that workers’ choices over their hours is *de facto* limited as they are forced to work long hours to earn a liveable wage. But the realities of women’s experiences of balancing unpaid work and gig work – and the extent to which this differs

between different sectors within the gig economy – is largely unknown.

This report brings together findings from a two-year project that employed novel forms of data collection – a longitudinal survey with gig workers combined with platform data on their experiences as well as and qualitative fieldwork – to provide new insights into women’s experiences of the gig economy and their management of gig work alongside unpaid care and domestic work. In Kenya and South Africa, countries at the forefront of developments in digitally mediated work in sub-Saharan Africa, we explored how women’s experiences of gig work differs from other employment they might find, and the extent to which gig work offers independent, flexible

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3 In Kenya and South Africa, the gendered digital divide remains sizeable, especially with respect to the use of mobile data: 26% of women use mobile data in Kenya compared with 43% of men, while in South Africa, the figures are 54% and 63% respectively (Rowntree, 2019).

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working patterns that support them in managing paid work and unpaid care. The focus is localised, on-demand labour which typically provides less-skilled and lower-remunerated work than other forms of gig work (Box 1 on p.12). This research identified similar assumptions among our respondents to those in the literature on HICs:

... when you empower women, you are empowering the whole society. This platform provides them with flexibility where they can earn a living, a decent living. Have good incomes while they are also taking care of their children ... [these are] some of the challenges that come with bringing up the society. (Key informant Interview (KII), Kenya Federation of Employers, Nairobi)

Indeed, we did find some evidence of flexible working arrangements, in which workers had the ability to stipulate their availability and to opt for or turn down specific gigs. However, it often appeared to be outweighed by other issues that they faced, as this quote from South Africa attests:

There are too many issues [with my platform work] man. I'm not getting enough bookings and the money I earn is too little. Sometimes when I do get a booking its only for three hours and I am not happy with that. Imagine I live all the way in [area A] and I have to travel to a booking in [area B]. So I'm not happy. Interviewee: OK, so why are you still working through the platform given all these issues? Interviewer: It's easier working through the platform because in this day and age, jobs are scarce. You cannot go to someone's gate and knock for a job, otherwise they will shoot you. (Jane, Johannesburg)

Our research suggests that there are ways in which gig work can specifically affect working conditions and how women manage care and unpaid care. At the same time, the broader context in both countries is one in which

structural constraints have a negative impact on the overall working conditions of marginalised and disadvantaged workers and the supportive infrastructure available to carers. Given its current small scale, gig work is unlikely to provide a meaningful way to overcome these constraints at present. Yet platform companies and policy-makers alike have a responsibility to better understand the implications of the new operating model for workers and respond to their specific concerns, and to ensure access to established labour rights and protections, in line with national legislation (which is increasingly recognising informal workers) regardless of their status.

These findings carry implications for ongoing national and international dialogues over the future of work and efforts to improve working conditions for women – notably, at a global level, through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its commitments to promote decent work (Goal 8) and gender equality and women's empowerment (Goal 5), and its overarching ambition to 'leave no one behind'. This report calls for a strong gender lens in these debates and for women's economic empowerment to be at the forefront of efforts to ensure the gig economy evolves to the benefit of all.

Chapter 2 introduces key concepts that inform this study in providing an overview of the evolution of the gig economy in LICs and MICs; of gender inequalities in informal work, unpaid care and domestic work; and of flexible working arrangements. It also provides a snapshot of the gig economy in our two focus countries, South Africa and Kenya. Chapter 3 outlines our methodology and Chapter 4 describes the background and circumstances of the gig workers who participated in this study. Chapter 5 addresses whether and how the gig economy might improve working conditions, while Chapter 6 focuses on its effects on the ability of workers to manage gig work alongside unpaid care and domestic work. Chapter 7 discusses the implications of the burgeoning gig economy for working conditions in lower-income settings and our recommendations to address the key challenges identified. Finally, Chapter 8 briefly outlines future research directions emerging from this study.

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# 2 Women and the gig economy: key concepts

This chapter outlines the key concepts that inform this study. We situate the evolution of the gig economy within wider economic trends in LICs and MICs, emphasising how gender intersects with other inequalities. Key concepts include informal work and employment quality, the nexus between labour-market participation and unpaid care and domestic work, and flexibility in work arrangements. We also introduce the two focus countries – South Africa and Kenya – and briefly explore the rise of the gig economy and trajectories in women’s work and care in each context.

## 2.1 Key concepts: work, care and flexibility

### 2.1.1 Informal work and quality of employment

Women’s presence in the workforce began to grow from around the 1970s, at a time when work conditions were shifting globally (Standing, 1999; Heintz 2006).<sup>4</sup> Standing (1999) recounts how the weakening protection of workers led to a deterioration of income and economic security, and how companies seeking to increase their competitiveness by cutting labour costs resorted increasingly to casual labour, outsourcing and home-based work. These shifts occurred in parallel with the expansion of the informal economy and the informalisation of employment relations, which has occurred as the formal economy has been unable to generate sufficient opportunity to absorb the ‘surplus’ labour active in informal economic activities (ibid.; Carr and Chen, 2002). Additional evidence points to the gendered segregation of

#### Box 2 Defining informal employment

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines informal employment as comprising all employment without labour or social protection, ‘both inside and outside informal enterprises, including both self-employment in small unregistered enterprises and wage employment in unprotected jobs’ (Chen, 2007: 2). This is an expanded definition relative to that of the informal sector, which focuses on informal self-employment and is based on a dualistic understanding of the economy, with separate formal and informal sectors (Chen, 2012). Both the neglect of informal wage employment and the formal–informal dualism are considered inadequate to capture the nature of the informal economy (ibid.).

labour markets and the specific disadvantages women face, such as their over-representation in informal work (see Box 2) and in its more precarious segments such as unpaid family work, and their higher likelihood of underemployment (Chen, 2012; World Bank, 2013; ILO, 2016a).

Unpaid care has been widely identified as a key reason for women’s concentration in poorer-quality sections of the labour market. It is argued that women participate in non-standard and informal work because these offer a way to combine domestic responsibilities, notably childcare, with paid work (Acs et al., 2013; ILO, 2016a; Samman et al., 2016). Elson (1999) argues persuasively that women’s disadvantages in the

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<sup>4</sup> Just under half of women (48%) in LICs and MICs are active in the workforce (World Bank, 2019), but apart from in Latin America and the Caribbean, participation rates have stagnated in recent decades (Klasen, 2018).

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labour market intertwine with those they face at home and in society:

It is sometimes claimed that labor markets adapt so as to allow women to combine paid work with unpaid work – for example, part-time work and home-based work. But, this kind of adaptation is generally one-sided – more designed to allow the productive economy access to workers whose entry into the labor market is constrained by domestic responsibilities than to give weight to the contribution that women’s unpaid work makes to the productive economy. This is revealed in the way in which these more ‘informal’ types of work typically do not have contracts which give employees any rights to paid time for meeting their responsibilities in the reproductive economy – rights such as maternity leave, and time-off for caring for sick relatives. (Elson, 1999: 613)

Elsewhere, we argue that the gig economy displays similar characteristics to ‘traditional’, highly informal labour markets across many LICs and MICs, and may reinforce many precarious aspects of informal employment, including disadvantages associated with gender (Hunt and Samman, 2019). Nevertheless, a critical question we address is whether and how the gig economy (and specific features of platform operating models) can allow better working conditions for disadvantaged or marginalised women. This, in turn, requires an understanding of what constitutes job quality.

Academics and international organisations have advanced numerous frameworks that seek to define and standardise concepts associated with the quality of employment (see, for example, Lugo, 2007; Eurofound, 2012; ILO 2013a; OECD, 2014, 2015; IDB, 2017). The ILO’s ‘decent work’ initiative has devised the most comprehensive and ambitious framework (notably, it underpins SDG 8 which aims at ‘decent work and economic growth’), although it has been argued that ‘only in Europe, where comparable indicators from harmonised surveys have become the norm and constitute extremely valuable data for analysts, has significant progress been made’ (Burchell et

al., 2014: 460). The ILO framework includes employment opportunities; earnings; working time; the balance between work, family and personal life; the stability and security of work; fair treatment at work; safety; social security; worker representation; and the right to collective bargaining. However, the weight given by those looking to improve labour conditions to the different dimensions within the framework and how they are measured will depend on different starting points, preferences and experiences of work within specific country contexts, not least patterns of informal employment and of non-standard work (ILO, 2013a, 2016a). Furthermore, individual, worker-level analysis based on perceptions around decent work in their own context can complement the framework, yet this is often missing from existing measures (Pereira et al., 2019). Therefore, we aim to foreground the voices and priorities of participating workers, situating the aspects of work they raised as crucial within this broader typology.

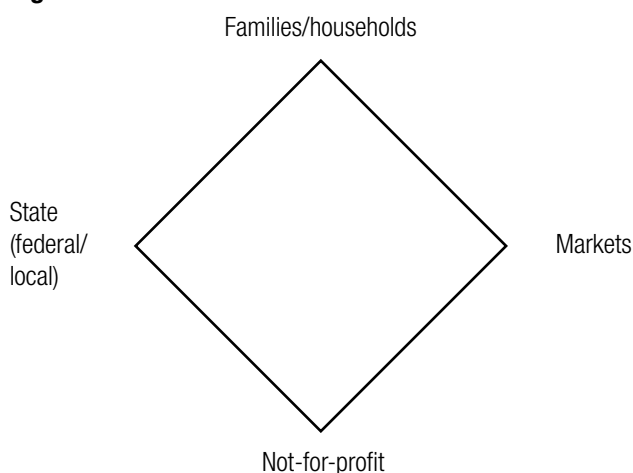
### 2.1.2 The unpaid and paid work nexus

Our exploration of whether and how the gig economy fulfils its promise to support the management of unpaid care and domestic work with paid work is motivated by the challenges unpaid care poses to the realisation of women’s preferences around engagement in ‘traditional’ labour markets. We draw on an often-cited definition of unpaid care work: ‘the housework and care of persons that occurs in homes and communities of all societies on an unpaid basis’ (Budlender, 2010: 1). The ways in which paid and unpaid work intersect, and how women manage and are supported to manage each, lie at the core of debates on women’s economic empowerment.

The challenges women often face in managing unpaid care and domestic work and paid work are compounded by a lack of support – from their partners and other household members, and from outside institutions – and are shaped by context-specific histories and gender regimes. The care diamond illustrated in Figure 1 outlines potential sources of support for the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care, pointing to the role of families, the state, non-profit organisations (NGOs) and the private sector.



**Figure 1 The care diamond**



Source: Razavi (2007: 21)

The evidence suggests that care continues to be overwhelmingly provided by women, and that when this work is accounted for, women have longer working days than men (Fagan et al., 2011; Rost et al., 2015; Samman et al., 2016). Kabeer (1997, 2012) contends that the type and quality of available employment are crucial to women's abilities either to renegotiate domestic responsibilities or to reconcile different types of paid and unpaid work, and that wage employment, and formal and secure jobs, can offer women the economic independence to challenge patriarchal constraints.

According to past studies, many women who work reduced hours – including in part-time work – are compelled to do so owing to the lack of viable alternatives to support unpaid work, such as paid parental leave, and/or affordable and quality care services (ILO, 2016b). Part-time work, whether voluntary or involuntary, is a major source of inequality: often, it is only available in limited sectors and female-dominated occupations, which require a lower cadre of skills and therefore pay less. Moreover, because part-time working modalities are often designed to reduce employers' labour costs such as social security benefits, they also limit women's access to such protections.

Where supportive services, notably childcare, are available, women are more likely to engage in the labour force. However, where childcare is lacking

outside the household, women are more likely to take up informal and low-paid work (Alfers, 2015; Samman et al. 2016). Informal and precarious work arrangements, in turn, further hinder the redistribution of care responsibilities because they do not provide workers with adequate social protection, including a social infrastructure to support care. Currently, work–family balance is the biggest challenge that employed women face globally (Gallup and ILO, 2017). As a result of lack of care support, more than one-third of employed women work part-time, and women are more likely to be underemployed (ILO, 2016b).<sup>5</sup> In some cases, the strategies employed to manage childcare also pose a risk to young children; across 76 countries (nearly all LICs and MICs) slightly more than 1 in 5 children under age five were reported as having been left alone or supervised by another child under 10 years old in the previous week,<sup>6</sup> totalling some 45 million children (UNICEF, 2017a), with 39% of children falling into this category in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2017b). Concerningly, this total figure is likely to be an underestimation given significant sub-regional data gaps, including in our focus countries of South Africa and Kenya.

Data on time use illustrate the constraints and trade-offs that women, particularly those who are less privileged, face in balancing paid and unpaid work. The concept of time poverty – 'the need to spend long hours working (in either the labour market or domestic work) because the alternative would be (even deeper) consumption poverty' (Bardasi and Wodon, 2010: 45) – is pivotal in highlighting the level of agency within which work decisions are made). Where women perform paid work alongside the bulk of unpaid work within a household, time poverty is more severe (Hirway, 2015).

In order to fulfil care responsibilities, women might reallocate leisure time to care, employ domestic help afforded using their additional earnings, or assign care responsibilities to grandmothers or daughters, potentially at the expense of young girls' education (Quisumbing et al., 2013; Samman et al., 2016; Johnston et al.,

5 Time-related underemployment refers to persons who are willing and available to work additional hours and whose working hours are below a given threshold relating to working time (ILO, 2016b).

6 Full category definition: 'Percentage of children 0–59 months left alone or in the care of another child younger than 10 years of age for more than one hour at least once in the past week' (UNICEF, 2017b).

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2018). Numerous studies point to negative effects of high care workloads for women and children – for example, a recent study in Tanzania, Rwanda and India highlights that excessive paid and unpaid work – often highly physical – limited women’s physical and mental health and reduced time for sleep, personal/self-care, hygiene and leisure (Chopra and Zambelli, 2017). The flexibility gig work purports to offer could offer a remedy or it could potentially exacerbate the problem by motivating overwork.

### 2.1.3 Flexibility and its critiques

We explore flexibility in terms of worker ability to arrange the location and timing of their gigs to suit their preferences and other commitments. When considering the extent to which flexibility in the gig economy is a helpful asset to assist with the challenges that women face in managing paid and unpaid work, it is useful to draw on the existing literature on different types of labour-market flexibility.

One focus is on ‘employer-led’ flexibility, a strategy that employers use to cheapen the cost of labour and increase their ability to respond to fluctuating demand at no additional cost (Dolan and Sutherland, 2002). This strategy has become institutionalised or deepened (depending on the starting point) as part of a wider trend of structural labour-market flexibilisation since the 1980s, pursued by many countries to boost competitiveness and efficiency. The development of gig platforms can be seen as one manifestation. Critically, flexibility in LICs and MICs has been described as a tool that can be used to the detriment of a workforce that faces reduced rights and protections in relation to full-time, non-flexible workers (ibid.; Kenny and Webster, 1998; Valodia, 2001).

Another emphasis of research in this area is ‘worker-led flexibility’, which is framed in terms of workers having the choice to achieve their desired work–life balance – the narrative that gig platforms often adopt. This literature, which is focused on HICs and is only beginning to appear in relation to LICs and MICs, has been criticised for not adequately considering constraints that workers face through often not having full autonomy over their schedules and the employment opportunities available and suited to them (Fagan et al., 2011;

Wood, 2016). Critically, workers’ level of agency and their ability to choose how to allocate their time in practice dictate whether flexibility is desirable or empowering, though there are also concerns that greater working-time autonomy may lead to an intensification of work and overtime (Lott, 2015).

The literature often portrays flexible work as being particularly advantageous for women, making it possible to maintain their primary role of caretaker and provider of unpaid work (Bardasi and Wodon, 2010; Allen et al., 2013). The logic is that women’s engagement in part-time work or self-employment can support women in providing unpaid care (Hilbrecht and Lero, 2014).

However, it has also been argued that the concept of work–life balance, and an associated focus on flexitime and part-time work, might have little relevance for the many workers in LICs and MICs who are engaged in informal self-employment, and casual and subsistence agricultural work because no other options are available (Alfers, 2015). Furthermore, this focus on choice can detract attention from the structural constraints that lead women to *prefer* ostensibly flexible work arrangements to balance paid work and care, which have been described in terms of ‘conditioned choice’ (Gregory and Milner, 2009; Jacques and Radkte, 2012; Vinkenburg 2015). The concern is that the perception of increased choice may veil the extension of the working day, blur the distinction between work and non-work and fail to challenge the gendered allocation of labour (Bourne and Forman, 2014). In other words, work flexibility may be a double-edged sword, especially where job control and earnings are low.

There is an assumption that flexibility is an important feature offered by gig work, and that this is particularly relevant to women. This has not been rigorously interrogated so far – a gap this research contributes towards filling.

## 2.2 Focus countries: South Africa and Kenya

This section introduces our two focus countries, South Africa and Kenya, both of which have an increasingly established gig economy and can be regarded as trend-setters within Africa. Key factors fostering the rise of platform companies in each

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country include the technological and business environment as well as labour-market conditions. Women's participation in gig work in each context is shaped by prevailing labour market circumstances and patterns of managing unpaid care, which we also discuss, highlighting persistent gender disparities. This sets the scene for our subsequent exploration of how the gig economy is experienced and provides a basis upon which to consider the wider labour market that gig workers navigate before and alongside platform-mediated work. The comparison seeks to illustrate the extent to which the gig economy is disruptive – both relative to working conditions in 'traditional' labour markets, and in terms of how gig workers manage unpaid care and domestic work alongside paid economic activity.

### 2.2.1 South Africa

South Africa 'has been the entry point into the continent for several leading international players such as Uber, Airbnb, and Fon' (EOS Intelligence, 2017), while the gig economy, incorporating freelance workers and machines, has been identified as one of five major trends with significant implications for business in the country (Deloitte, 2017). The flow of global companies has been said to bolster employment and local competition, with domestic gig companies providing similar services to globally established gig-economy giants (EOS Intelligence, 2017). Economic conditions within the country have also provided a ready supply of labour, including workers willing to engage in poorly remunerated employment due to lack of other options – notably, persistently high unemployment, which reached around 27% in 2018 (29.5% for women and 25% for men) after steadily increasing over previous years (STATS SA, 2019a). Among youth aged 15–24, the unemployment rate is twice as high, at 55% (STATS SA, 2019b). In this context, the coexistence of limited possibilities for formal

employment, alongside a sizeable informal and un/underemployed workforce,<sup>7</sup> help to explain the attraction of gig work.

Women's participation in South Africa's gig economy is rooted within its unique historical trajectory and resulting labour market. Rising female labour force participation has been identified as one of the most significant changes in the nature of South Africa's labour supply (Ackermann and Velelo, 2013),<sup>8</sup> with a particularly notable effect on jobs involving a reproductive, caring aspect, such as cleaning, domestic work, nursing and teaching (Orr and van Meelis, 2014). The median gender wage gap, estimated at around 23–25%, has remained unchanged since the end of Apartheid (Mosomi, 2019), and can be attributed, in part, to the low-paid informal nature of many women's paid jobs, low female participation in trade unions, women's unpaid care work and gender-based discrimination (ibid.; Ncube, 2012). Black African women particularly continue to be over-represented in low-income, less secure employment.<sup>9</sup>

Labour force survey data suggests that some 48% of employed women work in the informal sector, relative to 31% of employed men (STATS SA, 2018a). Black African women have especially low formal employment rates, linked to Apartheid laws that prohibited them from entering the paid labour force – for most women, especially poor black women, the alternative was largely restricted to domestic work for white households (see Du Toit, 2013). Today, informal wage employment, especially domestic work, is the most important component of informal employment (Heintz and Valodia, 2008, Box 3). More recently, Casale and Posel (2002) argue that women, rather than being 'pulled' by rising demand for their work, have instead been 'pushed' into the labour market due to falling male incomes.

In addition, the Apartheid regime and legislation contributed to fragmented households and specific gendered patterns of childcare provision; amongst

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7 For 2016, the government (time-based approach) estimate was 6.2%; however, the ILO approach, which also identifies people undertaking work for which they are overqualified as under-employed (Beukes et al., 2017), estimates a rate of 28%. Combining elements of the two approaches suggests 12% under-employment (ibid.).

8 Female labour force participation stands at 49% relative to 63% for men (World Bank, 2019).

9 For example, just 18% of black African women and 20% of 'coloured' women were employed in skilled occupations in 2017, compared with more than half of white and Indian/Asian women (STATS SA, 2017). Note we adopt those (Apartheid-era) race-based categories still used by STATS SA since we draw directly on their statistics.

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### Box 3 'Traditional' domestic work in South Africa

Domestic workers account for around 6% of South Africa's workforce (STATS SA, 2018b). As the number of authorised and unauthorised migrants in South Africa has increased in recent years due to political unrest, economic instability and environmental degradation in sub-Saharan Africa, migrant labour forms a significant share of the paid domestic workforce, notably in its less formalised segments (Meny-Gibert and Chiumia, 2016).

Government attempts to regulate the sector include the introduction of the 'Sectoral Determination 7' in 2002. This mandates a minimum wage and basic working conditions, such as formal employment contracts and compulsory registration of workers with the Department of Labour, to enable them to contribute to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). One recent estimate suggests that approximately one-third of domestic workers who work the requisite 24 hours or more per month remain unregistered with UIF (STATS SA, cited in Liao, 2019). However, other estimates point to even more significant deficits, citing coverage rates as low as 20%.<sup>10</sup> What is clear is that much domestic work remains informal, with an unknown (but presumably significant share) of workers engaged without contracts and several categories of domestic workers – notably part-time and migrant workers – excluded from social protection provisions (du Toit, 2013).

Domestic worker unions such as the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) have long campaigned for decent wages and adequate workers' compensation. The National Minimum Wage Act of 2018 specified a minimum hourly wage of 20 South African Rand (ZAR) as of January 2019, with the minimum wage for domestic workers set at 75% of the national minimum and entitlements to a 10% annual salary rise.<sup>11</sup> SADSAWU and other domestic worker organisations continue to highlight the insufficiency of this wage to meet the cost of living, as well as its symbolism as a persistent undervaluation of domestic work vis-à-vis the multiple other forms of work to which the standard minimum wage applies. In 2018, the Department of Labour proposed to extend workers' compensation to domestic workers (and in May 2019, the Pretoria High Court ruled that their exclusion from the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act of 1993 was unconstitutional).

other factors, male migrant workers were often housed in single-sex compounds on long contracts. This provided them with little opportunity to build relationships and engage with their children, and meant support was often delivered to their rurally based families via remittances (Posel, 2001; Budlender and Lund, 2011). In 2008, most children in South Africa did not live with their fathers, but rather with their mother (40%), although women's labour migration has increased in recent years. One outcome is that many children

are left with other relatives despite the parents being alive (23%) (ibid.), raising concerns over the care needs of left-behind children in rural areas (Razavi, 2011; Schatz and Seeley, 2015). For example, Lund (1998) reports that half of women working as street traders in Johannesburg did not live with their children – children were sent to live with a grandparent or another relative, so the mother could engage in paid work. The importance of grandparents, grandmothers especially, for the provision of childcare is

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10 Based on 2011 STATS SA data, following a similar procedure, it was estimated that 74% of domestic workers were enrolled in the UIF, whereas actual UIF data from the same period suggested that 20% of active domestic workers were registered in practice (de Toit, 2013).

11 The Sectoral Determination of Minimum Wages for Domestic Workers (December 2018) adds additional detail based on location and on hours worked weekly. Domestic workers in 'bigger metropolitan areas' working more than 27 hours per week are entitled to a minimum hourly wage of ZAR 13.69, while those working fewer than 27 hours are entitled to ZAR 16.03 per hour.

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enhanced by the system of social grants to older people, which provides a basic level of economic security to many (Hull, 2014). Nonetheless, the onus often remains on mothers to earn a living to support their children and the relatives caring for them – the need for many women to seek an income in a context of limited economic opportunities leads many into poor-quality paid work.

In short, the large numbers of job seekers, particularly women, in a context where women are disproportionately involved in informal economic activity and are often household breadwinners (whether living with or apart from their children), has provided a fertile ground for the rise of the gig economy, notably in female-dominated sectors.

### 2.2.2 Kenya

Kenya's vibrant digital technology ecosystem boomed following the arrival of undersea fibre optics that more than doubled connectivity and rendered broadband more affordable (Stuart et al., 2015). This led to the country becoming known as the 'Silicon Savannah'. The gig economy has arguably flourished following this, due to the country's pro-tech entrepreneurialism policies starting with the endorsement of outsourcing as a key driver of economic development under Vision 2030<sup>12</sup> (Graham and Mann, 2013), and continuing through active government programmes such as Ajira Digital, which aims to support one million young people to access digital work.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the private sector and development partners are also driving gig-economy engagement with a focus on providing digital skills and infrastructure to unemployed youth and vulnerable communities through so-called 'impact sourcing'.<sup>14</sup>

Nairobi is emerging as a 'freelance capital' (KenDesk, 2017) with intermediary tech companies

such as Uber, Airbnb, Taxify, Kuhustle, Lynk and Fundislink among many others providing platforms through which individuals can connect with available jobs. But gig work is undoubtedly rising in importance across Kenya – the most recent figures from 2017 estimate that 40,000 Kenyans (about 0.02% of the country's labour force) found work through online platforms such as Kuhustle, Mechanical Turk, Elance, Upwork and through several business processes outsourcing (BPO) companies (Miriri, 2017). Given the pace of change, however, this statistic should no doubt be revised.

Labour-market conditions in Kenya have also proved fruitful ground for the gig economy. Informal employment and other forms of non-standard/casual work have increased over recent decades.<sup>15</sup> Poor employment outcomes in the formal economy, coupled with decent work deficits and weak labour laws and enforcement, further motivates the rising unemployed workforce to seek alternative work opportunities (Chari et al., 2017). While regular employment grew 7% between 2003 and 2011, casual employment grew by 87% (ILO and ILSS, 2013)<sup>16</sup> and, as of 2015/16, 13% of the Kenyan workforce was in casual work (KNBS, 2018). At the same time, the government and others in the technology sector are encouraging and promoting entrepreneurship and the status of independent contractor work (KenDesk, 2017; Ndemo and Weiss, 2017).

Yet gender disparities prevail in low-quality work in Kenya, as in South Africa. The labour force participation of women is just below that of men (64% relative to 69%) (World Bank, 2019), but, on average, women earn 35% less (World Economic Forum, 2018). Around three-quarters of Kenya's non-agricultural workforce are in the informal economy (Charmes, 2016), as are most working women in urban areas (Kinyanjui, 2016).

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12 This is the country's long-term development policy that aims to transform the country into a modern, globally competitive MIC offering high-quality life in a clean environment for all citizens by 2030. See <https://vision2030.go.ke/>

13 See <https://ajiradigital.go.ke/home>

14 For example, in 2013, the Rockefeller Foundation invested in a seven-year \$100 million 'Digital jobs for Africa' programme to enable one million youth in Kenya and another five countries to find work in the digital economy (Imaizumi, 2015), while in 2016, Google Africa committed to online digital skills training for a million young Africans (CIO, 2016).

15 Kenya's definition of informal employment refers to employment in informal-sector enterprises and households, thereby leaving out those informally employed in the formal sector (ILO, 2013b).

16 Casual employment includes persons working for a short time period, generally not more than 24 hours at a time, and paid daily. They have no guarantee of work for more than 24 hours and can be dismissed at one day's notice (Kituo Cha Sheria, n.d.).

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This leaves many women vulnerable to changing conditions of work that neither enable them to transition to formal work nor alleviate the constraints associated with informal work, as well as lacking access to basic social protection (Heintz and Valodia, 2008).

The management of unpaid care with paid work is no less a challenge for women in Kenya than elsewhere. A study of employees in horticultural value chains showed that 43% of men and 63% of women experienced time conflicts between domestic responsibilities and employment. It highlighted the importance of social networks for women who migrated with children; in Nairobi, especially, family, friends and neighbours assisted workers with unpaid care (Dolan and Sutherland, 2002). While stating that too little is known about care in Kenya, Dimova et al. (2015) highlight the growing problem of childcare in Nairobi, in which better-off families were more able than poorer families to manage care through paid-for services. Other literature emphasises the importance of local care chains, whereby women

migrate from rural to urban areas to work as nannies and domestic workers, and highlights that care needs are compounded by HIV/AIDS and an ageing population (Moyer and Ingonya, 2014; Schatz and Seeley, 2015).

Finally, it is worth noting that literature in relation to ‘flexibility’ and the paid–unpaid work nexus is very limited in relation to both Kenya and South Africa. Most available evidence in these contexts draws on the literature on work–family balance in HICs and attempts to assess empirically how flexible work arrangements may benefit workers in specific jobs, mostly senior roles in formal employment. This focus is likely to obscure important differences between workers in HICS, relative to LICs and MICs – for example, with regards to access to systems of care provision (Alfers, 2015) – and is therefore limited in providing a perspective on worker-led flexibility in LICs and MICs. Consequently, this research aims to provide new insights into how flexibility is experienced in relation to unpaid care by workers traditionally concentrated in the informal economy.

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# 3 Methodology

Our mixed-methods methodology focused on one platform company in South Africa, SweepSouth (in the following sections, we refer to this company simply as ‘the platform’ – see profile in Box 4), which agreed to cooperate in this research, and on several platform companies in Kenya, which we refer to anonymously.

Two types of quantitative data informed this study. First, in South Africa, we collected data from registered workers, so-called ‘SweepStars’ through a nine-round longitudinal automated voice response (AVR) phone-based survey between August 2018 and February 2019, through survey company Ulula. Administering the survey in several rounds facilitated coverage

of multiple aspects of working conditions and unpaid care and domestic workloads. Second, the platform company engaged in this research provided data on their workforce – which we were able to merge with the survey data at an individual level to obtain a fuller picture of worker experiences. We also analysed the platform data for South Africa separately to obtain a more comprehensive picture of supply and demand for the services offered, and worker availability (between November 2017 and December 2018), as well as earnings data (available for detailed analysis between June 2018 and September 2019).

In South Africa, nearly 650 workers (around one-third of the total) who were on the platform

## Box 4 A profile of SweepSouth

SweepSouth is a domestic work platform based in Cape Town, South Africa, which operates in cities in the provinces of Western Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and, to a limited extent, Mpumalanga. Founded in 2014, its operating model has evolved over time as the company experiments with diverse modalities, including the scheduling of bookings and payment of workers. At the time our data was collected, the platform enabled clients to make bookings of three hours or more and offered its workers an hourly rate based on their tenure with the platform (those who had worked at least 400 hours earned between 80% and 96% while those who had worked fewer hours earned between 65% and 96% of the average hourly booking fee of ZAR 42). The platform also operates a mechanism known as ‘Earn More’ where workers can sign up for gigs cancelled by others on a first come, first served basis, for a higher hourly rate. Clients can also opt to tip their ‘SweepStar’.

The company communicates with its workers through a dedicated mobile phone-based app and covers the cost of their cleaning supplies, while workers pay for their transport and, until recently, the cost of their data (in November 2018, the company introduced a data-free app, see section 7.1.5). As with other platform companies, workers are categorised as independent contractors. Clients rate the worker performance following each ‘gig’. Those with higher ratings are more likely to receive bookings, though worker preferences regarding when and where they would like to work are also influential. Workers also rate their experience with a client after each ‘gig’. According to Fairwork Foundation ratings (Fairwork, n.d.), SweepSouth ranks fairly high among platform companies in South Africa, having demonstrated ‘fair pay’ (in line with the local minimum wage), for its management and contracting of workers, its provision of work-related insurance and the facilitation of worker voice.

Source: SweepSouth (n.d.a) and KII.

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as of August 2018 responded to an invitation to complete the first round of a survey covering their background and motivations for engaging with the platform. We could not investigate self-selection into the survey nor non-response comprehensively because, for privacy reasons, the platform deliberately collects minimal personal details regarding registered workers. We gave an incentive of ZAR 10 to all respondents who completed each survey round and entered those who completed at least six rounds into a lottery to receive the prize of a tablet. Subsequent response rates varied between 25% and 42% for the first five rounds of the survey, after which we had to reduce the sample size due to budgetary restrictions and a rise in the price of mobile phone airtime. The survey contained questions with pre-coded responses and some open-coded questions that enabled participants to answer in their own words (these responses were analysed and also post-coded).

Though we faced certain challenges, not least month-on-month turnover of nearly 10%, we obtained rich data on worker perceptions of gig work, other work that they engaged in, and how they (and their partners) managed unpaid care and domestic work within their households.<sup>17</sup> Annex 1 explains the computations we made with this data. Our efforts to conduct a parallel AVR survey in Kenya did not succeed for financial reasons (including rises in the cost of airtime). Our attempt to launch a WhatsApp survey also proved unsuccessful after the first round.<sup>18</sup>

Qualitative research also took place in both Kenya and South Africa. A qualitative methodology protocol was established, which defined procedural guidelines to be followed across the two countries covering participant sampling method, data collection, transfer and storage, ethics and consent, data protection and risk assessment, among other areas.<sup>19</sup> In both countries, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out with gig workers and key informants. Due to the participant sampling method employed for this study, key characteristics of workers include: having a caring role/responsibility for at least one child under eight years old or an

adult, and having (at least until recently) worked on a gig platform. The participant group was split between single parents looking after children alone and married/partnered couples living with children.

In South Africa, 16 women workers from the same domestic work platform were interviewed (10 active workers, 2 inactive workers and 4 deactivated workers) as well as three key informant interviews (one academic team, one domestic worker union representative and one platform representative). In Kenya, 16 active workers were interviewed (12 women and 4 men), who were registered across three different platforms (one driving platform, two multi-services platforms) and provided services across a wide range of categories including appliance repair, tiling, plumbing, decorating, gardening, administration, beauty services, cleaning and childminding services, furniture-making and repair, catering/restaurant trade and driving/ride-sharing. We also carried out nine key informant interviews, with one government representative, two platforms, one academic, four workers' groups/unions, and one employer organisation.

In addition, one focus group discussion (FGD) was carried out with workers in each country, aimed at (1) gathering gig workers' current ideas and supporting them to develop new ideas as a group around what could/should happen to improve their experiences as gig workers, including with reference to unpaid care and domestic work, and (2) to provide a space for gig workers to share their experiences and ideas for improvements with others in a similar situation. Ten participants took part in South Africa and nine participants took part in Kenya. FGDs can provide a context within which ideas are formed and decisions are made (Kitzinger, 1994). As such, the format and focus of the FGDs attempted to encourage participants to reflect more deeply on their individual and collective situation, to provide an opportunity to build or strengthen links with other gig workers, to identify avenues for change and/or motivate them to take action for change, and potentially to make the gig worker participants feel less alone; as such, the focus groups could be

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17 The survey questionnaire and full descriptive results are available on request.

18 The number we used to launch the survey was restricted due to operational issues involving the use of WhatsApp.

19 Available from authors on request.



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said to have created an interface between research and political process (Laws et al., 2013).

A key issue we grappled with is that responses to our survey in South Africa suggested far more positive experiences and perceptions of gig work than those that arose in our interviews with workers. For example, as discussed below, most survey respondents (88%) reported being able to undertake platform work at hours that were convenient to them, whereas in the qualitative accounts, interviewees stressed security concerns arising from early starts. Similarly, in our survey, a clear majority of workers reported that their working lives and family lives balanced well, whereas in the qualitative interviews, workers – particularly single mothers – highlighted challenges of trying to balance paid work with childcare and other domestic responsibilities.

There are several possible explanations for these differences. The survey had many more respondents,

and therefore may be more representative of workers' experiences than a smaller number of interviews. However, it could be that interviewees felt more able to respond honestly to open-ended questions and to trust the interviewers than they did in responding to the AVR survey (while we expressed clearly in the survey that the responses were confidential and independent of the company, workers may not have truly believed this). Another possibility is that workers may report aspects of their working lives in a relatively positive light compared to what they perceive as other options open to them and their peers (i.e. in the survey), but, when pressed on specific details, they relate accounts that problematise their experiences. It would be useful to probe these potentially diverging accounts further, possibly through qualitative interviews with survey respondents, in which they provide additional detail in relation to their responses.

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# 4 Situating the study

Based on our own primary data collection, this chapter provides a profile of gig workers in South Africa and Kenya focusing on their demographic and household characteristics, the work they undertook before and are undertaking alongside gig work, and their motivations for engaging in the gig economy.

In South Africa, where we surveyed gig workers engaged in domestic work, we seek to illustrate how the characteristics of our respondents and their households compare with the broader population, drawing on national household survey data. We discuss gig earnings and other conditions of gig work in the following chapter.

## 4.1 Who are the gig workers?

We first profile domestic workers involved in gig work in South Africa and their household circumstances (for full descriptive statistics, see Annex 2). Our results reflect the ways in which the country's labour-market dynamics are shaped by mutually reinforcing relationships between race, gender and class (Orr and van Meelis, 2014). Our respondents are nearly exclusively female (98%) and black African (97%). The share of black Africans is significantly above their share in the South African population (80%)<sup>20</sup> but, in line with the paid domestic workforce – which, with the exception of the Western Cape (where the so-called 'coloured' population makes up the largest share) – is made up predominantly of black African women with a median age of 41 (Budlender, 2016, STATS SA, 2016; 2017). The typical worker (median) in our sample is around 35 years old.

The share of single or widowed women among our study participants (63%) stands above their share in the wider adult population (56%), and

workers typically lived in larger households than the norm – the average in our sample was 4.5 members, compared with 3.2 for the population. Moreover, just 5% of workers lived alone while 63% lived in households with four or more members. In contrast, in South Africa, 26% of households have just one member and 38% have four or more members. Nearly all workers (98%) lived with at least one child under 18 while 83% lived with one or more children under 6. In this, our sample appears to differ markedly from the broader population, in which 56% of households have a child under 18 and one-third have a child under 6.

There is some heterogeneity in gig workers' education. While nearly 3 in 10 workers surveyed (27%) had not finished their schooling, more than half (54%) had either lower or upper secondary education and around 10% had a university degree or other tertiary qualification. Here, the platform workers appeared to have acquired more education than the adult population as a whole (in which 54% had not finished their schooling, and around 5% had some tertiary qualification). This may reflect the youth of platform workers relative to the adult population or, potentially, barriers to entry in other fields for migrants with qualifications acquired elsewhere. Moreover, platform work appears to offer a means of reconciling paid work and further education, given that around one-quarter of workers (26%) were also studying at the time of the survey (compared with 9% of adults in South Africa).

Other notable observations include the workers' place of residence; most, if not all, lived in township or other low-income areas in their city – with significant negative consequences for their ability to engage in paid work, owing to transport and security issues, as discussed below. Several interviewees were internal or international migrants, having migrated to large

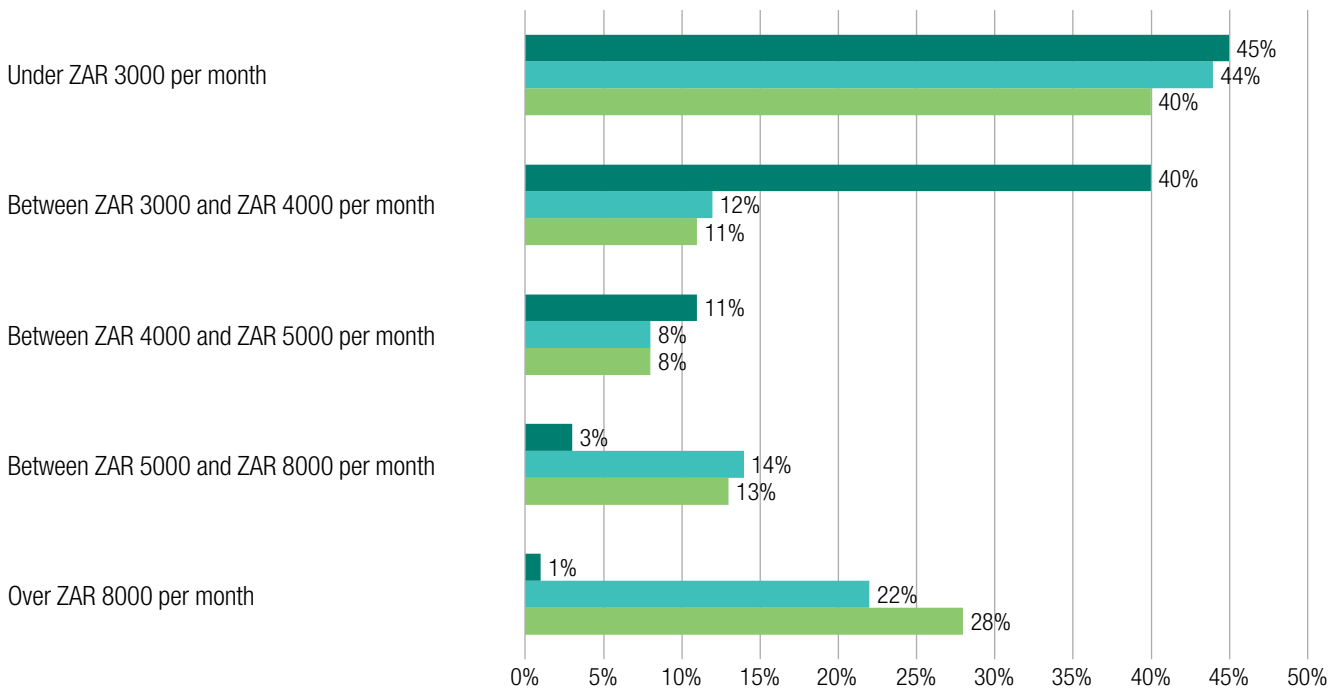
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20 Population-wide statistics in this section are computed from the *General household survey 2017* unless noted (STATS SA, 2018c).

South African cities to seek work. Exploration of the household earnings of gig workers gives additional insights into their socioeconomic status (we focus on earnings from gig work and other income-generating activity in Chapter 5). The household income of platform workers and

their perceptions of their income indicate economic insecurity. Just below half of workers (45%) reported a monthly household income of under ZAR 3,000 (purchasing power parity (PPP) \$570), and an additional 40% reported an income of under ZAR 4,000 (PPP \$650)

**Figure 2 Monthly household income of platform workers surveyed and of South African households**

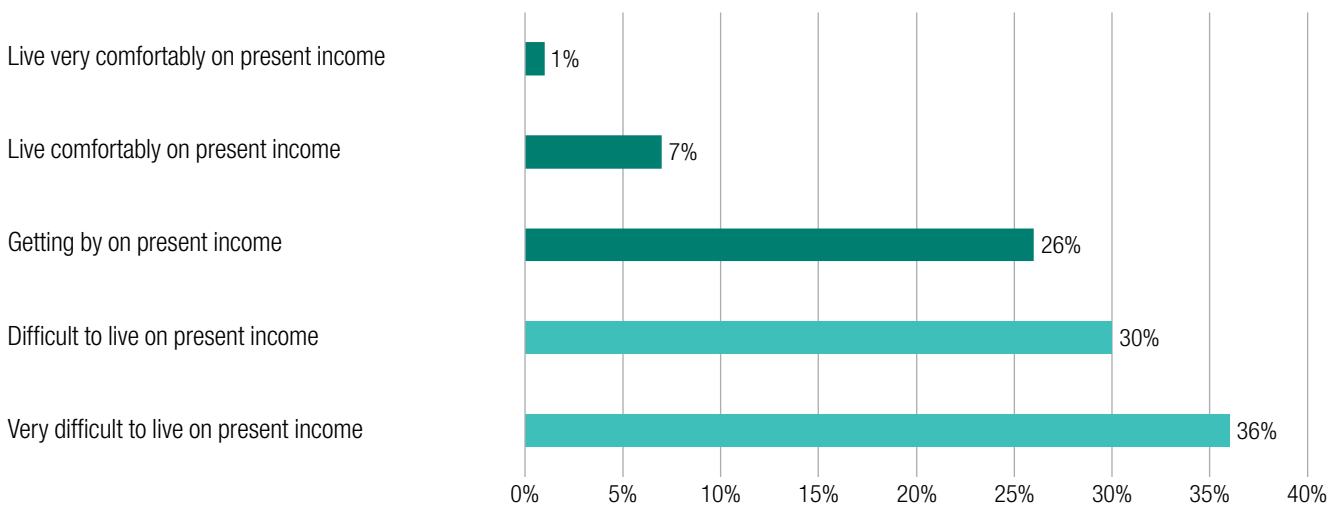


● Survey respondents ● SA-wide African/Black-headed households ● SA-wide all households

Note: South Africa-wide incomes are truncated top and bottom 1%.

Source: Our survey, N=377. South Africa-wide (SA-wide) data is computed from STATS SA (2018c).

**Figure 3 Perceptions of ease of living on current household income among platform workers surveyed in South Africa**



Source: Our survey, N=370.

(Figure 2).<sup>21</sup> Just 15% of platform workers have a household income above the national median income of ZAR 3,800 (\$ 619 PPP).

Fewer than one in five survey respondents (17%) felt their total household income was ‘enough to cover basic necessities like housing, food, education, clothing and transportation’. Nearly half (46%) felt their household income was insufficient, while 37% reported that it was ‘sometimes’ enough. Along similar lines, around two-thirds of workers felt it was very difficult (36%) or difficult (30%) to live on their household income (Figure 3).

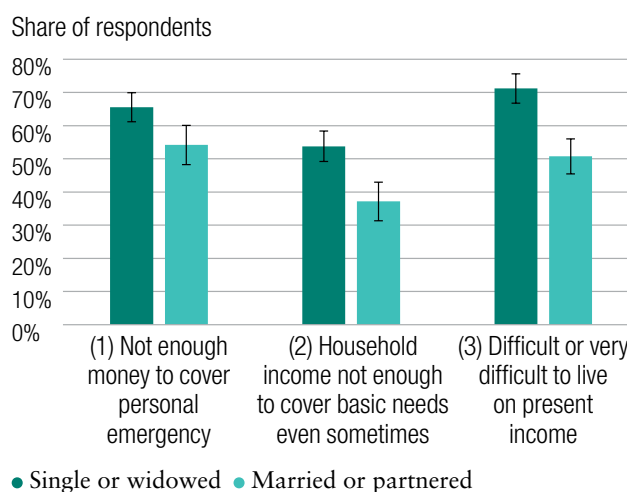
Single women appear to be particularly economically precarious, compared with married or partnered women, reporting higher levels of financial insecurity (Figure 4). Several single women described during interviews how they came to be in their situation – often citing the departure or death of their partner/husband. While most of the workers interviewed reported living in financial difficulty, those who became single particularly emphasised the precarity they lived in as a direct result:

their father left me and does not even contribute a cent. (Michelle, Cape Town)

I was married and my husband passed away last year, now I am alone and it’s really difficult. (Simlindile, Johannesburg)

Data we obtained for one platform in Kenya showed that women accounted for just over one-third of workers and pointed to a very gendered distribution of many task categories, reflecting traditional occupational divides – for example, all but one housekeeper/nanny was female. Interviews suggested that the gig platforms involved in this study tended to attract individuals with lower levels of education, who were used to casual work in the informal economy or had been unemployed, and whose focus was on economic survival: ‘Because I’m like jobless, I can’t ignore [a gig]. I must go.’ (Patience, waitress, Nairobi).

**Figure 4 Reports of financial insecurity among single and partnered platform workers in South Africa**



Note: For (1) N=191 (119 single, 72 partnered); for (2) N=189 (119 single, 70 partnered); for (3) N=374 (236 single, 138 partnered). Vertical bars depict confidence intervals.

Source: Our survey.

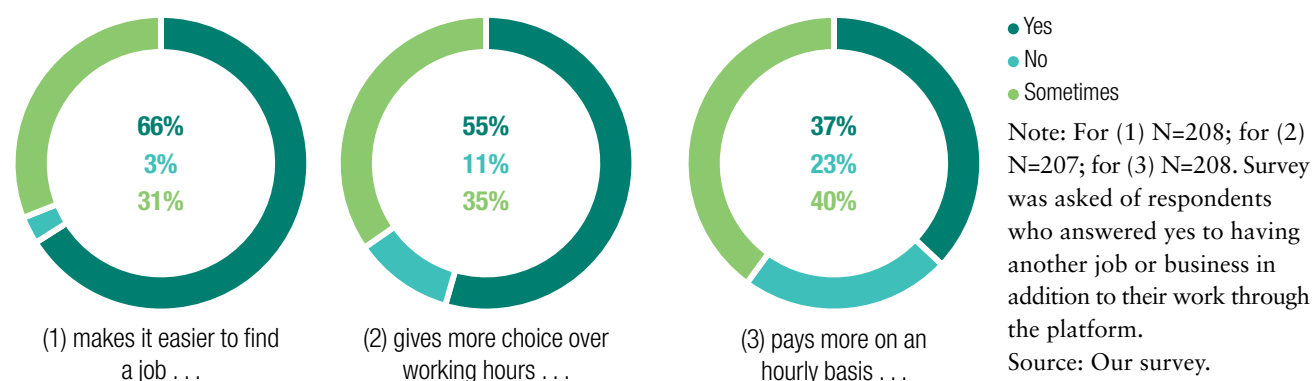
## 4.2 Work before/alongside gig work

Our face-to-face interviews with workers in South Africa provided insights into the work they engaged in before joining the platform. Several workers described being unemployed, notably because of a lack of economic opportunities or their caring responsibilities – e.g., one participant cited having a baby and no childcare option. Those in paid work engaged in various activities before joining the platform – including work in shops and other types of casual or informal work, with several mentioning street vending. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, paid domestic work was the most frequently cited work engaged in before joining the platform, whether live-in or day labour within private homes, sometimes obtained via an agency. Some had engaged in other commercial cleaning work.

Once registered, gig workers tended to engage in other forms of paid work alongside platform work with around half (52%) of survey respondents reporting an additional job or business or that they worked for another platform. Yet there were indications that the platform often provided the bulk of workers’ income: nearly three-quarters of

<sup>21</sup> The PPP conversion factor is 6.14 for 2018 (World Bank, 2019). Average monthly household income in South Africa was ZAR 8,376 (PPP \$1,364 in 2011), above the household income of 99% of survey respondents; the huge gap between the median and mean reflects the inequality that characterises the South African economy.

**Figure 5 Compared to other jobs you do, the platform . . .**



respondents (73%) reported that the platform was the main source of their earnings in the previous month. Among the remainder, the most common sources were another job (permanent or temporary) (49%), and spousal or family support (18%). A lack of other opportunities was commonly cited by those for whom the platform was their only source of work, as one interviewee explained:

There are no jobs in my area so if the platform doesn't send me a booking I will be at home sleeping. There is nowhere I can go really. (Akumzi, Cape Town)

The additional work that the platform provided is highlighted in the data we collected on time use.<sup>22</sup> This data suggests around three-quarters of registered workers had worked through the platform in a given week, and this group had worked on average over three days more that week than registered workers who had not worked through the platform that week. Both those who had worked through the platform and those who had not had worked around three days on other jobs, while a sizeable share of both groups (around 40%) had also spent time looking for work – on average six to seven hours that same week.

Among those who reported other paid work alongside their platform work, several participants described taking 'chars' or 'side-hustles' when the chance arose, for example, intermittent day labour on a nearby farm. However, domestic work with private clients was most frequently cited, sometimes through private bookings taken from clients they met during their work on the gig platform. Workers

described varied feelings for their other work vis-à-vis their platform work – some felt that private domestic-work clients can be less reliable compared to the platform, while others appeared to be more positive about their private clients, for example, mentioning 'extras' they more frequently obtain, such as a Christmas bonus, items no longer used in the household and food.

In addition, survey respondents were asked how work from the platform differed from other jobs they did in three key respects: ease of finding work, choice and hourly pay. Their responses again indicate that most workers perceived platform work as being easier to find than other work, with some evidence of more choice over working hours and a pay rate that was higher or sometimes higher than for other jobs they did (Figure 5). In addition, nearly all survey respondents (91%) reported that working through the platform allowed them more freedom and control in their work. But at the same time, most expressed a desire for more stable employment – asked if they would accept a permanent job with acceptable pay, two-thirds (67%) responded in the affirmative while 21% were unsure. Just 12% indicated they would not accept such an offer.

We also spoke to several workers no longer active on the platform – either through voluntarily becoming inactive or through being deactivated by the platform. Those who had become inactive largely did so because they found other employment opportunities with conditions they perceived as better. One reported during an interview that her new contract cleaning job offered better money and that working hours 'are fixed so I am able to

22 We collected this data in rounds 3 and 9 – the results were very similar and are averaged across the rounds.

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plan my life' (Jostina, Cape Town). Another was offered a live-in role with a client she met while working on the platform and struggling financially:

I told her my story that I never got maternity leave on the platform when I was pregnant and I needed to spend more time with my child. That's when she suggested we move in with her. I am still registered with the platform, but I have not been taking any bookings. Looking back, I feel like I made the biggest mistake. She gives me ZAR 1,500 and that's peanuts. I feel like a charity case but I am actually working every day. The platform gave me flexibility and more money. But I feel more secure being here because there the bookings are never guaranteed. (Charlene, Cape Town)

The deactivated workers we interviewed all cited doing '*chars*' since being no longer able to work via the platform and were seeking more stable employment.

In Kenya, prior to joining the platforms, the gig workers we interviewed were either employed in casual work in the informal economy, running small informal businesses (such as a taxi or carpentry shop) or were unemployed and seeking work through more 'traditional' means. A few women interviewed had not worked for pay prior to their gig work. For many men, however, gig platforms offered a second income source, alongside earnings from a small business, traditional casual work or other employment. Traditional means of finding such work that were cited included, being employed at a shop waiting all day for clients to come, women waiting by the roadside for a client to pick them up for a cleaning or nanny job, knocking on people's doors to offer their services and asking friends to refer them to potential employers:

Most of the time I leave the house and go and sit outside apartments at their gates. You wait for someone to call you to go and wash their clothes. If you're lucky and you get called to go wash, then you get some money. That's how I've been surviving. (Cynthia, housekeeper, Nairobi)

There was strong evidence that workers engaged in multiple income-generation activities to improve their earnings. Our survey of workers on one Kenyan platform (N=80) suggested that 80% had another job or 'side hustle' – however the huge majority (90%) felt that the platform offered them better choices for work than other options. Many engaged in similar income-earning activities to those carried out via their own small business, using the traditional ways of finding clients for their services. Indeed, the nature of traditional casual work, which often sees participants engage in various types of task-based activities, was turned to their advantage on the platform where most gig workers' profiles indicated more than one skill set (e.g. nanny and cook, or driver and gardener). This meant they could be available for varied tasks, increasing their chances of finding a gig. Often, these skills had been picked up during previous paid work, self-taught or gained through informal apprenticeships.

### 4.3 Why are workers engaging in the gig economy?

Workers participating in this research had a relatively similar set of motivations for using gig platforms (Table 1). In both South Africa and Kenya, the majority cited access to work as their primary reason for joining – the platforms provided an easier way to find work and helped them to find more clients. In South Africa, around two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents reported that the platform gave them better choices for work, while the remainder felt they had no other choices. In our interviews in both countries, platform workers echoed these motivations, perceiving the platform as an easier way to access paid work than other available options. Interviewees described needing an income in the case of those unemployed, or needing to increase income or have a more regular income for those already in paid work, and feeling the platform could give an opportunity to do this:

I was working in a small grocery store as a cashier. But that didn't pay me much. That's why I ended up moving to join the platform because it had better money at the time. (Charlene, Cape Town)

**Table 1 Most important and second most important reasons workers reported working through platforms in South Africa and Kenya**

Motivation for joining platform	South Africa		Kenya	
	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
It is an easier way to find work	39%	44%	33%	33%
It gives me flexibility over my work	23%	19%		
It gives me more choice over when I work			15%	10%
It gives me more choice over who I work for			4%	6%
It helps me find more clients	17%	17%	44%	23%
It pays better than other kinds of work	13%	13%	4%	17%
For another reason	8%	5%	2%	4%
There is no other reason		3%		8%

Source: Our survey.

Note: For South Africa, N=636 (first reason), N=640 (second reason). For Kenya, N=58 (first reason), N=55 (second reason). Different wording was used to capture flexibility in each country as a result of cognitive testing: in South Africa, ‘flexibility’ was preferred, in Kenya, the concept needed more explanation and we ended up instead dividing it into having more choice over when to work and over who to work for.

I joined the platform because I had no job, first of all. (Patience, waitress, Nairobi)

Platforms ease the burden of seeking casual work, both physically and financially. In Kenya, some gig workers described finding platform work to be as simple as responding to a text message. The cost of airtime notwithstanding, they considered this easier and cheaper than traditional ways of finding work, which required looking for clients by moving from place to place:

Yeah, because you don’t have to go door to door, asking for jobs. They’ll do it for you. (Martha, housekeeper and nanny, Nairobi)

Survey responses demonstrating workers’ somewhat positive views around the flexibility and choice over gig work relative to other options were echoed to some extent in interviews, signalling that gig work goes some way towards supporting worker-led engagement in the labour market. For example, in South Africa, some workers described the platform as offering more flexible and higher-paid domestic work than other work available to them, including other forms of domestic work (e.g. Petronella, Johannesburg). One worker had previously worked with the

agency ‘Marvellous Maids’, noting that while this company provided some transport to bookings, the money was too little and the hours of work were fixed (which she perceived negatively).

In both countries, female gig workers related their motivations to their family situation. Most sought paid work to enable them to provide for or contribute to the financial needs of the household, and/or to gain financial independence from their husbands. Some had been encouraged and supported by their husbands to find paid work for this reason, as a participant from Kenya explained:

Before I joined the platform, yeah, I was just depending on my husband. Of which it was very difficult life. [. . .] [Platform work is] good because it has really helped me. Because my kids are now going to school. (Isabella, housekeeper and nanny, Nairobi)

In South Africa too, several participants alluded to family wishes, including those of their husbands, as a reason to engage in gig work:

The money was better than what I was getting at [my last job]. I also wanted to get home early. Sometimes I used to get home at 11 from work and my husband would complain. (Zukelwa, Cape Town)

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# 5 Gender, the gig economy and quality of work

This chapter addresses the critical question of whether and how the gig economy (and specific platform design features) can enable better working conditions. In doing so, it draws on key aspects of work quality outlined in Chapter 2, highlighting those that emerged as salient in the accounts of the gig workers we spoke with – among them, the level and stability of earnings; flexible working arrangements and the extent to which these preferences are fulfilled; safety and security; access to labour and social protections; learning opportunities and the professionalisation of offerings; and possibilities for organisation/collective action. We find that while platforms offer some positive features that workers valued (and which improved their working conditions), at their current scale, the ability of platform companies to alleviate the broad structural economic conditions that restrict the availability and quality of work available to marginalised and disadvantaged women in South Africa and in Kenya is likely limited. Nevertheless, we argue that gig work is experienced in some distinctive ways that require the attention of platforms and policy-makers; that some aspects of working conditions are able to be shaped by platform actions (e.g. safety on the job, learning opportunities/training and, to a large extent, earnings); and that there is a need to ensure that platforms facilitate access to established labour rights and social protections.

## 5.1 Pay in gig work

Platform design features determine workers' terms of payment. In some cases, workers bid to carry

out a service, meaning that the payment for a task will vary, whereas in other cases (notably where the service is perceived to be uniform), it is common to establish a standard rate per hour or task. Some platforms also enable clients to tip workers through the platform payment system, while some workers reported receiving tips or in-kind benefits directly from clients.

Each payment modality raises challenges. Under the former, where individuals bid for work, it was reported that some workers were unsure how to price their services, resulting in their bids being rejected and/or client complaints about receiving a range of quotes for the same service. With standard rates, some workers were dissatisfied that the platform modality did not allow them to negotiate with clients over their pay.

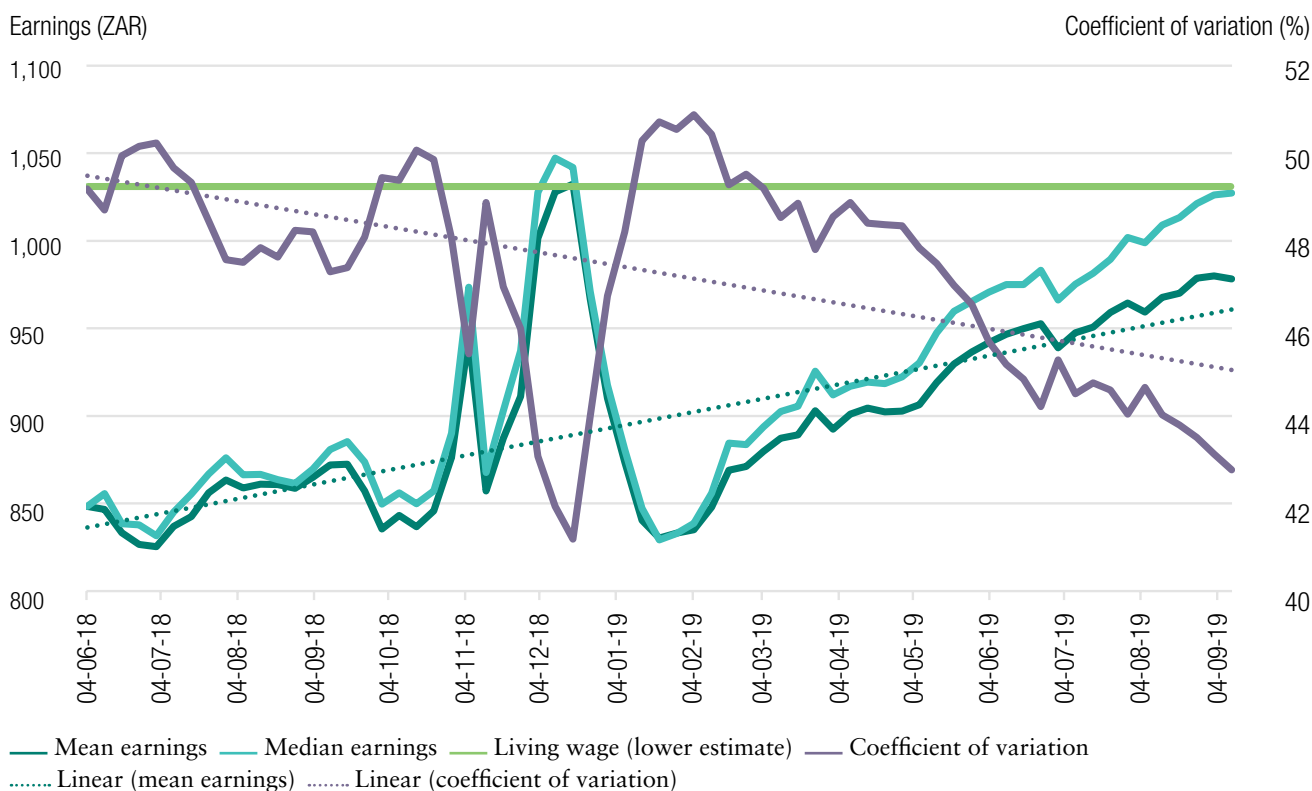
In South Africa, using platform data, we have looked at levels of pay and fluctuations over time and among workers, and have compared the circumstances of platform domestic workers versus those in traditional domestic work arrangements. We have also examined worker perceptions of their income and its sufficiency through survey data and interviews. In Kenya, we interviewed workers and key informants about their perceptions of gig worker earnings and how it compared with earnings in conventional jobs.

### 5.1.1 South Africa

The platform stipulates an hourly rate, which is around double the official minimum wage for domestic workers (depending on worker tenure on the platform), but without any guarantee of regular work. However, the minimum wage – set



**Figure 6 Average and median weekly earnings of platform workers surveyed in South Africa**



Source: Author computation of the platform data.

Note: N=75, 174. A four-week moving average is used to smooth fluctuations.

at 75% of that which applies to other workers – has been heavily criticised as being both inequitable and insufficient to provide a living wage (Harrisberg, n.d.). If a worker is able to work eight hours a day through the platform, we estimate that this would provide her household, on average, with a living wage (using living-wage data from Harrisberg, n.d.). However, our calculations (see Annex 1 for details) show that, on average, workers with full-time availability (five days or more) generally had utilisation rates that hovered around 60% of a 40-hour week, over a 1-year period (November 2017–December 2018). Platform data additionally suggest that utilisation is positively correlated with tenure, such that variability in income tends to diminish for those workers who have been on the platform for longer.

Earnings data, available for detailed analysis between June 2018 and mid-September 2019, show that weekly earnings for workers with five or more days availability per week, excluding voluntary ‘days off’, averaged ZAR 900 (PPP \$145) (with a median of ZAR 910 or PPP \$150).

This is around 45-50% higher than the minimum wage for domestic workers working at least 27 hours weekly as of December 2018 (ZAR 616 or PPP \$100). However, it nonetheless falls short of a living wage (as per Harrisberg, n.d.).

Estimates of household income needed for a household of four to exceed the poverty line are ZAR 5,276 (Finn, 2015) and ZAR 4,125 per month (Budlender et al., 2015). The coefficient of variation suggests average variation from mean earnings of close to 50% each week. The data exhibit seasonal variation – notably a peak in earnings in December and a trough in January – but the overall trend over the 16-month period is for average and median earnings to rise and variation to decline (Figure 6).

An important issue in the literature on gig work is the overhead financial costs of such work, particularly where gig workers supply equipment needed to carry out a task. The chief costs workers reported included airtime and transport, and childcare for mothers of young children – though the South African platform introduced a data-free app in November 2018. In South Africa, we assume

transport costs of ZAR 40 for each day worked, which is likely to be a conservative estimate as it assumes one round trip per day only.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, this equates to over one hour of earnings daily. While these costs are not specific to gig work (to reach ‘*chars*’ or other types of day labour or employment, for example, workers would generally pay for their transport), the short bookings that can characterise gig work can render these costs a higher share of total earnings.

Several workers expressed concerns relating to overhead costs. As one explained, private bookings pay better once earnings after expenses are taken into account, factoring in the length of gig bookings:

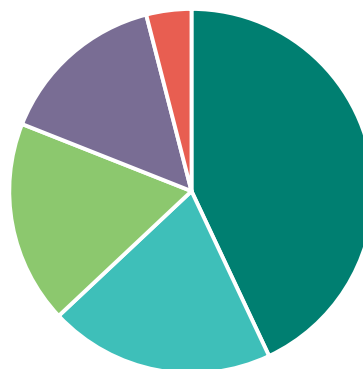
We work according to the hours which you are booked. Sometimes we work for three hours sometimes four hours but it depends. This is the main reason why I only made myself available for two days because for me, it doesn’t make sense to work for three hours. It’s a waste of my money because you only work for your transport and this is why I prefer my own private bookings.  
(Ayanda, Cape Town)

Nevertheless, over half of survey respondents (56%) reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their pay, perhaps because a significant share perceived that their hourly earnings were higher than they would be in other types of work: 37% reported that working under the platform was more lucrative than other jobs on an hourly basis and 40% indicated this was ‘sometimes’ the case. Other workers stressed that the realistic alternative to working with the platform was not having work given the broader climate, characterised by high un- and underemployment:

I am not saying that I am super excited about the money that I am getting but it’s better than staying at home.  
(Akumzi, Cape Town)

There are likely to be several reasons for this mixed picture: gig workers often had different

**Figure 7 Share of South African platform workers’ income from the platform in the previous month**



● All income from platform (43%) ● Most of it (20%)  
● Around half (18%) ● Small amount (15%) ● None (4%)

Source: Our survey. N=386.

forms of work with different income streams attached (Figure 7), and much of the work they were engaged in (including gig work) seemed to be carried out until something better came along. Some respondents clearly stated that platform work paid better than other work, but others reported alternative options more favourably – notably an inactive worker who had left the platform for a better option, and workers who took bookings from well-paying private clients.

Overall, workers were more concerned about the hours of work they received than the pay rate, and indeed, their satisfaction with their pay appeared to hinge on the number of hours of work they obtained through the platform:

It’s OK if you can get everyday jobs from Monday to Friday but the problem is sometimes you can stay two times in a week without going to work.  
(Simlindile, Johannesburg)

This is a key point: income was often not stable as the irregularity in receiving bookings meant that some gig workers experienced significant changes in their income level from week to week. We examined the characteristics of those workers with full-time availability who appeared to be faring better on the platform

23 Following Harrisberg (n.d.), we use as a benchmark the cost of getting from Khayelitsha, a Cape Town township, to a Cape Town suburb, which takes two minibus taxi trips; in early 2019, we estimated the cost at ZAR 40–44 for a return trip.

### Box 5 Who are platform superstars?

An issue that has received some attention in debates over the gig economy is the distribution of available jobs among registered workers. Some past research has probed whether there is evidence of a ‘superstar’ effect in which a small share of workers take a disproportionate share of jobs versus a ‘long tail’ effect in which jobs are more evenly distributed (Codagnone et al., 2016). Noting that the evidence is ‘limited and inconclusive’, Codagnone and colleagues’ review nonetheless finds no evidence of a longtail effect in either crowdwork or on-demand platforms and clear evidence of a concentration effect. They attribute this to the positive effect of reputation (i.e. ratings) rather than skills, and the negative effect of discrimination.

To illustrate, Ipeirotis (2010) finds that on Mechanical Turk, a crowdwork platform, 10% of ‘Mturkers’ performed 75% of completed tasks and earned 70% of total income. Along similar lines, Musthag and Ganesan (2013) find that in an on-demand platform active in several US cities, 10% of workers completed 80% of tasks, which they attribute to the willingness of ‘super agents’ to travel longer distances to reach jobs and to organise their work efficiently, so that they perform several jobs in nearby areas. In theory, a concentration effect can be expected where there is ‘vertical’ differentiation in quality (of the task or the worker), and a longtail effect where there is ‘horizontal differentiation’ or variety (Bar-Isaac et al., 2012, cited in Codagnone et al., 2016).

On the platform in South Africa, we might expect greater evidence of a longtail effect. At the same time, it is plausible that concentration on all platforms would be likely to increase over time given that some workers have the opportunity to acquire more experience than others (and those with higher ratings are more likely to focus on the income-generation opportunities the platform provides). Indeed, we do not find the concentration that has been observed on other platforms – but nonetheless, we find that the top 10% of full-time workers (those available for 5 or more days weekly) were taking on around one quarter of the available hours of work carried out by full-time workers (see Table 2).

We consider determinants of being a ‘superstar’, defined in terms of being in the top decile in terms of hours worked (see Annex 1 for details). Ratings, first and foremost, as well as tenure and the number of days a worker is available for ‘platform’ work each week display a positive and statistically significant relationship with ‘superstar’ status. Socio-demographic markers including age, marital status, education and geography (at the city level) do not display any statistically significant association. Critically, the positive relationship between ‘days available’ and the likelihood of being a ‘superstar’ points to flexibility being inversely related to top performance (even among workers with at least 5 days available per week). So, while flexibility is a feature the platform offers its workers, it is not necessarily associated with being a top performer.

**Table 2 Cumulative share of hours worked by share of workers on the platform (%)**

Share of workers	Share of hours
0	0
10	0.002
20	1
30	4
40	10
50	19
60	31
70	44
80	59
90	77
100	100

Note: N=83,973.

Source: Computed from the platform’s data.

than others in terms of capturing a larger share of the available work – so called ‘superstars’. ‘Superstar’ status does not seem to be linked to any socio-demographic characteristics or attitudinal variables, but rather to ratings, tenure on the platform and being relatively more available (Box 5).

Most survey respondents (84%) reported being the person who contributed the most to their household income while nearly all (95%) had financial dependents. However, in absolute terms, the majority signalled that their platform earnings were insufficient, with some indicating that they could not meet their basic needs and financial responsibilities through platform work, nor were they able to save:

I have to balance everything with the money that I earn. I sacrifice to eat less and opt to walk distances than paying for taxi fares [to gigs].  
(Akumzi, Cape Town)

I have to pay for everything and the money I earn is too little. Its peanuts. I can’t even afford to buy myself clothes. I have to rely on the clothes that the people I work for give me. I am a charity case even though I work every day. And you see things are now expensive. (Michelle, Cape Town)

The ability for workers to save money varied – one interviewee reported being able to save if she took many gigs, although this changed after she had a child and her expenses increased, but several workers reported having no option to save money after their expenses:

There is no chance to save through the platform. If I die today, I know I’m leaving my child with nothing.  
(Ayanda, Cape Town)

We are not saving anything. Once you get the money you pay rent, school fees, transport to school, and crèche fees for the little one, and buy clothes for kids. In general I can say expenses run over my salary so there is no saving. It’s just

trying to make ends meet.  
(Petronella, Johannesburg)

Importantly, the workers interviewed who were no longer active on the platform reported that stability of income was a positive feature of their new employment – even where the overall level of pay was low:

At the guesthouse it’s much better because you know every day you go to work and you get your fixed salary at the end of the month. With the platform it’s very uncertain, everything is uncertain. From the money you are going to earn to getting the booking itself and once you get the booking you don’t even know what to expect because you might find a house that has not been cleaned for two months.  
(Matodi, Cape Town)

### 5.1.2 Kenya

As in South Africa, gig work in Kenya clearly remains a survival strategy for most workers, but at a minimum it enabled workers to earn some income for themselves and their families. For instance, Simon, a building contractor, who had joined the platform during a challenging time, had been able to move from ‘a tin house’ to a bigger two-room stone house as a result of increasing his client base through the platform. For others, gig work ensured they could meet the sustenance needs of their family:

At least I know at the end of the day there is food on the table for my kids. (Isabella, housekeeper and nanny, Nairobi)

While we did not ask workers to specify the amount they earned, we were interested in the words they used to describe their pay (typically words such as ‘good’, ‘okay’, ‘average’ and ‘better’). We interpreted this as meaning either the pay was equivalent to what they would earn in similar jobs acquired through traditional means, or that, regardless of its level, they were content with the opportunity to earn an income. Notably, gig workers

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did not express any concern over the amount they were paid per gig, but rather a need to work more so that they could earn more. They also valued being paid through the platform, as this ensured no delays or need to follow up directly with the client.

Yeah. It's just my main source of income. Although it is very painful because now, I am just going only one day and the other six days I am just in the house. (Isabella, housekeeper and nanny, Nairobi)

One representative of a platform offering household services said that they ensured that workers were paid at the 'market rate' for their service (i.e. the rate they would be paid to perform the same service outside the platform economy), pointing out that this was often higher than the government rate for casual labourers (platform representative, Nairobi). However, several key informants, notably worker union representatives, expressed concerns over the pricing of some on-demand work models which rely on worker bids rather than a standardised pricing structure. In fact, one platform was in the process of standardising both the prices that workers charged for their services and product offerings – in a pilot to promote this shift within one of their service categories they reported recording more sales in two weeks than they had in the previous two years.<sup>24</sup>

The representative from the Ministry for Information and Communication Technology described a Ministry study which found that most gig workers (in on-demand and crowdwork) earned on average about the recommended minimum wage per month. However, this estimate did not specify the number of tasks or hours a worker would have to complete to earn this amount, nor did it factor in overheads such as the cost of an internet connection, airtime, transport, etc. The adequacy of the minimum wage itself is another concern, as previously discussed, with evidence suggesting it is well below a living wage for a typical family (Guzi and Kahanec, 2018).

## 5.2 Flexibility

In Chapter 2, we distinguished between employer- and worker-led flexibility. Our findings for both South Africa and Kenya suggest that flexibility is a core offering that platform companies advertise to their workforce, and also provide some evidence of worker-led flexibility. However, we find that platform operating models mainly strengthen employer-driven flexibility, whether the platform or its clients are considered to be the employer. This is because, by design, the operating model allows platforms and clients to contract workers only when they need them, and therefore respond to fluctuating demand at minimal cost.

### 5.2.1 Flexibility in the location of gigs

In South Africa, most workers that we interviewed raised the location of gigs as a challenge – being too far away and with no reliable and affordable transport link with their home neighbourhood. While workers can specify on the platform where they wish to work, the legacy of racial and economic segregation in South Africa persists such that many workers live in township or other low-income areas that are geographically far from their more affluent clients' neighbourhoods, with poor transport links.

At first I used to work in the area [A] . . . But I found out that this area was too expensive for me in terms of transport because I would use two to three taxis on one trip. Then I changed to the area [B]. (Alister, Cape Town)

Some interviewees cited distance and associated commuting challenges as a reason to decline bookings (e.g. Faheema, Cape Town). However, others chose to take bookings in faraway suburbs in zones where the houses are big – by making themselves available to travel to and work in these areas, some workers found that they could more easily obtain longer bookings/shifts (e.g. Zukelwa, Cape Town).

In Kenya too, the cost of commuting to a gig – in terms of time and transport – were important

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24 It should also be noted that other factors than the standardised pricing structure may be at play; this pilot was accompanied by a focused marketing campaign, to which some of these additional sales may also be attributed.

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influences over worker decisions to bid for/accept a gig. The gig workers we spoke with all lived in different areas of Nairobi, often in the informal settlements or neighbouring counties where rents were more affordable. For several workers, this necessitated long commuting times, which in turn could mandate very early starts and, for some, additional financial outlay for childcare and/or transport. For example, Ruth, a housekeeper, would start her days as early as 3.30 a.m. – this required her to pay for a motorcycle, because she feared being mugged if she walked to a public transportation stop at that hour. As in South Africa, workers recounted rejecting or not pursuing gigs that they deemed to be too far away due to higher transport costs.

### 5.2.2 Flexibility in the timing of gigs

On the face of it, some evidence suggests platform work affords considerable flexibility to workers in the timing of work. Indeed, 92% of our survey respondents in South Africa reported having worked on convenient days during the previous week and 88% reported having worked at convenient times. Indeed, the platform allows workers to specify the days they are available to work (which they can change if their circumstances alter), to take a certain number of ‘days off’ and to specify longer periods during which they are unavailable. Platform data suggests that one-third of active workers opt to work less than full-time and, on any given day, approximately 30% of active workers opt to take a ‘day off’.

Some workers reported a mix of ad hoc and regular clients, with some ad hoc bookings turning into a longer-term, more regular relationship with gigs booked further in advance and during the same time slot.<sup>25</sup> Among our survey respondents, nearly two-thirds (63%) reported having at least one regular booking with a client while around 40% worked only through regular bookings with the same client.

Yet our interviews suggest mixed experiences among workers in relation to the benefits of this flexibility. Several interviewees agreed that, comparatively, platform work was more flexible than other types of work, including ‘traditional’ domestic work – and therefore a reason to join

the platform along with the low pay of previous roles (or persistent unemployment). For example, one worker explained how she felt the platform allowed her to manage other commitments better than other paid work options:

choosing hours is good because I can accommodate the other things that I want to do somewhere else. Interviewer: You have said that you want to go to church. Interviewee: Or else I want to go to clinic first then I can choose a booking that can start at 2 pm or 1 pm other than someone that I am employed to who says strictly 8.00 a.m. That hour choosing is better because you can accommodate anything in your life. Interviewer: OK, and the platform is helping you to choose working hours whenever you like. Interviewee: Yes. (Petronella, Johannesburg)

This ostensible flexibility, however, must be interpreted alongside other features of how the platform model operates in practice. First, the flexibility the model offers is circumscribed by the number of workers a platform registers, as well as client demand for bookings and their preferences over the day, timing and length of bookings. This ‘constrained flexibility’ is inherent to any service offering, but arguably poses more of a constraint to gig workers who work for a range of different clients and therefore may find it harder to build trust (and the flexibility this may bestow) than a worker in a more stable placement. Second, the ability of clients to book (and cancel) cleaners on an ad hoc basis – which is designed into the platform operating model – introduces considerable uncertainty for workers. Third, the need to agree to a fixed number of hours in advance increases the likelihood for clients to insist on more work than can reasonably be done in a given time, putting pressure on workers to acquiesce (or risk being rated negatively or not being booked again by that household and therefore losing someone from their client ‘pool’). We explore each issue in turn.

First and foremost, the extent of workers’ economic opportunities in the gig economy depends

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25 Such longer-term relationships can stay on the platform, though some workers and clients end up making private arrangements.

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## Box 6 The contribution of flexibility to life satisfaction

Nearly two-thirds of workers surveyed (64%) reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their lives. We sought to understand better the extent to which job-related characteristics were associated with life satisfaction.

Although hampered by small sample sizes, our analysis yielded some thought-provoking results (see Annex 1 for details). The only variables positively associated with life satisfaction, our dependent variable, at statistically significant levels are age (age is negatively associated with life satisfaction till the early 30s, and positively associated thereafter), being in better health, and hours worked (which is highly correlated with earnings). Notably, the variables associated with flexibility (number of days available per week, and reporting flexibility as a motivation for being on the platform) do not display any significant associations with life satisfaction. In this our results contrast with those of Berger et al. (2018), in whose study Uber drivers in London reported higher levels of life satisfaction than other workers, which the authors attribute in part to a preference for the flexibility and autonomy that the platform offers. In the present study, we do not see any evidence that flexibility, per se, is associated with higher levels of satisfaction; rather, the results highlight a desire for more hours of work.

In our surveys, workers were asked to specify in their own words one thing they would change about their work on the platform, if anything. It is notable that the largest share of respondents answering this question (17%) answered ‘none’, which could express satisfaction with their conditions or, conversely, a feeling of having no control over most aspects of the platform model.<sup>26</sup> The next most common response was a desire for longer hours and more work (20% of workers). Smaller shares of workers wanted assistance with transport (8%), a respectful workplace (6%) and higher pay (6%). Worker responses included:

The platform is helping me and I am gaining a lot of experience while I am booked from different clients and it’s helping me to do the things I couldn’t do when I was unemployed.

The platform is good because I am able to take care of my family and have some sort of development in my life. It’s also nice because you work and rest and you don’t work every day – the work is also really easy.

I have nothing to hate about my work through the platform because work is easy. I also like the fact that we can choose our off days, but the problem is that I am not getting the bookings and I don’t know why.

I would like to change the working conditions because sometimes when you are going for a booking you use your own money and you don’t know where you are going. [. . .] Every day I must be on the app looking for work, it’s inconvenient for me. I just need to know that every day, I’m going to a certain place so that if I am buying a bus ticket, I do that and budget my money. Sometimes the hours are too little, sometimes they are too much.

largely on client bookings. Perhaps the most common issue that workers raised in relation to time was not being able to find as much work as they would like. This need for more work emerged as a more pressing concern than having more time to spend with family or on household chores. Indeed, when we analysed determinants of life

satisfaction among gig workers, hours worked showed a strong positive association, while neither measure of flexibility we considered (the number of days a worker made herself available and identifying flexibility as a key motivation for gig-work engagement) was statistically significant (Box 6). When asked if they would have preferred

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26 Out of 809 respondents, 64% opted to respond to this question. Among those who did respond, 17% of responses were inaudible.

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to work more in the previous week, 74% of respondents responded affirmatively, also indicating that the main reason they did not work was not having enough bookings. Furthermore, when asked more broadly if they would like to work more hours than they did via the platform, 62% responded ‘yes’ and 34%, ‘sometimes’; just 5% did not want to work more than they already did. Importantly, workers felt that if they got regular work, the platform was a better option for them:

Working for the platform is ok, at least if you can get everyday jobs from Monday to Friday but the problem is sometimes you can stay two times in a week without going to work.  
(Simlindile, Johannesburg)

Not getting enough bookings in some cases was a key reason that workers considered leaving a platform and seeking work elsewhere:

there is a day that you sit at home because you didn’t have any booking available of which it’s [a day marked available on the platform]. This will make you to decide to leave . . . for a full-time position. The bookings are a few. I do not work completely. It’s like [names day] I ended up removing, [names day] I am not getting anything at all.  
(Happiness, Johannesburg)

According to the platform representative, the platform has been through a process of learning about ‘utilisation’, explaining that ‘supply and demand is a very difficult thing to balance’ and that a lot more people want to join the platform than they can cater for, given rife unemployment. In addition, the platform ratings system is also a key determinant of the frequency of bookings and therefore working schedules. As the representative explained, workers with a higher average rating get more gigs but want longer hours, while those with lower ratings get less work (days with gigs booked) and so just want more confirmed bookings:

your utilisation is largely based on ratings and so . . . those who are above the mean,

for them getting longer bookings is more the issue because they are getting more than enough work and those at the bottom end of the market [the issue] is that they just want more work. (KII, platform representative)

The ability of the platform to provide work clearly rests on the volume of client bookings; clients also determine the days and times that bookings are available. The platform plays an active role in mediating schedules, notably through trying to regulate supply and demand throughout the week through a mixture of pricing/earnings incentives and by providing information to workers around which days are likely to provide the most income to them. Critically, one consequence for some workers was that they opted to be available for work when demand was likely to be higher rather than in line with their initial preferences – e.g. to work at weekends, rather than during the week.

Client trust also emerged as a key issue driving demand – often clients want to be at home with a worker, particularly when the relationship between worker and client is new. Although in a very few cases workers felt that clients were willing to agree gig timings in line with workers’ preferences (e.g. Precious, Cape Town), most workers reported that the client determined their schedule. This meant that workers often needed to wake up very early to be punctual and keep the client happy, as well as to meet client preference around their start time – which was often early in the morning as the clients themselves often had to leave to get to work. After a client and worker have built a relationship, the platform suggests or gives incentives (such as lower prices) to move a booking from the weekend to the week, to better spread supply and demand across the week.

The main thing that we have really tried to do is to use pricing to try and funnel more people into the week [. . .] but yeah, it’s been difficult to shift clients away from Saturdays and Sundays and a lot of it was because of security concerns in South Africa. [. . .] So trust is a big factor . . .  
(KII, platform representative)



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Most frequently, workers voiced a preference to work at times that would allow them to commute in daylight due to the significant security risks they face travelling in the dark. Early mornings in particular were discussed at length by several workers, with many reporting having been the victim of aggressive robberies in the dark, notably in winter:

Like now its winter and I stay in [area] . . . people are getting robbed every day. So 6 a.m. it will be very dark, and for instance you will be having a booking for 7 a.m. which means I will have to wake up by 5 a.m. then I will take my child to crèche by 6 a.m. because at the crèche they open at 6 a.m. I will then go to take whatever that I will take but it's not safe to move from my house to the school because it will be very dark so I do not want a 7 a.m. booking because it's a risk. I can't risk my life for ZAR 150 it won't work.  
(Faheema, Cape Town)

In this regard, workers perceived that the platform prioritised client preferences when this issue was raised:

A lot of people complain but they say the client wants to go work so they cannot change the time.  
(Faheema, Cape Town)

This is clearly a challenge: the platform changing the start times would likely result in clients no longer booking, and therefore fewer gigs available to workers.

A second main feature of the operating model is that its reliance on client bookings of cleaners on an ad hoc basis can introduce considerable uncertainty for workers. Workers would generally know by the afternoon if they had work for the following day, as they had to confirm booking requests (assuming the client did not cancel the booking). However, several workers cited the inconsistency of times worked from week to week, discussing frequent changes in the days and number of hours worked using terms such as 'uncertainty' and 'waiting' for bookings.

Most of the times I work in [area] from Monday to Saturday. Interviewer: I understand these are the days that you are available to work, but what is your reality – do you always get bookings every day from Monday to Saturday? Interviewee: No, sometimes I do not get bookings once or twice in a week.  
(Akumzi, Cape Town)

Regular clients (as opposed to ad hoc clients) who made repeat bookings with the same worker via the platform seemed to be viewed more favourably by workers as they provided some stability/ongoing predictability – although it cannot be said that this provided total stability as some workers also reported that regular clients would cancel gigs, including at the last minute.

These days I have been getting Monday bookings, but sometimes you can be disappointed when you are trusting that obviously Monday I am going to work. You already have a client that you have recruited that takes you every week so sometimes they can cancel the booking and you don't have anything to do other than staying at home.  
(Precious, Cape Town)

A third feature that restricted worker-led flexibility in practice was, in some cases, a perceived need to overwork to meet client demands for certain tasks to be completed within a fixed number of hours. While being able to leave the booking on time was cited as a positive attribute of some clients, several workers described how clients booked a few tasks in a short time slot on the platform, with the worker then asked to do much more work when they arrived. In this situation, the clients often put pressure on workers to finish but if they rushed to do so quality could be compromised, and so the worker risked getting a bad rating:

Let's say I have been booked for five hours [. . .]. It will be a big house that does not even tally with those five hours [. . .] but the client expects me to finish that job, so I am forced to add hours

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[. . .]. The client will be putting pressure on me to work fast, but if I work fast, I will get a bad rating attributed to not cleaning properly as the job was rushed. There is a serious problem there.  
(Faheema, FGD participant, Cape Town)

In response to this challenge, some clients added hours to a booking, and one worker reported that a client let her negotiate her hours and finish a job the next day. Another respondent reported that ‘others are just so rude’ (Jostina, Cape Town), while others described how the longer-than-expected hours can be problematic for the management of unpaid care (discussed further in the next chapter). The platform representative interviewed recognised these negative experiences and explained that workers are paid for time worked when this exceeds time booked and that the platform contains a mechanism for workers to no longer provide services to clients whom they rate poorly.

Finally, it should be noted that, for some workers, the concept of working to a schedule determined by hours was novel. Some saw this very positively, appreciating that the amount of time they were due to work at a gig was much clearer than in other kinds of non-platform work: ‘why I love to work for the platform is that I work with hours’ (Portia, Johannesburg).<sup>27</sup>

Similar challenges emerged in Kenya too – with workers describing long working hours, a need to comply with client demands regarding scheduling (and associated unpredictability), and, at times, the underestimation of the hours needed to complete a task. In Kenya, our focus on several different platforms revealed key differences in sectors geared towards providing household services (where we would argue that worker-led flexibility is limited) and those focused on services like ride-hailing, where higher demand – including throughout the whole day/night – enables greater worker say over when and where they work. Reflecting the nascent state of gig work in Kenya, a key difference with South Africa is the much lower availability of

regular bookings with the same client – though, at times, workers reported developing relationships with their clients to a point where they trusted working for them outside the gig platforms.

For platforms reliant on providing services to households, again, clients often set the time of the day/week to conduct a gig, with workers adjusting their schedules accordingly. Essentially, workers’ constant need for a gig (and uncertainty regarding when the next gig would be available) made it difficult for them to decline requests for their services at times they would prefer not to work, e.g. at weekends when caring for their family, etc. Further, gig platforms themselves prefer workers who are flexible with their working hours, i.e. who will not choose specific times and days of the week to work. There were some accounts of a limited ability to negotiate the timing of gigs, which could vary from client to client:

It’s them who tell me what time to arrive. That’s when I explain to them the situation with my child and ask to come at this particular time. Then we agree. If they refuse, then the hours that they have said I should be there, I sacrifice and go at that time.  
(Cynthia, housekeeper, Nairobi)

Gig work also can be said to redefine notions of ‘time off’. Because workers have multiple clients, and in theory, are managing their own schedules, it is up to them to decide whether they take days off. Some workers who valued a day off did not accept gigs on that day, or negotiated a day off if they had a regular, long-term assignment. Others opted to make themselves continually available, though in practice, apart from for drivers, there was insufficient demand for daily gigs.

Some workers such as Marah who worked with regular days and clients as a housekeeper, nanny and cook had successfully negotiated having a rest day after six working days (in line with Kenyan labour law). Others, like Ruth, perceived no option but to be available as much

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27 Some evidence points to a process of adaptation to working in this way – the platform representative suggested the company has to (and has an appetite to) educate workers on the model: ‘*We previously had someone in ops from Germany teaching our workers how to count hours and we have noted this as we cannot take it for granted since education is needed to work well.*’ (KII, platform representative, South Africa)

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as possible; once her child was three months old, she returned to her regular cleaning gigs, taking her child with her.

I have been working throughout except for the time I had a miscarriage, I took some time off to rest. And also, when I got this baby, then I also rested.

(Ruth, housekeeper, Nairobi)

As in South Africa, in many sectors of work in Kenya (ride-hailing being a notable exception), gig workers are reliant on client descriptions of the tasks they need to complete – if a client underestimated the work involved in completing a task, workers nonetheless typically reported feeling that they had no choice but to complete the workload (not least to secure a positive rating that would help in securing future gigs). While some aspects of extended time for gig work could be considered as overtime, neither workers nor platform companies considered charging for these extended working hours. While some workers did share with us complaints about having to work longer hours than the norm to complete client requests, they did not put forward any request for additional compensation, presumably for fear of jeopardising the next gig.

More broadly (and again with ride-sharing as the exception), there is rarely consistency in work because the nature of a gig changes with every client. Rather, workers are constantly adjusting to fit into the gigs available, working long hours to accomplish tasks given, but also waiting to know when the next gig will be available. The irregularity and unpredictability of gig work renders it difficult for workers to plan their time and budget their income. This is, in part, a function of the ‘start-up’ nature of many platforms in Kenya, which are not yet working at a scale that can provide regular work and face challenges in balancing supply and demand. However, one platform representative spoke of experimentation with a model that could place limits on flexibility in return for certain guarantees from the platform (see Chapter 7), and also of the platform’s intent to acquire regular clients and thereby offer gigs on a regular basis to workers (as with the platform in South Africa).

Worker strategies to cope with this uncertainty included, where viable, registering on a platform in more than one category and registering on more than one platform (as 19% of our survey respondents in South Africa did) to increase their chances of being offered work. The ride-hailing apps in particular were criticised by respondents for not having capped the number of registered drivers, with the consequence that drivers were registering on all available platforms in the hope of receiving work. Some workers also expressed a need to remain alert and available for work at all times, including remaining connected to the platform app throughout the day and night. Workers also expressed a desire to cultivate relationships with their clients, which could facilitate negotiations over working hours and pay (and having time off, when needed); however, they noted that gig work typically did not afford the possibility to build such relationships.

### 5.3 Safety and security

Crime rates are a concern for workers in LICs and many MICs, particularly in South Africa. One gauge of this is the intentional homicide rate, which is 34 per 100,000 inhabitants in South Africa, over 5 times the LIC and MIC average of 6 (similar to the Kenyan average of 5) (World Bank, 2019).

Broadly speaking, workers are exposed to distinct types of risk, based on their profiles, transport patterns and sites of work. Working hours often pose a considerable risk to platform workers because of the amount of time they spend travelling between gigs and because gigs often involve travelling during early mornings or late evenings. Some gig work – notably ride-sharing – can pose hazards to workers from clients in their vehicle or as a result of travelling to or through risky areas. Providing services to a range of unknown clients in their homes may also heighten safety risks to on-demand workers (Hunt and Machingura, 2016).

In South Africa, early starts were reported as a concern: workers relayed several instances of the armed and aggressive robbery of gig workers travelling to and from gigs:

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Last month when I was on my way to my booking, the robber wanted to take my handbag that had my cell phone inside. I could not afford to give away my handbag to the robber, so the robber stabbed me with a knife.  
(Akumzi, Cape Town)

One day when I was leaving the complex [client's residence] I met robbers with a car and they robbed me. They took money and my bank card [. . .] and they withdrew all the money. It was [right after we were paid by the platform] . . . all the money was taken away by the robbers.  
(Portia, Johannesburg)

This insecurity also compromised workers' ability to comply with platform requirements for regular communication. For example in South Africa, platform workers' reluctance to use their phones in public could render it difficult for them to report on their whereabouts, as 'it means that the otherwise sense of professionalism that they would like to have they are unable to, because their own safety is at risk' (KII, platform representative, South Africa).

Platforms focused on household services raise distinct concerns as the worker provides the service in a private home. In Kenya, a worker's sense of security determined if they accepted a given gig; women especially reported declining gigs at night or with clients they perceived as unsafe, even when the alternative was to be without work. For example, Mercy, who offered beauty services, automatically rejected all requests from male clients for this reason. Some workers also felt that platforms made too little effort to vet clients and on some platforms they themselves did not have the ability to rate clients or any other formal mechanism to provide feedback. Some workers had raised complaints over a client to a platform, but none knew if any further action had been taken. In both South Africa and Kenya, some workers reported instances of rude, aggressive or abusive treatment by clients, as well as accounts of other inappropriate behaviours including clients being drunk or using illegal drugs while the worker was in their home.

The client lifestyle is going to be a challenge to me because when you go to a client who takes marijuana or takes drugs or someone who wants to take something, a tot or a shot before you give the person service. . . . Especially marijuana because it is going to affect me.  
(Prudence, beautician, Nairobi)

For drivers too, safety considerations are paramount and indeed they have been cited as a key barrier to the recruitment and retention of women drivers on ride-hailing platforms (IFC, 2018). In Kenya, Ivy, a ride-hailing driver, and a Digital Taxi Forum (DTF) representative both explained that drivers decline requests from clients in areas deemed insecure, particularly at night. The DTF representative recounted that 34 driver deaths had been recorded in a 4-month period, alongside reports of robbery, sexual abuse and harassment.

## 5.4 Access to labour and social protections

A chief critique of digital platforms is that they deny workers the status of employees and therefore restrict their access to labour and contributory social protections, while removing the need for the platform to make any contributions on their behalf (De Stefano, 2016). This may be particularly harmful for women workers, given that they tend to be more reliant on flexible and less protected forms of work. However, in LIC and MIC contexts, gig-economy offerings are likely to be on par with other casual and informal jobs, which constitute the bulk of employment opportunities (Hunt and Samman, 2019). Indeed, platform-mediated work may even offer some advantages over other casual and informal jobs in that while the platforms we examined have not sought any linkages with the public social protection system, there have been limited attempts to develop some private forms of provision (which we revisit in Chapter 7).

In South Africa, around half (52%) of our survey respondents reported having a funeral plan, and 5% a medical plan, while a further 6% had both (and 37%, neither). Of those with

either plan, 71% of respondents paid for it themselves; of those that had neither, around half (52%) cited low earnings. Three-quarters of survey respondents were not entitled to paid leave and/or days off when sick in any of their jobs. Just 7% of workers were covered under a pension scheme (almost always through a spouse/partner, relative or someone else).

Workers articulated being unable to access income via the platform, including at times when it was most needed (e.g. a maternity-leave income), leaving them in extreme financial precarity:

I was pregnant when I joined the platform [but] it's no work no pay there. I wasn't active for three months. (Simlindile, Johannesburg)

Another currently inactive worker gave a clear account of how her financial situation deteriorated during pregnancy and after childbirth, including because she did not receive any protections while on maternity leave. This eventually led to her taking up another offer of work elsewhere:

I would get bookings every day of the week and before I had a child I was fine really [. . .] When I found out that I was pregnant, the father of the child did not want anything to do with us. That's when I saved up enough to sustain myself when the baby comes. It was not easy [. . .] I needed to pay rent, transport to work and still make sure I save enough for the child's preparation and for the three months when I will not be working. Also, I asked worker support if they assist us during maternity leave and they said they don't. That was the toughest time of my life. (Charlene, Cape Town)

Furthermore, workers' coverage by public social protection was low, for both social insurance schemes but also social assistance – for example,

just under one in three workers (27%) were in a household in which anyone received a South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) grant (while 12% were unsure), far below the 70% of households nationally who receive a social grant.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, 96% of workers felt it was 'very important' (81%) or 'important' (15%) for them to have benefits such as medical aid or a pension. Access to maternity protections – including cash benefits – is limited for 'traditional' and on-demand domestic workers alike (Box 7). Some key barriers appear common to both groups, highlighting the importance of expanding coverage and access as the gig economy grows to avoid further exclusion.

Key informants discussed the link of platform work with statutory labour rights – which they felt may be complied with to a certain extent – but the link with statutory social protections was considered weak. The Social Law Project explained that, in their view, platforms are regulated in the sense they comply with certain aspects of labour law, for example, on minimum wage:

So they comply with the law but as you are aware, the minimum wage for domestic workers (starting wage) is very low and that is the standard wage. So it is not different for the different kinds of domestic work. The whole issue of wages needs to be re-looked at [across the whole sector]. (KII, Social Law Project)

However, key informants also highlighted that workers may remain unlikely to get the full benefits of 'collective bargaining, unfair dismissal and all the legal protection that goes with formal employment that goes in inverted commas if and when they become employees' (KII, Social Law Project), given that in the 'traditional' domestic work sector, full employer compliance to labour rights and protections is limited.

A minority (18%) of workers reported paying income tax, while 55% did not and 27% were 'unsure'. The main reasons for not doing so were not earning enough (40% of workers who did not

28 SASSA is a national agency that distributes social grants on behalf of the Department of Social Development. These include the Child Support Grant, Older Person's Grant, Disability Grant, Grant-in-Aid, Care Dependency Grant, War Veteran's Grant and Foster Child Grant. All but the Grant-in-Aid and Foster Child Grant are means tested (Kelly and GroundUp Staff 2017).

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### **Box 7 Protection in name only: domestic worker access to maternity benefits in South Africa**

Examination of the maternity-leave benefits accessed by ‘traditional’ domestic workers in South Africa highlights persistent gaps in coverage and access. Going forward, consideration of how to ensure gig workers’ access to protections will be critical as the gig economy grows – not least as many gig workers are simultaneously active in the ‘traditional’ sector, meaning measures to recognise multiple employment relationships within social protection systems will become ever more important.

On paper, there are a range of maternity protections. The 1996 Constitution establishes that everyone has the right to social security (South Africa, 1996), following which the 1997 Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 stipulated that workers are entitled to four months of unpaid consecutive maternity leave, to be taken at any time from four weeks before the expected date of birth and not to end until six weeks after birth, unless authorised by a medical practitioner (Dupper, 2002). This act was later amended by Sectoral Determination 7 in 2002, which entitles domestic workers to the same maternity leave (South Africa, 2002).

In 2001, the Unemployment Insurance Act No. 64 established an Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) for employees, with enrolled workers entitled to maternity benefits for a maximum of 17 weeks or 6 weeks if they have a miscarriage or stillborn child (Department of Labour, 2013). On 1 April 2003, domestic workers and their employers were officially included (*ibid.*). To enrol in the UIF, employers must register themselves and their domestic workers with the fund and make contributions monthly. To contribute, employers deduct 1% of their worker’s salary and pay 1% themselves (Department of Labour, 2008). To claim maternity benefit, workers must apply in person at an employment office at least eight weeks prior to birth. Benefits are then provided on a sliding scale ranging from 38% to 60% of the contributor’s prior income (Department of Labour, 2001).

Yet while these provisions represent major progress in securing domestic workers’ maternity protection coverage, access to benefits remains low in practice. Several categories of workers are excluded from the UIF, including foreign individuals working on a contract, as well as individuals employed for less than 24 hours a month for a single employer (*ibid.*). This time stipulation poses a key barrier, given many domestic workers work less than 24 hours per month for any single employer, instead working part-time hours for different employers (du Toit, 2013). Employer non-compliance and domestic workers’ limited awareness of their rights pose further barriers (Gobind et al., 2013). Even when more aware and entitled, many domestic workers fear losing their jobs and therefore do not question their employers if they take actions which contradict the law (Magwaza, 2011). Navigating the claimant application process poses insurmountable challenges to many too (see Liao, 2019).

The platform’s polling of its workforce in 2019 suggested that just 5% of on-demand domestic workers were definitely registered for UIF, while 32% did not know. This low level of registration may well be attributable to eligibility requirements: only 6% of single worker–client relationships for the month of June were for more than 24 hours per month. However, 66% of the platform workers worked for more than 24 hours in a sample month (August 2018), highlighting the significant implications for workers’ entitlement (and contributions) depending on whether their employer is considered to be the household client or the platform company that mediates their work.

Note: We are extremely grateful to Aasha Jackson who carried out a comprehensive literature review during a placement at ODI in Spring 2019, which informed the content in this box.

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pay tax or who were unsure whether they did) and being engaged in part-time work (31%).

All gig workers are conceptualised by the platform as independent contractors and agree to terms and conditions stipulating this. However, workers frequently expressed confusion over their status with the platform, including that they didn't know what it meant or who they were working for:

Another issue that is confusing is this word of 'independent contractor' – we do not know what it means or which company we are working under because when we go to clients we are under the platform but when we go to the platform with our issues they say they are not responsible for us. This is bothering us, we don't know where we stand.

(Olinda, FGD participant, Cape Town)

Yet some of these same workers were aware of some of the limitations of their independent contractor status, notably in relation to their inability to access various protections and benefits:

How important are these benefits [such as medical aid] to you and what do you hope to see from companies? Participant: Presently the company looks at us as individual contractors; we need someone to stand with us.

(Olinda, FGD participant, Cape Town)

Along similar lines, in Kenya, participants associated obligations and benefits such as remitting taxes, health insurance and social security with formal employment (and indeed were an aspiration, rather than something achievable in their current work status), while good employer–employee relations and working conditions were seen as pertinent issues that employers and clients should adhere to.

Furthermore, according to a key informant from the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU), Kenya, within Kenyan labour law informal workers who do not have any social benefits from the employer are still protected at their workplace as casual labourers.<sup>29</sup>

From the platform perspective, there is a delicate balancing act between the desire to provide some incentives to workers to register and stay with them while avoiding conditions that could be considered to constitute an employment relationship. On the one hand, some platform companies offer workers perks such as training, free airtime, bank loans and access to materials required to carry out their gigs. However, their representatives were clear that this did not mean acknowledging the workers as platform employees (with the associated obligations this would entail as an employer):

I would love to find a way to make it easier to like provide benefits without taking the responsibility of then being their employer. Which is not possible to do as a digital platform.

(KII, platform representative, Kenya)

The platform companies expressed aversion to becoming recognised as gig worker employers, due to the associated government regulations through which their engagement with workers would be governed, and any mechanisms through which gig workers themselves could become recognised through existing policies and/or associations. Yet some worker representatives were pushing for greater regulation of the sector, focusing on the limitations on security and protections faced by workers subject to independent contractor status:

And also, what we are pushing most were regulations. 'Unaona' [You see]. Because there is no regulation to follow. Because you see, the major problem with the gig company or being an independent contractor is, this person

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<sup>29</sup> The key informant further elaborated that as per the Employment Act 2007, Labour Institutions Act 2007, Labour Relations Act 2007, Occupational Safety and Health Act 2007 and Work Injury Benefits Act 2007. There are also institutions such as the Labour Board that determine policies in Kenya and Employment Labour Relations Court.

doesn't care about your future. No one cares about you. No one cares what you go through. No one cares how we are. No one cares about your health, whether you save for your future. Whether you earn something decent. No one cares. Why? Because you are an independent contractor.  
(KII, DTF representative)

## 5.5 Learning opportunities and professionalisation

In both countries, workers appreciated many aspects of the platform operating model; in Kenya, especially, this included professional development. Key informants also cited support for further professional development – in job-related and transferable skills – as key to professionalising lower-skilled service jobs and improving worker opportunities either to stay in the same field or to move into another line of work.

In South Africa, 91% of survey respondents believed that the work they did through the platform gave them opportunities for 'learning on the job'. It also appeared to enable a significant share of workers (26%) to pursue studies alongside work. The platform representative we interviewed spoke of providing training in soft skills such as scheduling and customer interaction. At the same time, several key informants felt that, collectively, domestic workers need holistic support, at an individual and collective level. This included increasing their ability to access comprehensive education programmes for workers to build transferrable vocational and financial skills (including to transfer away from domestic work if they wish), and participation in education programmes which – importantly – would seek to build social awareness and empowerment (KII, Social Law Project).

In Kenya, workers appeared to particularly value belonging to a platform and the networking this afforded. They appreciated platform marketing strategies that promoted worker portfolios, which increased their visibility and enabled them to attract more clients. Moreover, workers felt that the relationships they cultivated at work widened their networks, increasing their likelihood of

referrals to other potential clients, on or off the platform. For instance, Simon, a building contractor, spoke of having participated in a roundtable meeting to negotiate a large-scale deal with a housing agency on behalf of the platform company.

Some workers also spoke of opportunities for learning that gig work offered, including acquiring skills in how to dignify their work and to price their services and products reasonably:

Yeah, I've learnt so much. Like when they are asking you for the quotation, they ask you . . . 'How much are you going to charge for your transport? How much are you going to charge for your labour?' Those are some of the things you don't think about when you're giving out a service.  
(Prudence, beautician, Nairobi)

Domestic workers in particular spoke of a lack of respect for the service they were providing:

Those of us who work as housekeepers, we are disrespected a lot. They disrespect us a lot. They see us as if we are not learned. Someone talks to you rudely. The woman can give you clothes to wash and she has even left a pad on the panty for you to remove. Because she is seeing you are useless! (Isabella, housekeeper and nanny, Nairobi)

Workers felt that being on a platform and acquiring such transferable skills enhanced their level of professionalism, enabling them to stand out above their peers who were doing similar work using conventional approaches.

Both platform representatives and our key informants were explicitly seeking to improve the skill set of gig workers and to strengthen the qualifications and certifications attached to gig work. One key informant spoke of the importance of developing a means of testing, measuring and registering skills, not only as a way of ensuring that clients receive quality services (and that this is reflected in worker wages) and as a means of dignifying informal jobs, but more broadly as an important step in fostering the transition from an



informal to a formal economy. This proposition receives some support in the very limited empirical literature. Kassi and Lehdonvirta (2019) find that on a crowdwork platform, certification increases the earnings of workers but not the likelihood of their obtaining work; they suggest such schemes are most likely to benefit workers with some previous experience.

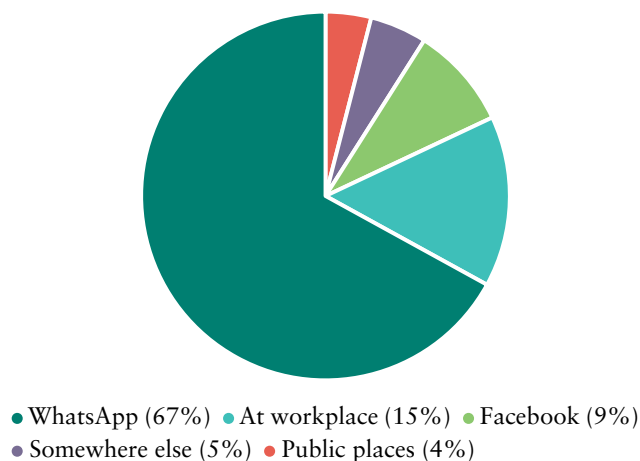
## 5.6 Worker organisation and collective action

Among gig workers registered with the platforms we focused on, formal gig worker organisation was non-existent or nascent in both Kenya and South Africa, and there were relatively few signs of collective action.<sup>30</sup> As a result, workers expressed that they were limited in their ability to express grievances to the platform, or to advocate for changes in their working conditions, using any official mechanisms.

### 5.6.1 South Africa

In South Africa, the workers we spoke with were increasingly in contact with each other informally through social media. Indeed, the platform, unlike many companies, adds workers to social network groups and sets them up with a representative. The emphasis is on workers supporting each other, including in vernacular language given the platform business is conducted in English, passing on tips and tricks, and arranging to share transport. Because the platform is also active on these groups, ‘we are able to observe and get the information of where we are failing and what we need to do to better cater for them’ (KII, platform representative). But several interviewees described challenges reaching and having problems satisfactorily dealt with by the platform’s worker support team. This was corroborated by the platform itself, whose key informant admitted it cannot always offer extensive support from its small office, and who felt that the peer-to-peer network is an important additional source. However, we also found that workers were highly active in their own private

**Figure 8 Most common means by which the platform’s workers interact on a regular basis in South Africa**



Source: Our survey. N=247.

social network groups where they felt more able to speak candidly about their experiences. So far, this has not yet led to any concerted collective action, despite shared grievances having been aired regularly in these groups.

In our survey, three-quarters of workers (74%) reported interacting with other workers on the platform on a regular basis. The most popular mechanism by far was WhatsApp (67% of respondents) followed by workplace encounters (presumably at the platform office) (15%) and Facebook (9%) (Figure 8). Of the respondents who regularly interacted with other platform workers, 60% discussed their working conditions ‘a lot’, 33% discussed these ‘somewhat’ while 7% did not discuss them at all.

Beyond these specific interactions with other workers on ‘the platform’, social media appeared to be the most common forum for discussion of working conditions. About half (49%) of our survey respondents reported belonging to another group where they discussed working conditions. It was a WhatsApp group for 82% of these workers; for 8% it was through Facebook, while 11% reported belonging to ‘another group’.

There was no evidence of any formal organisation of the platform workers, such as union membership. None of our survey

<sup>30</sup> With notable exceptions, such as a tripartite agreement in the ride-hailing sector in Kenya (which riders later complained had not been fully implemented by companies) and a legal case against Uber in South Africa, which the company later successfully appealed.

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respondents reported membership in any kind of formal group outside the platform that would advocate for their rights. One-third (32%) professed not to know how to join such a group and one-quarter (26%) felt that such organisation was for workers in the formal economy. If they experienced a problem at work while working through the platform, most workers (82%) stated that they would seek help from the platform itself, while an additional 12% would seek help from a workers' group (including either the company sponsored or private WhatsApp groups).

Key informants felt this organisation should be more formal – that workers need to organise, and have support to do so:

They need support from people like ourselves who can mobilize resources, provide tech support, education and training, ensure organizations become self-sustaining and acquire resources to continue.  
(KII, Social Law Project)

While South Africa's main domestic workers' union, SADSAWU, recognises the emergence of gig companies, and reports some complaints from platform workers, it has not yet had the scope to focus on them. A key informant noted that workers would need to be members for them to help them on a sustained basis and that they would need to establish a working relationship with gig companies.

Aside from providing direct support to workers, key informants were keen to initiate a stronger social dialogue, bringing diverse stakeholders together to start to discuss issues (KII, SADSAWU) and fostering advocacy to local and national government to improve conditions. Critically, however, platform workers had limited knowledge of any forms of formal support and they were unaware of SADSAWU. Ultimately, several key informants were of the view that although self-organisation is critical, engaging the current company-led gig economy model and established social dialogue approach had inherent limitations:

Self-organization and support in self-organization is in my view the key to everything else. The current union model doesn't really find traction because at the moment no one can negotiate and workers are dispersed and so on, its more a question of congregating and working together. Workers need to be empowered to do things for themselves.  
(KII, Social Law Project)

Several informants raised the proposal of worker-owned platform cooperatives, in which workers come together with designers to develop and own platforms under a different model:

... we form some company without Marvellous Maids or anybody involved. ... why don't we equip domestic workers to form their own little cooperative company? And then work themselves and whatever they pull together, organise a transport pool for them, basically enrich each other. I know it will not happen tomorrow, but it can happen. Why must we enrich a company, when we can form cooperatives?  
(KII, SADSAWU representative)

## 5.6.2 Kenya

In Kenya, gig worker organisation is nascent. When asked about labour laws that should protect them at work, most workers cited limited awareness, and had no intention of joining any type of union or raising any complaints about their working conditions. Although ride-hailing drivers have made efforts to organise themselves into various unions,<sup>31</sup> because most workers are in the gig economy for survival, they tend to avoid activism, citing the time and expense involved and a fear of platform deactivation. Indeed, a representative of the DTF reported that drivers who had participated in strikes had been deactivated from a ride-hailing platform. In addition, most gig workers had few opportunities to meet one another and, as in South Africa, perceived that unions are only

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31 For example, the Digital Taxi Association of Kenya (DTAK), Public Transport Operators Union (PUTON), Rideshare Sacco, Kenya Online Taxi Workers Association (KOTWA) and Drivers and Partners Association of Kenya (DIPAK).

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for those in formal employment. Moreover, most of the workers we interviewed aimed for their engagement in gig work to be temporary while they sought a more secure job, rendering them all the more disinclined to involve themselves in any collective action.

A representative of Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers (KUDHEIHA) expressed the view that this inability to express grievances to their ‘employer’ compromised gig workers’ ostensible independence and amplified their insecurity:

Yes, you have a job, but you do not have a voice. And most of the time because it is a job that has got a lot of precariousness in it, that is within the informal economy, then any time you want to voice, you’re sacked and another one is employed.  
(KII, KUDHEIHA representative)

precarious and casual work. In South Africa, workers perceived their earnings as relatively high on an hourly basis; however, in both countries, workers struggled with the unpredictability and variability that often characterise earnings from gig work. Many felt that their overall earnings were insufficient to meet household needs. The platform in South Africa, in turn, cited an inability to raise its prices to bolster worker incomes, as this would price some clients out of the market, resulting in less work being available:

We don’t feel like we are able to pay workers or to charge clients what we feel our workers deserve. We really have tried to look at mechanisms of better optimising that, but I would say there are enormous challenges in trying to make ends meet in our current economic circumstances. (KII, platform representative, South Africa)

## 5.7 Discussion of key findings

This chapter has argued that, relative to the alternatives open to many gig workers, digital platforms offer some positive features that workers value (and which improve their working conditions). Yet it is clear that, overall, platforms do not yet meaningfully overcome the adverse economic conditions that limit the availability and quality of work available to marginalised and disadvantaged women in South Africa and in Kenya. These women face widespread unemployment and informality, and a physical urban environment distinguished by long distances, poor transport links and, notably in South Africa, extremely high levels of crime and insecurity.

Nonetheless, gig work is experienced in some distinct ways from other forms of informal and casual work – which are typically the alternatives open to the workers in our study. There is a need for policy-makers and platforms to better understand these differences, as well as the concerns of gig workers, in order to improve working conditions.

At a minimum, platforms offered some paid work, whereas the alternative was often unemployment (particularly in South Africa) or

This issue of low pay for domestic workers is not particular to the gig economy though. Indeed, it is indicative of the undervaluation of the domestic work sector and, more generally, of work in female-dominated professions. The platform in South Africa was seeking to challenge clients’ perception of domestic work as a low-value commodity by presenting it as a professional service. However, although the platform started out with a higher price for clients, no one made bookings until hourly rates were lowered. So, while the platform might want to pay workers more, a representative observed that ‘razor thin margins and no willingness to pay’ among clients make this extremely challenging for a start-up company (KII, platform representative, South Africa).

Second, while platforms often highlight the flexibility they offer workers – and indeed some workers sought out and valued this aspect – this flexibility is limited by client demand. Clients determine the volume of bookings, and their location and timing (with the frequent imperative of early bookings, which workers found inconvenient and, at times, a safety risk). Some workers reported feeling compelled to meet client demand to do an unreasonably large amount of work within a given booking (or to complete the work even if they

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would not be paid for the extra time it took). All these factors restrict the extent to which workers can, in practice, avail themselves of flexible working conditions. Relatedly, there is some evidence that a small share of the platform's workers in South Africa are taking on a disproportionate share of the available gigs, a so-called 'superstar' effect. It is noteworthy that being a platform 'superstar' positively correlated with ratings, tenure on the platform, and availability, signifying that flexibility is not necessarily associated with being a top performer.

Third, many workers felt that platforms afforded them the opportunity to learn on the job (moreover, in South Africa, a sizeable share were undertaking further studies alongside gig work). More broadly, platform representatives in each country spoke of a more ambitious aim to 'professionalise' the gig workforce and 'dignify' service-based work by standardising services, certifying and marketing worker offerings and providing workers with training in 'soft skills', such as how to present themselves and how to bid for services. While arguably self-serving, in that it enables charging out workers on the platform at higher rates, it also improves workers' skill sets and (if this became more widely scaled) could offer the promise of raising earnings more broadly within the service industry.

Fourth, gig workers face threats to their security, including the risk of robbery and assault. This is a general risk of casual and insecure service-based work, and a notable feature of South African society in particular. However, it is arguably experienced distinctly by gig workers due to the high mobility required to travel between gigs, the timing of gigs (notably, early starts) and poor public transport, as well as work that takes place for a varied range of clients, often in private or isolated locations such as clients' homes or in private vehicles. A platform representative in

South Africa described transport as the biggest structural challenge workers faced, because of its cost and the restrictions it places on economic opportunities: 'Public transport is something which completely undermines the working class across South Africa' (KII, platform representative). Workers also described situations they perceived as a threat to their safety when carrying out gigs in private households.

Fifth, owing in part to their status as independent contractors – but in common with the broader informal workforce – gig workers have limited access to social protection. This means that life events common to women risk further exacerbating economic precariousness. For example, workers often had limited means of coping during maternity periods in which they could not work – especially in South Africa where many were single mothers. Several platforms interviewed for this study across both countries reported that they are carefully considering how to extend protections and benefits to workers – and in some cases had already put in place private insurance and other schemes such as supporting access to bank accounts. However, difficulties remain in ensuring comprehensive social protection, in part because they see themselves as technology platforms not employers.

Finally, the workers who participated in this study displayed limited awareness of the benefits of unionisation or collective action and, particularly in Kenya, had little appetite for any activity that could jeopardise their gig earnings. While in Kenya there were some nascent attempts at gig worker organisation, and in South Africa workers interacted extensively with one another through informal channels such as social media, few collective initiatives currently offer significant promise for exerting change vis-à-vis companies and/or the government.

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# 6 The gig economy and unpaid care and domestic work

This chapter explores the extent to which the gig economy helps workers better manage unpaid care and domestic work and paid work. To do this, we first identify the types of unpaid care and domestic work that gig workers are involved in and the implications of this for their time use. We find that unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities are strongly gendered, with women taking on the bulk of related tasks.

We explore women workers' preferences around managing unpaid care and domestic work alongside their paid work, and how this plays out in practice. We identify a range of strategies used to manage different aspects of the day. Significantly, we also find that although many workers view gig work as more flexible, offering them a better work–life balance than other forms of paid work available to them, they are, nonetheless, still forced to make difficult trade-offs between their time use, income-generation and caring role. The extent to which flexibility is able to be realised in practice is limited for many workers. Therefore, while flexible-work modalities may offer some promise to support management of paid and unpaid work, a broader approach is needed.

## 6.1 The unpaid care and domestic work in which gig workers are involved

Existing understanding of unpaid care and time use in Kenya and South Africa is at very different stages, with significantly more known in South Africa following the implementation of time-use surveys in 2000 and 2010, and the associated development of a relatively comprehensive literature.

In South Africa, consistent with global trends, women's time spent on care activities is at the expense of activities such as learning, leisure and paid work (Floro and Komatsu, 2011). The *2009/10 South Africa time-use survey* shows that women spent 2.3 times more time on unpaid care work than men (Charmes, 2016). Women living with children aged seven years and younger spent more than 4 hours on household maintenance and 1 hour 25 minutes on child and adult care, while men in these households spent 1 hour 16 minutes on household maintenance and 15 minutes caring for household members and children (Ahmed, 2018).

Among ethnic groups in South Africa, black African women spend the most time on unpaid care in absolute terms – 4 hours 26 minutes daily compared to 3 hours 18 minutes for white women, who spend the least time (Orr and van Meelis, 2014). Gendered differences in care work in South Africa may be explained by fractured family arrangements, where only around a third of children live with both their mother and father, and many women being left to carry out both caregiver and breadwinner roles in a country of limited economic opportunities and high unemployment (Budlender and Lund, 2011). Indeed, evidence suggests single-parent households are highly associated with being time-poor, especially where the household is female-headed (Antonopoulos and Memis, 2010).

Data on time use in Kenya is scarce; to date, no nationally representative time-use survey has been conducted. However, an ActionAid study found that women in Kenya tend to work predominantly in the private domain, leaving work in the public sphere and the associated decision-making to men.

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After accounting for sleep, Kenyan women spend most time on housework, while men spend most time on unpaid work such as farming for own consumption, sleep and other forms of self-care, social and cultural activities, and media consumption (Budlender and Moussié, 2013).

These time-use surveys in Kenya estimate that, on average, women spend around 1.4 hours on unpaid care work compared to every hour spent by men, giving rise to what is termed as a ‘double workday’, particularly in poor rural and urban areas, where households cannot afford a paid care worker (ibid.). This gender gap has been attributed to lack of services and infrastructure (e.g. inadequate access to water, sanitation, electricity, roads, safe transport, healthcare, etc.) to reduce unpaid household and care work, alongside gender-based and social norms under which women are considered primary caregivers (ibid.).

Our findings clearly confirm prevalent gendered domestic roles, with unpaid care and domestic work within their own homes overwhelmingly being the responsibility of, and carried out by, women workers in both South Africa and Kenya – a dynamic which most participants appeared to have internalised without question.

As noted above, nearly all survey participants in South Africa lived with children: 98% lived with at least one child under 18 and 83% lived with one or more children under 6. Moreover, most respondents (91%) were the main person in the household responsible for caring for any children. Sizeable shares of respondents also indicated that they cared for someone who was elderly (50%, while an additional 28% did so ‘sometimes’); and/or for someone who was sick or disabled (23%, while an additional 19% did so ‘sometimes’). In Kenya too, participants also frequently cared for children, older people, disabled and ill persons. Given the high rate of participants with primary responsibility for childcare, we explore this aspect of unpaid care in more detail in this chapter, recognising that the implications of caring for older people and people with disabilities for gig and other precarious workers is an important area for further investigation.

During interviews in South Africa and Kenya we asked gig workers to describe the domestic tasks they carry out in and around the household.

Across both contexts, most frequently noted by women were cleaning, laundry and cooking for child(ren) and husband, taking children to/from school and other activities, with shopping and fetching other household necessities such as water also mentioned. It is worth mentioning that several participants in South Africa specifically said that they didn’t feel they had much domestic cleaning work of their own to carry out, as they live in a one-room dwelling (often in a township). Ruth from Kenya summed up how many participants described the gendered responsibility for these tasks:

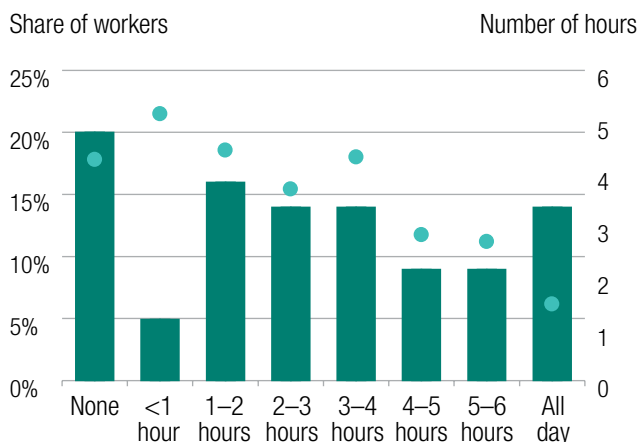
As a woman, you must cook, wash dishes. In the morning, you prepare the children to go to school. So much work. You must wash clothes. So that’s the job. And also take care of the chickens. I am everything. (Ruth, housekeeper, Nairobi)

Several women workers noted that childcare is more important than housework to them, and they all spent more time detailing the unpaid care work they carried out than the domestic work, often identifying time spent looking after their child(ren), husband and other family members. Family care-related activities cited, included: playing with children, working hard to make sure children have food and a roof over their heads, making sure the child looks good, being there when they are ill, and making time for their husband. Love and the affective aspect of care was cited, including being present to understand and get to know the child and learning what the child likes/doesn’t like, even when that was not always easy for the women due to tiredness, as this worker in South Africa noted:

As a mother you have to sacrifice to offer love and care. You may be tired from work but have to accommodate family. (Petronella, Johannesburg)

While the tasks carried out were often similar, time-use data we collected among women gig workers in South Africa shows vastly different amounts of time spent on caring for others and household chores on the previous day, with the unpaid load extremely heavy for some women

**Figure 9 Hours the platform workers spent on unpaid care and domestic work on previous day in South Africa**



- Hours spent on unpaid care and domestic work
- Average hours of paid work

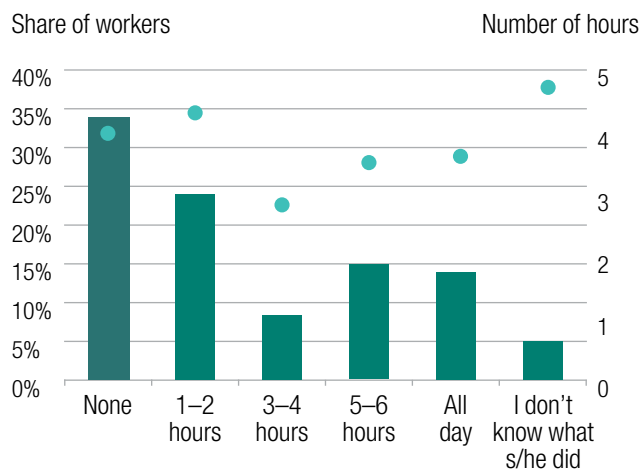
Note: N=398. ‘All day’ refers to more than six hours of unpaid care and domestic work.

Source: Our survey.

gig workers. Overall, our data suggest that the typical married or cohabiting respondent in our survey spent 2.3 times as many hours as her partner did on unpaid care and domestic work, in line with the *2009/10 South Africa time-use survey* (Charmes, 2016).<sup>32</sup> As Figure 9 demonstrates, women’s unpaid care inversely correlates with their paid work, with women who worked more hours through the platform on a given day spending less time on unpaid care that day. At one extreme, the nearly 20% of women who spent no time on unpaid care worked, on average, around four hours via the platform; at the other extreme, the nearly 15% who spent ‘all day’ on care (i.e. more than six hours), engaged in just over one hour of paid work on average.

This time-use data further demonstrates gendered domestic roles, confirming that women workers’ spouses contributed relatively little unpaid care and domestic work. Figure 10 depicts the unpaid care work that women platform workers’ partners carried out relative to the amount of paid work each gig worker

**Figure 10 Hours the platform workers report that their partners spent caring for others or on household chores on previous day in South Africa**



- Hours worker’s partner spent on unpaid care and domestic work
- Average hours of paid work (worker)

Note: N=143. This question was asked only of married or partnered respondents whose spouse or partner was not away during the previous week.

Source: Our survey.

undertook, showing that most men engaged very little in care and domestic work – around 35% did none at all, while nearly 25% did one to two hours. This data also reveals that the amount of unpaid care men carried out displays almost no correlation with women’s hours of paid work, suggesting that women undertaking more paid work on a given day is not being compensated for by their spouse taking on more care and domestic work on that same day.

Instead, men’s role within the household was most often cited as a financial contribution, with little dedication to other household work even when they were the only adult in the home. In the exceptions identified, men tended to carry out home maintenance-related tasks such as household repairs or decorating. As this male gig worker in Nairobi, Kenya explained:

Me? No. Me my work is only to go to work to search for the income . . . so

32 To collect time-use data simply, given our reliance on AVR technology, we asked women to input their own time use and that of men in categories (for women, none, less than an hour, 1–2 hours and so on, up to ‘all day’; for men, none, 1–2 hours and so on, up to ‘all day’). To compute the median for each category we assigned them a value of time in the middle of each category (e.g. 1.5 hours, for 1–2 hours).

the remaining people are normally do the cleaning and the preparation of the house . . . I don't engage in house chores as I have older girls of class seven and six and three. So, the older ones prepare the younger ones. My work is to provide for how they will survive. (Anthony, general masonry worker, Nairobi)

Indeed, gendered expectations around financial contributions to the household were so deeply entrenched in Kenya that single women described taking care of the man's responsibility in addition to their own care responsibilities. For instance, when Ivy, separated from the father of her son, was asked to list all her household chores, she said:

Well, for me I do more of what you say maybe people could consider men responsibilities and women's responsibilities. So, from partly paying for the house, to the food, all the necessities, to the school fees. Everything. [Paying for] my mum because she needs medical care. She has heart failure. So her medical bills. I do everything. (Ivy, cab driver, Nairobi)

Several participants explained that if their husband/partner was around the house and not working he may 'help' or 'assist' them with unpaid care and domestic work – for example, the man may go shopping, play with their child while the participant was cleaning the house, or help a child with homework. At the same time, there were often limits to the kind of tasks the men would be willing to undertake. Their partner might do some things e.g. help cook, but not others e.g. tidying/cleaning. Gender roles were also entrenched in some of the tasks performed outside the household itself. For example, one participant noted it was her responsibility to pick their child up from the crèche even if her husband was also available or finishing work around the same time. The times when men bucked the general trend tended to be when their wives were working late, or were ill, leaving no other option.

## 6.2 Workers' preferences around organising unpaid care and domestic work, paid work and other activities

Any effort to improve workers' lives must be based on a firm understanding of their preferences and priorities, an approach that has formed a core pillar of this research. To begin to understand how gig workers would like to organise unpaid care, paid work and other activities, we asked an open question during interviews about what their perfect working day would look like. Most had trouble answering at first. Further probing revealed this was because they have rarely, if ever, been in a position to think about their 'ideal' or 'desired' way of organising their time and activities and what this would entail for them. For many, their main preoccupation was battling to make ends meet and survive.

Importantly, the nature of a perfect working day eventually articulated by most interviewees was highly reminiscent of the kind of day often associated with the standard employment relationship found in the formal economy. That is, to work for regular income during daytime hours (e.g. around eight hours a day) and have weekends largely free from paid work. Almost all women interviewed wished for a schedule that allowed them to manage family responsibilities with work while, at the same time (and this was critical), earning a secure income sufficient to meet their daily needs. Indeed, in the few cases where participants mentioned occasionally having this perfect day through gig work, it was because they obtained long enough bookings to obtain better earnings, but not so long that they couldn't satisfactorily manage their unpaid work.

At the same time, many women's perfect day featured their children's schedules – notably that the women would like their children to wake up or for them to travel later in the morning so the children could rest more, or that the women would be able to go themselves to pick children up from school or childcare or have more time to play or do homework with children. As Ivy from Kenya summarised:

[I would] end before 7 p.m., you know. So that I can go home, teach homework to the children. Even just watch news,



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‘ya saa moja ile ya Kiswahili’ [the 7 o’clock Swahili news]. Just have a normal life. (Ivy, driver, Nairobi)

Of particular note is that many of the participants invoked sleep and rest as something that would form part of their perfect day – either by having time to rest by watching television, for example, or being able to sleep more hours during the night, as these quotes demonstrate:

[If I had a shorter working day] at least I would get home at around 3 p.m. and go fetch my child. I would also have time to rest before I start cooking for my family. I’d also be in bed early. (Ayanda, Cape Town)

I would like to have at least seven-hour bookings starting from 8 a.m. Because then I would be able to prepare my child for crèche and prepare breakfast for my husband. I will also be able to come back and rest on time . . . A booking should allow me to wake up at a reasonable time but I should also earn decent money. (Julia, Cape Town)

Critically, several women participants in both countries were acutely aware of the expectations of them imposed by others, notably their husbands and children. They articulated their vision of their perfect day to fulfil these expectations. As one from South Africa explained:

when [my husband] comes home he must find the house warm showing that I have arrived home early. That will make our husbands not run away from us. Not that you arrive home and your husband is the one who is there already there and you are still on your way. Then you cook for the children and also have enough time to rest and have time to talk to the kids. (Portia, Johannesburg)

For the male gig workers interviewed in Kenya, a perfect working day was also difficult to describe because they were often already primarily engaged in what they perceived was

their duty as men and providers in the household: carrying out paid work. Many described a perfect working day as being able to earn an adequate income while still having time to spend with their family. This related to relaxing with family members after work or activities such as helping children with homework, as opposed to the household tasks women often mentioned fitting into their day:

when it comes to work and family, let me concentrate on that one. It’s my desire to have plenty of time with my family. So, you find that sometimes when I go out and there is not much [paid work] out there, I will come back to the house and even sit with the children, we do homework together. (Simon, building contractor, Nairobi)

Given the centrality of childcare to most women participants’ lives, we also tried to ascertain their preferences in this area. Across the board, cost was a key consideration, meaning many preferred to leave their children with family members or other trusted people such as neighbours when possible, even if this incurred a small fee or cost, rather than send them to a crèche or other childcare service. This preference was particularly pronounced when leaving a child with family was free, as the following quote highlights:

there is no one who helps me look after the child. I do this on my own. Right now my sister is here for the June holiday; she is going back to Free State on the 15th of July. If my sister is there mostly my child doesn’t go to crèche. (Faheema, Cape Town)

However, in addition to cost, trust and safety were key considerations – some participants preferred to leave children with someone known well to them rather than take them to a crèche they felt to be of poor quality, even where they paid that person to look after their child:

for now I really won’t be able to afford a proper crèche and I feel he is still too

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young. I have never thought about taking him to the local crèche to be honest. I trust my friend and she has been doing a good job taking care of him.  
(Julia, Cape Town)

Finally, we identified that women workers' preferences around how to organise their working day also depended on the age of the children involved. Those with young children most often preferred gig times which allowed them to return home in the late afternoon so that they could care for their families throughout the evening. Yet, where gig-work options during the evening or night were possible (e.g. ride-sharing, catering/restaurant trade) and older children were present, some preferred working at night to be able to spend the daytime/early evening with their children and then leave them at home in the care of another family member – at times an older child.

In summary, then, none of the workers interviewed envisaged any lifestyle significantly different to the one they had in terms of unpaid care and domestic work. For example, in terms of shifts in gender norms that could lead to redistribution of household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, shopping or laundry – it could be said that they were resigned to their situation. Among the women, there was very little mention that anyone else, other than themselves, could/would carry out the care and household work that they were already engaged in. Instead, 'ideal' working days were articulated in terms of what time allocation would allow them to best balance the various paid and unpaid work tasks for which they were already responsible, alongside rest and leisure activities. They most frequently expressed a preference for regular paid work carried out in the daytime during weekdays, although the extent to which this was able to be realised was subject to trade-offs and often limited in practice, as we discuss below.

### **6.3 Strategies used to manage paid work, care work and other activities**

We turn now to explore in more detail the realities of how gig workers manage paid work, unpaid care and other activities. The fairly scant

existing literature in this area indicates limited structural support for work–life balance in both South Africa and Kenya.

A thin debate has emerged in the South African context around the notion of work–life balance and flexible work as an option for individuals to reconcile their participation in paid work with other aspects of life. Where it exists, the debate on work–life balance and worker-led flexible work arrangements focuses overwhelmingly on formal white-collar jobs in South Africa (e.g. Mageni and Slabbert, 2005; Potgieter and Barnard, 2010; Jackson and Fransman, 2018). In this literature, flexitime and flexible work arrangements are perceived as instruments to achieve better work–life balance, to expand workers' choices and to encourage women's employment (Dancaster, 2006; Jackson and Fransman, 2018). For example, Whitehead and Kotze (2003) report that flexible work hours were uncommon, and according to interviewees their organisations were unaware of the importance of work–life balance policies (*ibid.*). Another study of workers in a higher-education institution found that financial well-being, work–life balance and productivity were statistically significant predictors of job satisfaction (Jackson and Fransman, 2018). However, a further study of academics and support staff in a higher-education institution found that the lack of job security was a greater source of stress for the workers than work–life balance (Coetzee and Rothmann, 2005).

Different strategies to manage unpaid care have also been identified, with South Africa's large paid domestic work sector playing a notable role in supporting better-off women (and their families). Kinship networks have been found to be particularly important for care management in post-Apartheid South Africa, notably among black South Africans who rely on family and other close acquaintances to aid with the time demands of paid work as well as childcare (Madhavan and Gross, 2013). Available data for the country suggests that various childcare strategies are employed for children under six years old: for around half of these children, the reported strategies involve sending the child to a crèche/educare centre (22.5%), preschool, nursery or grade 00/000 (pre-reception) (10%), having children in Grade R (reception year) (9.8%), in school (6.7%) or in a

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home/community group (0.9%) (computed from STATS SA, 2018c). Of those children not in any of these forms of childcare, 84.7% stayed at home with a parent, foster parent or other guardian, with 11.1% staying at home with another adult, 1.5% of children going to someone else's dwelling, and 0.4% being left at home with someone under 18 years (*ibid.*). Those children who stayed at home were less likely to live in a household with an employed member (65% of children at home had an employed member, compared with 76.5% of those who attended a facility outside the home) suggesting that households with a non-working member may be more likely to care for a young child at home (*ibid.*).

As with other sub-Saharan African countries, the organisation of paid and unpaid work in Kenya has been affected by trends such as urbanisation and globalisation, which have provoked structural shifts in the labour market and family networks (Muasya, 2016a). Literature on flexible work in Kenya remains sparse, with more focus on paid management strategies including childcare and paid domestic work. A study of teachers' strategies to accommodate work–life balance suggests they were allowed to take time off on a discretionary basis when lack of domestic support led to acute time constraints, for example, with few formal mechanisms to reduce their workload or attain a more flexible schedule (Muasya, 2016b). Similarly, surveys carried out in the Kenyan university sector, where no structural support such as on-campus housing or childcare provision is available, shed light on the challenges posed by a lack of childcare and flexible worktime arrangements (Muasya, 2016a).

Additionally, in Kenya, traditional kinship networks have been interrupted, making it difficult for women to rely on other family members for childcare. Women employed in the formal economy often rely on domestic help to attend to household work but have been affected by recent legislation on domestic labour. This legislation, which has introduced a minimum wage for domestic workers, has had the unintended effect of provoking a shift to more informal employment of domestic workers and has led some employers to change their domestic routine, sending their children to day care centres (*ibid.*). Research has also shown that poorer workers struggle most to access good-

quality childcare services. For example, among those based in informal settlements in Nairobi, poor child supervision and caregiver capacity, health concerns, high costs and limited accessibility – notably during the rainy season – hamper access and take-up (Doughman et al., 2017).

Our research sheds further light on the strategies used to manage paid and unpaid work by a cohort of largely poor and informal workers. It is clear that most women gig workers are managing unpaid care with very little support. For example, in the South Africa survey only slightly more than one-third (36%) of workers with care responsibilities reported that someone else in the household 'helped them' with either care or household chores, while 30% said this was the case 'sometimes'. Just over one-third (34%) had no help, which includes 37% of single workers and 29% of married workers, revealing only a fairly small difference between the two groups.

Participants in South Africa described in detail the strategies they used to manage unpaid care and domestic work alongside their paid gig work. Most participants described doing their own cleaning/housework on the days when no bookings were made for their time through the gig platform, which for many was at the weekend when they chose not to work. However, it clearly emerged that the daily care of children – such as cooking, bathing and playing with them – had to be managed around gig work. At the same time, childcare clearly emerged as a major barrier to engaging in paid work: just one in five of all workers felt that childcare responsibilities did not limit the paid work they could do – the remainder reported that it did (37%) or that it did 'sometimes' (44%). Again, there was only a small difference in the experiences of single and partnered women, suggesting that both groups received little support with childcare within the household: 79% of single women were limited (35%) in the paid work they could do or limited sometimes (43%); compared with 81% of married women (31% limited, 50% sometimes). The chief reasons why childcare limited respondents' ability to undertake paid work were: having limited time available for paid work (34%), the cost of childcare (24%) and an inability to find work at convenient times (18%) (Figure 11).

**Figure 11 Whether and how childcare responsibilities limit platform workers' economic opportunities in South Africa**

(1) Do your childcare responsibilities limit the paid work or business you can do?

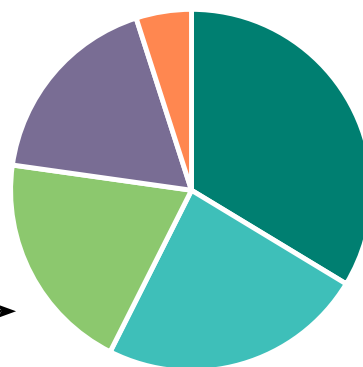


● No (20%) ● Yes (37%) ● Sometimes (44%)

Note: For (1), N=378; for (2), N=133. (2) was asked only of respondents who answered 'yes' or 'sometimes' to (1).

Source: Our survey.

(2) What is the main reason your childcare responsibilities limit the paid work or business you can do?



● I have limited time for paid work (34%)  
 ● Childcare is too expensive (24%)  
 ● Other (20%)  
 ● I can't find work at convenient times (18%)  
 ● I can't find childcare (5%)

A critical finding is that most respondents in South Africa felt that their work through the platform balanced well with their family/personal commitments (54% said 'very well' and 33% said 'well'). Furthermore, workers clearly viewed work through the platform as a helpful strategy to manage their childcare duties and paid work: all workers were asked whether platform work made it easier or harder for them to manage childcare and paid work than other jobs, with 74% responding that working through the platform made it easier. The remainder of respondents felt that it made no difference (15%) or that it made it harder (11%). This signals that platform modalities can be seen as a potentially promising means of managing paid and unpaid work in South Africa at least.

At the same time, it is clear that gig-work modalities – including flexibility – are not enough to fully support unpaid care. In South Africa, workers identified various strategies to manage unpaid care, with significant effort going into finding care for their children while they were at work. The message from many participants was clear: without regular childcare they would/could not engage in paid work, be it gig work or other forms of work, and they employed various strategies to manage childcare – some more permanent, others more ad hoc (and often a combination of the two):

Interviewer: 'What happens if your neighbour is not available on that day?'  
 Akumzi, Cape Town: 'ahhh unotorega kuenda kubasa kwacho' [you end up not taking any booking at all]

Survey data point to some interesting points of difference between the strategies employed by single parents to manage childcare and those who were partnered. The latter were more likely to rely on their partner or another female child or to look after the child themselves. Single respondents reported higher reliance on 'other relatives' in particular, as well as friends and neighbours, and were slightly more likely to use formal childcare, as Figure 12 shows. In some cases, care provided by family was short-term/daily, while in other cases consisted of a longer-term arrangement. For example, one interview participant explained how financial precarity since being left by their spouse meant that she sent her recently born baby to stay with family elsewhere, so she could continue in paid work to survive:

We had a child together who was born prematurely. During that time I stayed in hospital for two months with my child. Soon after I left hospital I separated with my husband. I then found work through

the platform and had to send my baby home to Zimbabwe . . . because things were very tough for me, especially after separating with the father of the child. I had no money and even to take care of her it's really tough with the kind of work I do . . . There is no one at all, 'baba vemwana havatombomutarise zvamuchose' [the father of my child does not even look at her, let alone look after her]. (Akumzi, Cape Town)

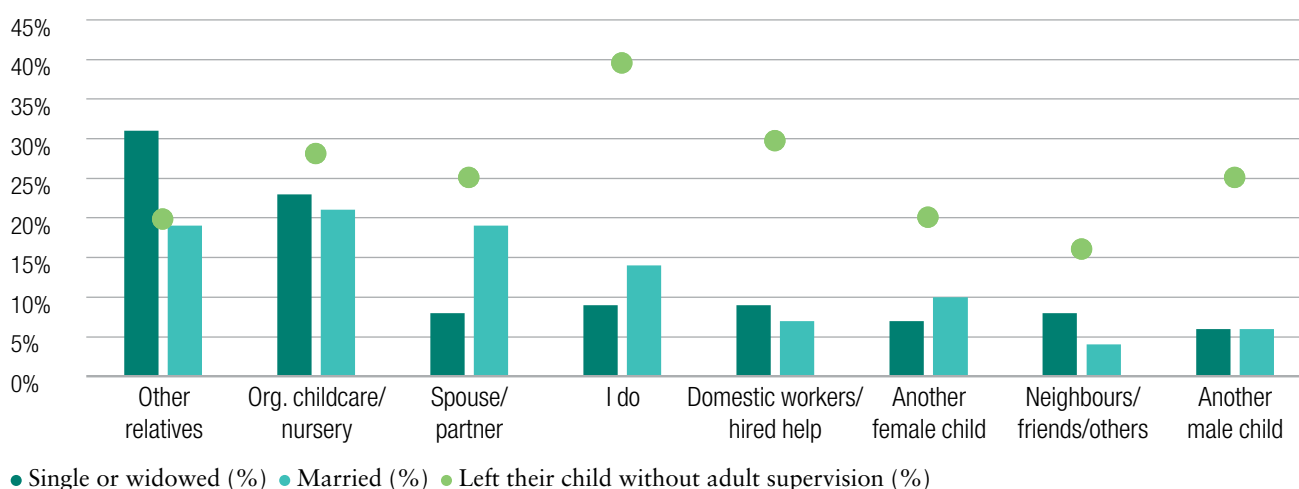
Some primary caregivers of children under six years old reported extreme strategies to manage childcare and their paid work – particularly, leaving children alone, which subsequently exposes these children to significant risks to their safety and healthy development (UNICEF, 2017a). Figure 12 shows the share of respondents in each childcare-strategy category who left a child without adult supervision in a given week. Overall, 24% reported having to leave their child alone for more than an hour in the previous week (88% of whom did so to work via the platform). A further 9% reported having to leave their child in the care of another child who was less than 10 years old for an hour in the previous week (again, 84% did so to work through the platform), suggesting a rate vastly exceeding the 0.4% of children reported to have been left with a person under 18 in South Africa's

*Global household survey data (computed from STATS SA, 2018c).*

The share of survey respondents leaving a child without adult supervision was highest among women who reported that they usually cared for their child themselves, followed by those who engaged formal childcare/nursery, domestic worker/hired help, and then those whose spouse/partner or another male child sometimes took on childcare. This suggests that the highest risk factors for children being left alone relate to a lack of other care options, notably more formal options, including childcare services and paid help – with a possible explanation being that children were left alone at times when these more formal options were not available, such as early mornings.

In addition, the high rate of children being left alone among those who might otherwise be cared for by a partner/spouse or another male child suggests that these options are not consistent or reliable. Conversely, the rate of left-alone children is lowest for those reliant on neighbours, friends/other, followed by relatives and other children (notably female children), further highlighting the importance of informal networks and family to support childcare – and the associated risk posed to children when these are not available. These findings are clearly alarming and reinforce the need expressed by participants for accessible and reliable childcare. At the same time, the

**Figure 12 Who looks after South African platform workers' children while they engage in paid work and share of children left without adult supervision in a given week**



Note: For question on who looks after child while respondent engages in paid work, N=297, for question on share of children without adult supervision, N=327.

Source: Our survey.

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findings merit further attention to explain in greater depth the divergence between the high rate of participants in our survey reporting leaving children alone and the nationally representative data, which suggests a far lower rate, and what ‘being left alone’ means in practice. Previous analysis has highlighted the need to place reports of children left ‘home alone’ into social and geographical context. This is both as a result of divergent understandings of survey translations, and due to living conditions in informal settlements and other crowded residential zones that limit privacy and make it unlikely that children ‘left alone’ are completely isolated or unnoticed by others (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2018). Therefore, we highlight this as a critical area for future research (see Chapter 8).

Interviews in Kenya with women gig workers revealed a similar mix of strategies to manage childcare on the days they carried out gig work, including family assistance via relatives who lived nearby or who came to live with the family, and some families relying on older children for help – notably teenage girls. Others relied on help from neighbours and friends (generally in return for payment, albeit at lower rates than an official crèche or childminder), and in some cases from a church or other community group. Some opted for paid-for childcare in a childcare facility, with a clear divide emerging between better-off and poorer workers, thus corroborating recent research that found that poorer workers in Nairobi faced the biggest barriers to accessing quality, reliable childcare (Doughman et al., 2017).

It is worth noting that a number of interviewees with school-age children cited dropping off/picking up children as a critical activity to coordinate, often managed by enrolling children in schools near the household to reduce the cost and time for care as children are allowed to walk to and from school unaccompanied. In instances where the schools are far away from their homes, workers would sometimes ask a neighbour or motorbike transporter to drop the children home with either of these options attracting a charge. Again, engaging this type of paid help is not possible for the poorest workers, meaning they are more likely to need to accompany their children and manage the time required to do this during days of paid work.

In summary, across both South Africa and Kenya, most women gig workers demonstrated

good time-management skills, meaning they were adept at navigating care work in order to ensure time was available for paid work as well. However, many women reported significant challenges managing their daily commitments, with overall work–family balance not necessarily achieved in line with their preferences. Notably, the disproportionate focus for many on juggling paid work and unpaid care and domestic work came at great cost to their time spent on rest and leisure activities. This was exacerbated for the poorest workers who were struggling to make ends meet, and for whom rest time was unimaginable, unattainable and a luxury rarely dreamt about.

## **6.4 Challenges and trade-offs in balancing gig work and unpaid care and domestic work**

### **6.4.1 Challenges**

While our research provides evidence that platform work can be seen to be relatively favourable, it also clearly highlights the perpetual challenges workers face in managing childcare – notably of the youngest children not yet at school. Despite survey respondents in South Africa suggesting that they found unpaid care easier to manage with platform work than other forms of paid work, participants in our qualitative interviews nonetheless articulated a range of challenges that were more focused around care than their domestic work. A key challenge was the unavailability of paid childcare services. This often coincided with times of highest demand for platform workers’ services; for example, because crèches close for the weekends and holidays (notably December) which, according to a platform representative, is when many clients want their houses cleaned. This is highly significant as it suggests that the majority of platform workers with young children (83% of our survey respondents) are disadvantaged compared to those without such responsibilities.

Another pressing challenge across both South Africa and Kenya is the often long and/or unpredictable hours worked on gig platforms, with gigs often starting early or finishing later than the booked time, as described in the previous chapter.

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In some cases, workers without family members or other childcare support reported having to forego gigs that demanded extended working hours, for others it meant being regularly rushed and under pressure.

Many participants described how it was difficult for them to arrange childcare when gigs started early, as some had to leave the house as early as 4 a.m. or 5 a.m. to reach their client's home on time. Many of these women relied on family or neighbours being available at this time, while others engaged their informal – and therefore fairly flexible – network of family and friends only when a gig was available. Although a critical source of childcare support, participants reported that informal networks were not always available, which limited their ability to do paid work. Further, changing family forms can mean that such support is waning, and respondents highlighted that while some older family members assisted with unpaid care, sick or very elderly relatives generated extra care loads for them.

Despite the challenges, underemployment manifested through irregular and part-time work led many to engage informal networks instead of a formal childcare service, such as a crèche, where fees were paid monthly:

At the crèche we do not pay every day we pay monthly a sum of ZAR 300. So whether you take your child or not it's a fixed amount ZAR 300 that you pay. (Faheema, Cape Town)

Further, several of those who did use formal arrangements spoke about what happened with childcare if they were running late finishing a gig (a fairly regular occurrence due to high workload, as described above). Some (but not all) childminders charged extra fees if parents picked up their child later than the agreed time, which represented a significant challenge for workers with an already stretched income. Again, informal arrangements appeared to help some workers here. One participant described how she paid a fixed rate each week to her childminder, but also brought food as an extra 'thank you' when she was running late from a gig to pick up her child. Another said that her childminder was very understanding and would charge her less if she

only got a short booking as she knew the worker didn't earn much. However, such favourable arrangements were far from universal.

The unpredictability of gig-work timings clearly emerged as a cause of stress and pressure for workers who wanted to keep their clients happy and maintain a high rating, meaning they often didn't have a choice but to stay late. This often created emotional costs through increased stress at not being able to pick their child(ren) up as planned and spend time with them as they would have liked to do, as well as stress related to the financial costs of childcare.

Responses from Kenyan participants reinforced the finding that low earnings mean that few gig workers can afford paid help to assist with their unpaid work and household chores either. As this key informant explained:

Remember she still has these chores back at home. So, [she does] double work for just survival pay. . . . This woman cannot hire someone to relieve her of her chores back at home. So, she will go find something for survival, come back home and still deliver the [unpaid] work that was left. (KUDHEIHA representative)

This clearly highlights the survival nature of much of the paid work respondents engaged in, as well as the inherent inequality between better-off women who can afford help with childcare and other domestic work and the poorest women who have no such option and are instead more reliant on family and other informal networks. One further message clearly emerged: even when women were earning too little from gig work, they still preferred to earn a small income to help meet household needs instead of solely attending to their children and household chores and earn nothing.

### 6.4.2 Trade-offs

We identified a range of trade-offs faced by workers in managing paid and unpaid work. Aside from the challenge in finding childcare, many workers from both South Africa and Kenya preferred not to work at the weekend so they could look after and spend time with their children and carry out

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domestic work, or engage in other low-cost activities such as attending church or *chamas* (savings and welfare groups) – although, as discussed below, this was not always possible in practice. Where some gig work allowed more autonomy over hours worked – for example, in ride-sharing – some workers chose to work longer hours from Monday to Friday to earn more, but this exacerbated unpaid care challenges during those days.

A clear finding across the board was that many workers viewed their non-gig work days as ‘sacrificing’ pay, with any days not in paid work seen as wasted time when they could otherwise be earning money:

Yes there are days that I would like to spend with my child, like off days and I sometimes sacrifice money to spend time with my child at home but the money that we earn, you want to do quite a lot with it so I would say if I can spend one day at home with my child it’s fine, not more than that.  
(Precious, Cape Town)

Ivy, a ride-hailing driver from Kenya described how every minute was a chance to earn an income to support her family: ‘I can get to decide I am resting on Sunday. But, if I decide I am resting on Sunday, then that means I will have to work more over the week.’ She carried a packed lunch so she didn’t lose time in a restaurant and could be ready for a client at any moment and had reduced time spent on self-care, including going to the hair salon by cutting her own hair. Yet fear of losing income had also prevented her from striking with other drivers for better working conditions:

What was happening like in this last strike, is that people were told, ‘Do not . . . do not work.’ So, ‘do not work’, for us as ladies, mothers, what does it mean? Our families do not eat.

On some of the platforms studied, the high frequency of short bookings (notably for ride-sharing and in some cases domestic work) meant that such gigs could be accepted by respondents, including at short notice at the

weekend, because workers could return home relatively quickly. While many found that they achieved a better work–life balance when they did not get many gigs because they had more time, the resultant overall low income posed a severe challenge:

it’s nice to work when you want to work but the main issue is money. All I want is to earn a little bit more than I earn now and still have time to take care of my family.  
(Jane, Johannesburg)

Workers displayed two main strategies in the face of the trade-off between managing unpaid care and generating income. For some, they were simply unable to take on more paid hours:

It is very difficult because I have to wake up very early at 5 a.m. and prepare lunchboxes for the kids, I have to wash them both. Their transport picks them up at 6 a.m. and I have to be at a booking at 7.30 a.m. After work I have to make sure I’m home by 4 p.m. because that’s when the transport drops off the kids. So I can’t even work overtime.  
(Michelle, Cape Town)

Other workers were forced by their difficult economic circumstances to deprioritise their families in order to take up gig work, including those who reported leaving their young children alone or in the care of older children. In Kenya, in particular, gig work was common among both male and female workers – both due to the need to earn an income at all possible moments, and because of their associated lack of negotiating power with clients who wanted them to work at the weekend. Critically, this pattern of working is not dissimilar to other forms of casual work described by participants, suggesting that those workers in most financial need are those least able to benefit from the flexibility and work–life balance ostensibly offered through digital platforms, and whose working conditions are most reminiscent of conditions in the wider informal economy.



### 6.4.3 Implications for children and families

For some participants, the challenge in managing paid and unpaid work was simply too difficult – several sent their child(ren) to live with family in a different location away from the city in which they resided. In some ways this meant that their paid work became easier, for example their working hours/schedule was not so much of a problem to manage alongside other responsibilities:

When I first started work, I had to leave my child with my neighbour at 4 a.m. in the morning so that I get to work on time. And as a first-time worker I had to be at work on time. So I found it better for me to send my child back home and let her come during holidays. Maybe one day when she is older she can live with me permanently . . . I had to wake up early at 4 a.m. when my child will still be sleeping so I take a bath, drop my child next door in her sleep and go to the train station. I have to take the early trains because trains delay and I end up being late for my booking. This is why I ended up leaving my child next door because no crèche opens at 4 a.m. (Akumzi, Cape Town)

Interviewer: What happens if your neighbour is not available on that day?  
Interviewee: ‘ahhh unotorega kuenda kubasa kwacho’ [you end up not taking any booking at all]. This is why it’s difficult to have my child live with me. (Akumzi, Cape Town)

This arrangement of sending children away to stay with family was felt to be positive for some children – notably given the security/safety risks in large South African cities, and because respondents felt they may have better educational opportunities. However, other workers were unhappy about the situation, because they were unable to see their children often and could not afford to visit as much as they would like, or because they worried they were neglecting their children or their children felt neglected.

As mentioned previously, gig work was also seen by some participants as posing a risk to children in some cases. For example, one worker (Petronella, Johannesburg) explained how she had to leave her child to travel to school alone when she had an early booking. Similarly, in Kenya, Ruth, a platform domestic worker, would go to work with her three-month-old baby as she was breastfeeding, so couldn’t be away from the infant during her long working days. However, Ruth’s home was far from her workplace and early start times endangered not only her own safety, but also that of the baby she carried and her three other children – aged nine, seven and four years – left behind at home when she was out working.

However, one of the most frequently recurring reports across interview respondents in both South Africa and Kenya was that gig work ultimately came second when a child was sick – this was despite the possibility of sanctions being imposed by the platform company which could affect their future opportunities of obtaining gig work, which they may not experience in other forms of work. During these times, participants’ first response was often to look for emergency care – notably from family or close neighbours. If this was not possible, workers would cancel or leave a booking, even if they risked a poor rating from clients or deactivation from a platform for cancelling at the last minute.

If a child falls sick and I want to go to work, I will report immediately that my child is sick even if I get a warning or deactivation. I have no choice because my child is sick. If my child falls sick and I am at work I will speak to my client and notify him/her that this is what happened. What I will not know is how he/she accepts or react to the situation. (Precious, Cape Town)

Losing income both for the missed gig and through disrupted relationships with clients caused significant anxiety. Even if platforms purported to be entirely flexible, workers feared that exercising this flexibility at the last minute may well jeopardise future opportunities:

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The first thing I ask myself is when I think about coming back home to take care of the child. If I leave the job and then tomorrow they tell me I don't have the job, how will the child survive? What will we eat? But I also tell the teacher to take care of the child as if they were theirs. (Cynthia, housekeeper, Nairobi)

## 6.5 Discussion of key findings

This chapter has explored the extent to which gig work supports or constrains the management of unpaid care and domestic work. It finds that, relative to other options available to many workers, platform-working modalities need to adapt in this regard. At the same time though, many workers' ideal was to have working days reminiscent of standard employment – with regular hours and income – because of the stability that this would provide and because they felt that such a working pattern would help them manage paid and unpaid work alongside other critical well-being activities like rest and sleep.

Many workers faced trade-offs between exercising choice over their working hours and income. While the ability to accept fewer or shorter bookings facilitated the management of care work, for many workers, their earnings remained insufficient to support themselves and their families – meaning some had no choice other than to take more bookings and 'get by' with childcare and domestic work. Those workers in most financial need – and therefore least able to work fewer hours, at times most suited to them – were those least able to benefit from the flexibility and work–life balance promoted by the platforms.

Furthermore, it is clear that women faced significant challenges in managing unpaid care

and domestic work due to wider structural factors. These include the highly gendered allocation of unpaid work and lack of support within the household as well as a widespread lack of comprehensive childcare options outside the home – which pose significant barriers to their engagement in paid work or business. Strategies to manage childcare differed somewhat between single and partnered women. However, there was an overall high reliance on informal networks (including family, neighbours and friends) to provide childcare due to the perceived cost, trust, convenience and affordability of formal childcare, which participants felt was likely to be low-quality and costly. The inability to access either formal or informal support also led some workers to engage in high-risk strategies, including leaving young children alone or in the care of other, slightly older children.

It is clear, therefore, that employment-based modalities such as flexible working options offer some promise to support the management of paid and unpaid work, but are not enough alone. Gig work purports to offer a means of reconciling work and care, and may offer improvements for some workers, but it does little to overcome the broader structural constraints to work–life balance and women's time poverty – including the notion that responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work rests with women. In this context, it emerged that the workers most likely to be able to exercise the most choice on platforms are those without unpaid care responsibilities such as childcare, because they are likely to be able to choose their working hours with fewer constraints. These findings cast doubt on the premise that platform work provides an ideal option to working mothers wishing for optimal work–life balance.

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# 7 Implications and ways forward to improve gig work

This research has explored working conditions in the gig economy in South Africa and Kenya and its effects on how women workers manage paid work alongside unpaid care and domestic work. We have identified a mixed picture in relation to these two interconnected aspects of women's working lives.

On the one hand, gig platforms clearly play a growing role in increasing the economic opportunities available to workers experiencing the negative effects of persistent structural unemployment and informality. Moreover, for some workers, the conditions of gig work are an improvement on what they experience in other forms of paid work – from hourly earnings to improving the isolation often felt by those accustomed to working alone and behind closed doors. As Faheema from Cape Town explained:

Clients will treat you right because they know that you have someone behind you. It's different than when you go to a client's house alone looking for work, they don't trust you.

On the other hand, workers identified significant challenges in overall working conditions and in realising the promise made by platforms that flexible gig work can significantly help to manage paid and unpaid work. Overall low and unstable income is ultimately at the heart of many of the challenges faced by workers – both in terms of an ongoing insufficiency in income to meet daily needs, and a lack of protections to support major life events such as childbirth. Low incomes also significantly offset the benefits offered by

worker-led flexibility in the gig economy, rendering it likely that workers will take on gigs outside their preferred schedule to maximise earning potential, with many resorting to insecure and, at times, risky childcare strategies due to a lack of other options. In short, workers prioritise gaining more hours of work and therefore more income, not more flexibility.

Yet the question of how to improve workers' experiences remains a conundrum. A key challenge is that – as platform representatives interviewed for this research confirmed – the gig economy in South Africa and Kenya (as elsewhere) is presently a buyers' market, with clients using platforms to procure cheap, convenient services at the touch of a button. Experience shows clients are often unwilling to pay significantly higher prices for platform-mediated services and goods as they can be procured significantly cheaper – or on terms that suit them better – in the traditional informal economy. This constrains platforms' ability to take seemingly simple action in response to worker concerns, such as moving gig start timings so domestic workers can travel more securely. To do so would likely limit client demand for platform workers' services, serving only to reduce the economic opportunities offered against a backdrop of high un/underemployment.

A further part of the conundrum, and one at the core of many debates the world over surrounding the gig economy, relates to the nature of the employment relationship between workers and platforms. It questions whether the best route to improving conditions is through establishing a formal employee–employer relationship instead of an independent-contractor model, and the presumed

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income stability and labour/social protections that accompany it. Our findings show clearly that many workers desire the type of schedule predictability and increased economic security often found in standard employment, adding important weight to such an approach.

Yet as our key informant legal experts discussed, establishing a standard employment relationship is not necessarily a panacea. This may quickly reduce the number of workers to whom platform work is available, or cause gig companies to change platform contracts or working conditions, or render workers' status as independent (or uncertain). In the case of gig sectors such as domestic work, even when an employment relationship has been established in the 'traditional' sector, in reality it has not always helped workers. For example, in South Africa, where employment law is premised on the idea of a single employer in a static workplace, highly dispersed domestic worker employees are not always able to avail of full labour protections. Many workers do not work a sufficient number of hours weekly to qualify for the rights and protections afforded by law and face significant challenges in exercising their right to collective bargaining to improve conditions. Such challenges are exacerbated by poor employer compliance with the existing law, and the gaps in protection under current legislation which include medical care, pension, employment injury benefit and family benefit (see ILO, 2016c).

At the same time, we caution against 'solutions' to improve the gig economy premised on binary notions of 'good' and 'bad' employment modalities, a category into which discussions around employment relationship versus independent contractor arguably fall. Instead, we propose that platform companies be mandated to provide a minimum set of worker protections, which accord – at a minimum – with national regulation in place. In this way, we align with the European Parliament's approach to gig work, in seeking to ensure 'fair working conditions and adequate legal and social protection for all workers in the collaborative economy, regardless of their status' (European Parliament, 2017a: para. 39). It places the onus on governments to 'ensure proper surveillance of the terms and conditions of the employment relationship or service contract, preventing abuses of dominant positions by the platforms' (European Parliament,

2017b: para. 5b). This approach is sensitive to the realities of the labour markets in which this research is situated, but rejects measures that might exacerbate the precarious conditions that many informal and non-standard workers currently face.

Going forward, the recognition of a formal employment relationship may well be identified as a priority means of improving working conditions in some contexts and as a means to ensure gig platforms do not undermine hard-won advances towards strengthened employment regulation and associated protections (notably where sectoral employee protections are already relatively stronger). In other contexts, a focus on the role of platforms in a phased introduction of the benefits of formal, standard employment to platform workers – under the approach termed 'incremental formalisation' (ILO, 2015; Stuart et al., 2018) – may be deemed more appropriate by those invested in achieving quality work. At the same time, while some platforms already offer individualised worker insurance through private schemes, which exceeds cover provided by their government, the realities of many workers' patchwork and fluctuating livelihoods mean that efforts to ensure gig workers are integrated into comprehensive and sustainable public social protection systems remain critical for their long-term security and well-being.

Finally, improving conditions for *all* workers requires linking paid and unpaid spheres of economic activity, challenging the invisibility and lack of recognition of unpaid care and domestic work, and the disproportionate load borne by women to meet domestic responsibilities. Unpaid care and domestic work remain outside the scope of much traditional labour-relations discourse and policy – despite being critical to the functioning of economies through the ongoing maintenance of the current workforce and enormous investment in bringing up future generations of workers (see Folbre, 1994). At the same time, increasing female labour force participation has gathered momentum as a key policy objective from global to local levels over recent decades – a trend that shows no sign of abating. Quite simply, boosting women's entry into paid work will have limited positive effect on their empowerment as long as the deeply gendered challenge of unpaid care and domestic work remains unaddressed. As this

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research has shown, flexible working – the favoured platform modality to address this challenge – may offer some promise, but it is not enough alone. And with too few workers fully benefiting from flexibility in practice, any gains it may provide in theory, still remain elusive for many workers.

Improving conditions in the gig economy – and ensuring all workers’ work–life balance is supported – requires a comprehensive approach, recognising that the root cause of many of the challenges gig workers face is structural inequality in the societies and economies in which they live, and recognising that many workers’ economic lives simultaneously span several sectors as they undertake other precarious work alongside the gig economy. While ensuring that platform modalities are conducive to quality work is critical, efforts to ensure better gig work must also seek to achieve economic and gender justice by addressing the broader underlying environment. Such an approach will consider what platform features can be ‘designed in’ to support workers while also envisioning a key role for governments to ensure economic, labour and social policy responds to the realities of gig workers’ economic lives in LIC and MIC settings. These are often characterised by structural challenges related to transport, crime, childcare, multiple livelihoods, precarity and highly unequal gender norms in the home and workplace, and further compounded by context-specific intersecting inequalities such as racial discrimination in South Africa. A ‘worker-centric’ approach, which foregrounds workers’ voices, preferences and experiences, and which ensures that flexibility meets workers’ needs and goals, is a critical starting point (Lehdonvirta, 2018; Hunt and Samman, 2019).

However, there is hope; a long history of improvements to conditions in the informal economy and marginalised workers’ access to care support, often through informal worker organising, offer positive examples to draw on as the gig economy grows. And despite discussion – and at times controversy – about the role of platforms in the future of work, they are set to become an ever-larger part of labour markets globally in the years to come. Perhaps counterintuitively, this growth may offer more potential to ensure that the gig economy delivers for the world’s most marginalised workers. An increased share of workers engaged

in the gig economy should increase impetus for policy-makers and workers’ groups to ensure the policy and regulatory environment is fit for purpose. Increased client demand is a prerequisite for platforms to reach scale, which in turn can also provide platforms more leverage to develop supportive modalities – from better designed and more accessible platform technology, to training and certification and increased worker access to protections, to developing partnerships with complementary financial, care or transport services. Addressing challenges in the near term is therefore critical to ensure the potential for longer-term gains for workers through increased – and better quality – economic opportunities in the gig economy is realised.

With this in mind, we propose a set of recommendations to address the key challenges identified, noting that the heterogeneity of the gig economy means that further tailoring to platforms, sectors and country contexts may be relevant as different measures and approaches are implemented.

## 7.1 Recommendations

### 7.1.1 Critical area one: ensure economic security

Improving gig workers’ economic security through ensuring stable and sufficient income is a critical priority, requiring focused action from platforms and governments. Priority measures include:

- **Increasing the demand for platform workers’ services as a key means of ensuring regular income and ensure that earnings are fair and adequate.** Key means to achieve this include:
  - For platforms and policy-makers: work to *professionalise the gig economy through certification, training and skills development* (including sector-specific skills and ‘soft’ skills needed by workers to navigate online workplaces). This can increase the quality and consistency of services delivered, create more aggregate demand from clients for platform-mediated services and an environment in which clients are increasingly willing to pay fair prices, and standardise skills to help level the field and support equal opportunities

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between gig workers.<sup>33</sup> A positive example of a skills programme for the gig economy is the Government of Kenya's Ajira Digital, which aims to support the country's youth into digital work.<sup>34</sup>

- For platforms: *increase recognition and verification of workers' education, skills and experience on platforms, by integrating work histories – including experience in the informal economy and on other platforms – into workers' profiles*. This can help to reduce reliance on individual platform ratings, counteract discrimination and provide a more comprehensive overview of workers' aptitudes and qualifications – which is particularly critical on platforms with gig bidding systems where demonstrating workers' competencies is central to their ability to command fair remuneration from clients.
- For platforms and policy-makers, **undertake robust economic analysis of the cost of living in close partnership with workers** to ensure gig rates are fair, and ensure the minimum wage is provided (and that this equates to a living income, including, accounting for overhead costs associated with the work). In some cases, this will require raising national or sector-specific minimum wages, where these undervalue the labour carried out or are insufficient to meet the cost of living (e.g. as with the minimum wage for domestic work in South Africa). Companies will ideally be proactive in this. However, given that they typically guard their own data closely (Gupta et al., 2017, Kässi and Lehdonvirta, 2019), this may also involve legal action to ensure worker access to their personal platform data (Open Society Foundations, 2019), legislated labour inspections and complaints mechanisms to enforce wage compliance and/or the development of robust complementary data sources. Methodologies are also needed to understand the gig economy, such as improved labour force and other surveys and systematisation of worker's stories for qualitative methods.
- For platforms and policy-makers, **ensure that workers can access social protection** as a critical means of supporting their economic rights, security and well-being. Focused measures that ensure that women informal workers access protection throughout the life-course are crucial, given the disproportionate and historical exclusion of this group and their growing share of the gig-economy workforce. Measures may differ according to context, but at a minimum:
  - *Entitlements linked to worker status should be based on a comprehensive definition of work and employment*, so that protections and associated benefits are not limited to those classed as 'employee', which in many contexts currently means the most marginalised workers are excluded from vital support.
  - Social protection programmes should *recognise the diverse livelihoods of many gig workers*, which are often characterised by multiple forms of employment that workers are concurrently engaged in. Portable benefits are an increasingly important means of ensuring that protection systems respond to this reality, while at the same time, linking with national social protections systems is critical to ensure workers are protected across the life-course, and to support the sustainability of these systems through employment-linked contributions (see Box 8).
- For platforms, **actively seek to engage with initiatives aimed at raising standards in the gig economy**, to become better informed about best practice and areas for improvement. Examples include the global 'Fairwork' principles, which aim to set and measure principles for decent work in the gig economy, including fair pay, conditions and contracts.<sup>35</sup> In the US, the National

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33 As noted previously, experience from the 'traditional' domestic work sector highlights that training-focused professionalisation initiatives can play an important role in raising the status of domestic work as a recognised profession, thereby helping to redress the widespread undervaluation of domestic work (for example, see ILO, 2018).

34 See <https://ajiradigital.go.ke/home>

35 See <https://fair.work/principles/>

## Box 8 Social protection for gig workers

Social protection is critical in smoothing income shocks and providing support during life events including maternity, sickness and older age. Yet many gig workers remain in highly informal conditions without full access to protection. Nonetheless, promising examples of mechanisms to extend social insurance to gig workers can be identified.<sup>36</sup>

In the US, the National Domestic Workers' Alliance has developed Alia, a digital portable benefits programme through which multiple clients can contribute to each cleaner's account, which cleaners then use to purchase benefits including disability, accident, critical illness and/or life insurance and paid days off. Alia is accessible to all US-based domestic workers registered with the platform regardless of migrant status.<sup>37</sup>

The largest gig platform in Indonesia – GoJek – became a global pioneer in 2018 by developing the SWADAYA programme, a partnership between the platform, BPJS Ketenagakerjaan (BPJS Employment) – part of the country's public social security system – and Bank Mandiri to make it easier for platform drivers to register and pay BPJS Employment Social Security contributions. This makes accident and life insurance available, with benefits including workplace accident cover, medical treatment, wage compensation if not working, as well as death and funeral compensation for their family in the event of their death.

In our focus countries, steps should be taken to address shortcomings in otherwise promising public protection mechanisms to increase worker coverage. This could involve review of the UIF in South Africa to reflect the realities of workers' lives – including ensuring that employers are identified and held accountable for paying employee contributions; recognising that many domestic workers work in multiple households throughout the month, either directly or via gig platforms or other agencies, thereby often far exceeding the 24-hour monthly minimum to be entitled to UIF benefits; and developing accessible mechanisms for registration and contributions across these different sub-sectors.

Domestic Workers' Alliance developed the 'Good work code', a set of eight principles of good work in the digital economy, signed by several major gig-economy platforms.<sup>38</sup>

### 7.1.2 Critical area two: rebalance and support unpaid care and domestic work

There is a clear need to *provide support to unpaid care and domestic work, especially childcare*, notably by redistributing care and related tasks from women to men within households and outside the household, in line with Razavi's

(2007) care diamond (Figure 1). This may be particularly acute for those gig workers who have unpredictable and fluctuating schedules, and consequent income volatility, as these factors may impede their ability to secure a regular childcare arrangement.<sup>39</sup>

Priority actions include:

- For policy-makers:
  - *Develop national childcare plans* that prioritise the needs of working families and which comprehensively address the needs of informal workers.
  - *Promote public investment in social infrastructure* to provide care, which would

36 See <https://www.myalia.org/>

37 See <https://www.go-jek.com/blog/go-jek-dan-bpjs-ketenagakerjaan-bandung/>

38 See [www.goodworkcode.org/](http://www.goodworkcode.org/)

39 Working for multiple clients may preclude many gig workers from establishing an agreement whereby they can bring their child with them to a job, which may help to explain the large number of 'left-alone' children that our respondents reported. We defer this question for future research.

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improve outcomes for children and boost choice and access to quality employment, particularly for women.

- *Initiate programmes aimed at including men in caregiving* and foster broader processes of normative change aimed at changing the traditional gendered divisions of labour.
- For platforms:
  - Platform companies may benefit from recognising *the strong business case for investment in childcare* in reducing absenteeism and turnover, improving morale and productivity and enhancing corporate reputations (IFC, 2017). A continuum of options is available to companies interested in supporting their workers' need for quality childcare, ranging from those that are more resource-intensive such as providing care services directly (potentially less suited to platform companies) to those that are less resource-intensive, such as ensuring workers can opt for flexible schedules and/or subsidising access to public services (ibid.). Initial steps to this end include:
    - *Identify the benefits and costs of providing or facilitating access to quality childcare.*
    - *Canvass worker demand for and preferences with respect to childcare services.*
    - *Support public policies that promote financing to ensure affordable and quality care.*

### 7.1.3 Critical area three: realise worker-led flexibility and choice over working schedules

Worker-led flexibility can make a critical contribution to work–life balance and can be an important means of supporting workers' choice and autonomy in their working lives. Therefore, supporting workers' access to flexible working schedules is an important step towards increased empowerment and good working conditions. The converse of this is that workers need some assurance of stability in their work. Critical steps that can be taken by platforms to realise worker-led flexibility while supporting security include:

- **Ensure workers have greater control of their own schedules**, including the ability to choose when to engage in gigs and when to cancel gigs they are no longer willing/able to carry out (e.g. at short notice if a child is sick). Platforms undoubtedly face challenges ensuring the continuity of service required to maintain the sizeable, loyal client base essential to providing workers with economic opportunities in the face of late changes. Therefore, we advocate approaches that maximise both flexibility and positive working conditions – notably by removing sanctions and instead encouraging consistency and predictability among workers through a positive reinforcement system, such as improved ratings or a payment bonus if they fulfil a set period without late cancellation.
- **Increase client demand at times preferred by workers.** The means to achieve this are likely to vary significantly between gig sectors but may include pricing structures that incentivise clients to book gigs at times preferred by workers, and improving understanding among clients of the challenges faced by workers and highlighting ways they can support workers to overcome these (e.g. by booking gigs at times that pose lower security risks to workers on their commute).
- **Address the issue of client underreporting the amount of work required** at time of booking to ensure workers finish within the allocated time. To achieve this, workers should be supported and encouraged to report instances of forced overtime or inaccurate gig descriptions to the platform, which are then followed up with the client to ensure any repeat booking is representative of the tasks to be carried out.
- **Enact measures to provide gig workers with some stability**, such as guarantees of a minimum number of hours of work in a given period, and compensation if clients cancel gigs they have committed to carrying out. Legislative initiatives from the US seeking to ensure a 'fair workweek' could provide some guidance in this respect, and this need not eliminate the flexibility that some workers seek (see Box 9).



## Box 9 US legislation of fair working hours and the gig economy

In the US, between 2014 and 2017, five cities (San Francisco, San Jose and Emeryville, California, New York City, New York and Seattle, Washington) and the state of Oregon passed comprehensive ‘fair work-week’ laws geared at providing workers (mainly those working in fast-food and retail, which are most likely to be subject to income volatility) with greater predictability, stability and flexibility in their work schedules. The specifics differ across contexts, but these laws generally include provisions that workers receive advance notice of their schedules, additional compensation for unexpected schedule changes, the right to accept or decline additional or extended shifts, mandatory ‘rest periods’ between shifts and the right to request scheduling accommodations. Many of these laws also mandate that part-time staff be given the opportunity to increase their hours of work before employers hire new staff. Similar legislative proposals have been advanced at a national level.

Following legislation in some US states mandating the treatment of gig workers as employees, ride-hailing companies have warned that this would require scheduling drivers in advance, and thereby would reduce the flexibility they offer their drivers to choose when and where to work. However, experts have contested this claim. The key will be to balance the diverse needs of the gig work force, some of whom will privilege flexibility and others greater stability in terms of working hours and earnings. Specific proposals include guaranteeing minimum working hours to gig workers with a certain tenure and offering regular employment contracts to those workers carrying out most of the work.

Sources: Wolfe et al. (2018), Conger and Scheiber (2019), De Stefano, Aloisi and Silberman (2019), Muro et al. (2019).

### 7.1.4 Critical area four: ensure physical security and safety

The physical security and safety experienced by gig workers is at risk during journeys to/from gigs, as well as during ‘working time’. Addressing the various forms of violence and abuse linked to gig work requires holistic action from platform companies and policy-makers:

- For platforms, take proactive steps to **‘design-in’ measures to prevent violence and abuse during gigs**, as well as to support workers who experience it, including:
  - *Experiment with providing workers with transport to/from gigs*, including providing safe transport where feasible.
  - *Build in platform features to ensure that workers can quickly and safely access support in the event of a safety threat or violation*. Examples of this include ‘panic buttons’ within app interfaces which may connect to the platform office, police or other reliable support services, as well as a freephone emergency phone line. A positive example of this was developed by Uber in South Africa in 2018 (and elsewhere), whose ‘emergency assistance button’ allows drivers, clients and delivery riders to access private emergency and security services via the app (Kansal, 2018).
- *Ensure worker reports of client abuse, harassment or other negative behaviour towards workers are treated seriously*, with robust sanctions or other appropriate responses to deter and tackle such behaviour – including reporting crimes to the police where the worker supports this course of action. Ensuring a two-way rating system so workers can rate clients and that client ratings are available to all workers can facilitate this outcome.
- For policy-makers, **develop understanding of the specific experiences of violence and abuse faced by platform workers**, and ensure they are fully *incorporated into policies and programmes to ensure worker safety*, both in the workplace and during the journey to/from work. This can involve:
  - Expanding the remit of government workplace inspections to include the

locations in which gig work takes place, and measures that would benefit all workers, such as ensuring that strategies to tackle gender-based violence include abuses linked to work and employment.

- Explicitly designing infrastructure and transport policy and planning to tackle violence and abuse.

### 7.1.5 Critical area five: base policy and practice on worker experience and priorities

Gig workers remain largely unorganised globally, which poses a critical barrier to ensuring worker-led policy and platform models. Key routes to improvement include:

#### Box 10 Incremental improvement – steps taken by the platform to improve working conditions

During this two-year research project, we worked with a domestic work platform in South Africa to better understand gig workers' paid and unpaid working lives, identifying a range of opportunities and challenges. During and subsequent to our data collection, and following discussion with the company about our emerging findings, additional measures aimed at improving working conditions have been put in place, including:

- Expanding options for increasing income and reducing income volatility:
  - Workers receive remuneration if a client cancels a booking later than 3.00 p.m. the day before, through a 'late cancellation' charge applied to clients (SweepSouth, n.d.b).
  - A new pricing model based on a minimum booking time of three hours for which workers receive payment equivalent to at least the current national minimum wage for a full day's work. This replaces the previous model under which workers were paid per hour worked. Hours booked past the three-hour minimum are now charged to clients at a cheaper rate, incentivising clients to book longer gigs and thereby further increasing worker utilisation and earnings. Workers booked for three-hour gigs only are able to engage in more than one booking daily.
  - A data-free app has been rolled out, eliminating airtime costs for workers to connect to the platform.
- Increasing protections and benefits:
  - Accidental death and disability cover insurance is offered to workers following completion of 50 hours of work on the platform via a private insurance partner.
  - Workers are insured against breakages at clients' homes, eliminating their financial liability for associated costs.
  - The platform has introduced guaranteed payment of workers following gigs, even if a client does not make payment to the company for services received.
- Supporting information-sharing, training and skills development:
  - A regular newsletter is distributed to workers providing tips on topics such as how to use the 'EarnMore' platform, videos to demonstrate cleaning skills, time management and handling difficult clients.
  - Training is delivered to workers in Cape Town to develop their knowledge on using home appliances via partnership with Hirsch's, a major South Africa appliance retailer.

Future avenues under exploration include:

- options to better link workers/employers to the UIF, notably for workers who take recurrent/ longer-term bookings with clients and so meet the minimum UIF weekly time requirements
- use of a skills development online platform to deliver training to workers.

The realisation of these changes highlights the positive value of collaboration (including sharing platform data) and constructive dialogue between independent researchers and gig companies. Their rapid implementation also highlights the agility of gig companies, showing that positive, tangible – and at times immediate – change in workers' experiences is entirely feasible when platforms commit to improving conditions.

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- For platforms, **establish collective mechanisms** through which gig workers (and clients where relevant) can share experiences and negotiate positive working conditions, including improved labour rights and social protections. Some promising examples of this kind of agreement have already emerged, including in Denmark where a pioneering collective agreement between Hilfr.dk, a Danish platform for cleaning in private homes, and 3F, a Danish trade union, came into force in August 2018 (Hilfr, n.d.).
  - For policy-makers, **ensure that gig worker representatives meaningfully participate in labour, social and economic policy discussion**, with the aim of ensuring that their voice, priorities and experiences are represented, and that policy and regulation is fit for purpose as the gig economy grows.
  - For unions and other worker collectives, **increase understanding of the experiences of platform workers** through meaningful engagement of platform-worker groups and their representatives, and seek to include them in union membership, union strategies and development of collective-bargaining processes/policy engagement. Social media, in particular, provides a promising means to identify and engage with platform workers, particularly in the first instance, given that many platform workers engage in active dialogue with each other through social media.
  - For worker groups, the **development of platform cooperatives** – in which worker cooperatives harness platform technology to reach customers – may provide a promising option to take more control of their economic lives and ensure quality work. Promising examples include Up & Go in New York City, a platform cooperatively owned by professional home cleaners which operates to self-defined ethical principles, including paying a fair wage to all members and using non-toxic cleaning products – thereby supporting the occupational health of workers and the wider environment.<sup>40</sup>
  - For funders and other advocates looking to support worker groups, **seek to identify and meaningfully engage with representative gig worker unions/collectives**, including burgeoning platform cooperatives. Support their work and strategic priorities where they already exist and provide support for the development and strengthening of nascent unions/collectives as they emerge and grow. To ensure comprehensive and gender-responsive support, this may involve working with informal economy-focused unions as well as women-focused movement actors and unions.

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40 See <https://www.upandgo.coop/>

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# 8 Future research directions

This report has focused on two key questions: 1) what do the implications of the burgeoning gig economy signify for working conditions in lower-income settings reliant in large part on informal or casual work? and 2) does gig work offer workers, primarily women workers, flexibility that helps them to manage paid work and unpaid care responsibilities? While we have provided some responses to these questions, based on empirical data we have collected, other issues either emerged in the course of this research or go beyond the scope of this report, and would benefit from future research.

Specific issues that arose in the course of this research apply to gig work as well as the wider realities of workers lives. These include (but are not limited to):

- *The ‘superstar’ effect.* Our results show that in South Africa, gig work tends to be distributed somewhat unevenly among platform domestic workers, and we have speculated that concentration of work among a small share of workers may be part of the dynamic of the evolution of platform companies more broadly. This concern requires more empirical study, and, if indicative of a broader trend, consideration of the implications for those workers who may be more likely to become marginalised through platform work and how they could be supported better.
- *Children ‘left alone’.* Our results suggest that a sizeable share of respondents felt compelled to leave young children alone or in the care of other young children while they engaged in gig work. This could be interpreted as a risky strategy to address childcare needs, potentially endangering young children. More work is needed to validate this finding and to

probe more into what ‘alone’ means, given the realities of their parents’ living conditions, and what kinds of policy supports would address this issue.

- *Informal care networks.* Networks of family, friends and neighbours emerged as an important support network to women gig workers to meet their childcare needs. Further study of what this support involves in practice would foster understanding of the impact, quality and sustainability of this type of care (and again, if additional supports to these carers would be useful). A better understanding of the role of fathers, particularly those living outside their children’s households, is also warranted.

Beyond these specific issues, we recognise that the nature of the employment relationship between the platform and worker is likely to remain a bone of contention for some time to come in discourse and in relation to the way the gig economy is organised. This is reflected in ongoing litigation and regulatory oversight being pursued by workers and labour advocates in many settings globally, including South Africa and Kenya.

Going forward, we encourage further exploration of how to ensure that regulation is comprehensive and provides for labour and social protections for gig workers, notably in contexts where labour-related policy advances remain focused on improving conditions in the informal economy. This is a significantly different starting point from many high-income contexts where the gig economy is assumed to signal a regression in standards experienced by workers previously accustomed to conditions associated with standard/formal employment. This may include legal analysis to ensure a comprehensive statutory definition of employment and/or work

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under which gig workers can access labour rights and protections; political economy analysis to understand the context-specific political incentives shaping local labour and social policy, the social contract governing labour relations and the

distribution of shared responsibility, risk-pooling and perceptions of cost/benefits shaping social protection systems; and gender analysis to ensure that the future of work supports – and does not further marginalise – women workers.

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# Annex 1. Analysis of platform data and regressions

## Utilisation

Utilisation can be challenging to measure in a context in which workers have the ability to specify the number of days they are available for platform work and to take ‘days off’ due to unforeseen circumstances on days when they would otherwise be working. To compute the rate at which workers on the platform are utilised, we focused on those workers available for full-time work (five or more days currently available – the platform representative noted that this metric is likely to be a proxy for previous days available, as it does not change often; it is the most straightforward metric at our disposal for assessing worker availability). Over the course of a year, we only considered those workers who had undertaken at least one job in a given month (to exclude those workers who might be registered on the platform but not be accepting any jobs – which the platform representative indicated is an ongoing challenge). We factored in the ‘days off’ a worker chooses to take by subtracting these from total availability in a given month (and capping the number of ‘days off’ at 21). We assume that a full-time working week would consist of 40 hours of work (e.g. five days of eight hours per day), minus any days off. We then computed the share of hours in a month that our ‘full-time’ cohort of employees worked, in practice, as a share of those for which they were available for work.

$$\text{utilisation\_ft\_} = (\text{hoursworked}) / ((40 \text{ hours/week}) * (4.34524 \text{ weeks/month}) - (\text{daysoffcount\_ft} * 8))$$

## Wages and their variability

To assess wages, we again distinguished full-time and part-time workers as our main interest was in the pay secured by those workers available to work five or more days weekly. Having identified this cohort, we used platform data on hours worked and on average earnings per worker (which relate to tenure on the platform) to estimate weekly earnings per worker. We then computed the estimated average weekly earnings of workers presumed to be available five or more days weekly over a 16 month period and the average coefficient of variation. The difference between the two indicators reveals the extent to which fluctuations in wages are determined by worker decisions to take time off paid work versus the platform being unable to provide work on a given day (though of course we cannot discount the possibility that a worker chose to take a ‘day off’ on the grounds that she did not think the platform could provide work). To look at wage variability in more depth, we identified the subset of workers who had been on the platform for a 52-week period and measured the level and dispersion of their wages – then looked at the average and median coefficient of variation across all workers. This provided a measure of standard deviation standardised by mean income.

## Distribution of work

For full-time workers and all workers, we looked at the cumulative distribution of hours worked relative to the cumulative share of workers, again factoring in ‘days off’ that the worker opted for.

## Regression: determinants of life satisfaction

Following Berger et al. (2018), we employed an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to measure determinants of life satisfaction on the basis of ‘extensive evidence based on a variety of datasets showing that the assumption of cardinality of responses and the use of linear models typically yields very similar results to using ordered models, and that the debate over whether subjective well-being measures are ordinal or cardinal has limited empirical relevance (e.g. Helliwell, 2003; Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters, 2004; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006 cited in Berger et al., 2018: 20).

Variables	Life satisfaction OLS
Age	-0.258* (0.148)
Age squared	0.004* (0.002)
Married	0.288 (0.176)
Highest level of education: matric/O levels	-0.060 (0.204)
Highest level of education: diploma	-0.223 (0.330)
Highest level of education: university degree	-0.513 (0.439)
Highest level of education: other tertiary qualification	0.054 (0.390)
Highest level of education: other	-0.321 (0.558)
Health: good	-0.159 (0.176)
Health: fair	-0.718** (0.283)
Health: bad	-1.096** (0.497)
Health: very bad	-0.991 (1.053)
City: Centurion	-0.152 (0.421)
City: Durban	-0.039 (0.376)
City: Johannesburg	0.019 (0.222)
City: Pretoria	0.324 (0.339)
City: Roodepoort	-0.425 (0.342)
Hours worked	0.002** (0.001)
Demand for flexibility	-0.093 (0.178)
Has another job	0.104 (0.187)
The platform offers better alternatives	0.049 (0.177)
Current days available	0.085 (0.052)
Constant	7.284*** (2.507)
Observations	170
R-squared	0.227

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1



## Regression: determinants of superstar status

We employed a standard logistic regression and a standard Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to measure determinants of ‘superstar’ status. In the logistic regression, the binary variable indicated whether or not the number of hours that a full-time worker worked each month in 2017/18 placed her in the top decile of the distribution in terms of the share of hours available that she worked. In the OLS regression, the dependent variable was hours worked.

Variables	(1) Superstar: Logistic	(2) Superstar: OLS	(3) Superstar: Logistic w/o flexibility	(4) Superstar: OLS w/o flexibility	(5) Superstar: Logistic w/o days av	(6) Superstar: OLS w/o days
What is your age, in years?	0.105 (0.235)	0.022 (0.036)	0.093 (0.234)	0.020 (0.035)	0.048 (0.233)	0.006 (0.036)
Age squared	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.001)
Is married	0.154 (0.326)	0.037 (0.054)	0.144 (0.325)	0.036 (0.053)	0.118 (0.319)	0.028 (0.055)
Highest level of education: Matric/O levels	0.325 (0.391)	0.039 (0.061)	0.290 (0.388)	0.034 (0.060)	0.414 (0.380)	0.056 (0.061)
Highest level of education: Diploma	0.420 (0.653)	0.045 (0.109)	0.424 (0.654)	0.045 (0.109)	0.514 (0.638)	0.076 (0.111)
Highest level of education: University degree	1.055 (0.660)	0.197 (0.123)	1.046 (0.660)	0.197 (0.122)	1.020 (0.654)	0.197 (0.125)
Highest level of education: Other tertiary qualification	0.066 (0.888)	0.018 (0.116)	0.057 (0.877)	0.018 (0.114)	-0.156 (0.877)	-0.006 (0.117)
Highest level of education: Other	1.065 (1.027)	0.198 (0.178)	1.049 (1.026)	0.197 (0.177)	1.063 (1.015)	0.197 (0.180)
City = 2, City: Centurion	-1.114 (1.134)	-0.145 (0.140)	-1.069 (1.132)	-0.138 (0.139)	-1.232 (1.124)	-0.168 (0.142)
City = 3, City: Durban	-0.870 (0.730)	-0.107 (0.105)	-0.852 (0.727)	-0.103 (0.104)	-0.711 (0.715)	-0.082 (0.106)
City = 4, City: Johannesburg	-0.299 (0.382)	-0.041 (0.063)	-0.264 (0.376)	-0.034 (0.062)	-0.402 (0.374)	-0.057 (0.064)
City = 5, City: Pretoria	0.391 (0.473)	0.074 (0.082)	0.422 (0.470)	0.081 (0.081)	0.223 (0.455)	0.047 (0.083)
City = 6, City: Roodepoort	-1.607 (1.108)	-0.158 (0.111)	-1.574 (1.108)	-0.153 (0.110)	-1.530 (1.082)	-0.161 (0.112)
City = 7, omitted	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of days available per week	0.710*** (0.235)	0.114*** (0.038)	0.722*** (0.233)	0.116*** (0.037)		
Demand for flexibility	-0.071 (0.348)	-0.002 (0.055)			-0.013 (0.339)	0.005 (0.056)
Has another job	-0.569 (0.427)	-0.096 (0.065)	-0.593 (0.425)	-0.100 (0.064)	-0.417 (0.415)	-0.066 (0.065)
SS offers better alternatives	0.212 (0.343)	0.028 (0.054)	0.222 (0.338)	0.031 (0.053)	0.042 (0.330)	0.010 (0.055)
More than 400 hours tenure	0.769** (0.356)	0.122** (0.057)	0.779** (0.354)	0.122** (0.056)	0.805** (0.347)	0.135** (0.057)
Mean client ratings	1.028** (0.454)	0.087** (0.041)	1.018** (0.450)	0.086** (0.040)	0.952** (0.432)	0.082** (0.041)
City = 7, City: Stellenbosch		-0.385 (0.419)		-0.381 (0.417)		-0.388 (0.426)
Constant	-11.861** (4.775)	-1.176* (0.687)	-11.689** (4.752)	-1.154* (0.683)	-6.344 (4.319)	-0.234 (0.622)
Observations	280	281	282	283	280	281
R-squared		0.126		0.126		0.095

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

# Annex 2. Demographic characteristics of workforce

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Observations
Is a student	0.26	<0.44>	642
Female	0.93	<0.25>	642
Married	0.37	<0.48>	642
Single	0.59	<0.49>	642
Widowed	0.04	<0.20>	642
Age	34.44	<6.25>	642
Age group: 15–24	0.05	<0.22>	642
Age group: 25–34	0.47	<0.50>	642
Age group: 34–44	0.42	<0.49>	642
Age group: 45–65	0.06	<0.24>	642
Highest level of education: didn't finish school	0.27	<0.44>	627
Highest level of education: matric or O Levels	0.54	<0.50>	627
Highest level of education: diploma	0.06	<0.24>	627
Highest level of education: university degree	0.05	<0.22>	627
Highest level of education: other tertiary education	0.05	<0.23>	627
Highest level of education: other	0.03	<0.16>	627
Race/ethnicity: black African	0.96	<0.20>	629
Race/ethnicity: 'coloured'	0.02	<0.13>	629
Race/ethnicity: Indian/Asian	0.01	<0.08>	629
Race/ethnicity: white	0.01	<0.10>	629
Race/ethnicity: other	0.00	<0.07>	629
Language: English	0.41	<0.49>	642
Language: Ndebele	0.06	<0.24>	642
Language: Shona	0.10	<0.29>	642
Language: Sotho	0.03	<0.18>	642
Language: Xhosa	0.14	<0.35>	642
Language: Zulu	0.26	<0.44>	642
How many children do you have?	1.76	<2.16>	861
How many of your children live with you in your main household?	3.19	<2.44>	546
How many of your children are under 18?	2.92	<2.55>	528
How many of your children are under six?	2.47	<2.99>	526
Main person responsible for children			422
Household size			526







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