

Challenges of platform employment development in BRICS countries

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Abstract

The paper seeks to evaluate the state of development of platform employment in the BRICS countries under the influence of digital transformation of the economy and society and identify common challenges that the countries face in this area. The study of the national regulatory frameworks and statistical data from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa allowed the authors to pinpoint the main trends in the platform employment development, identify its ‘bottlenecks’ caused by the lack of common understanding of the phenomenon, create socio-demographic portrait of the platform worker and address the issues pertaining to collective representation of the workers’ interests with a focus on social partnership. The research has taken into account specific traits of the BRICS countries and so its findings and proposals can be used for flexible regulation of their platforms aiming to achieve a balance of interests of the government, business and workers.

Keywords

platform employment, digital labour, digital labour platforms, BRICS

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается состояние развития платформенной занятости в странах БРИКС под влиянием цифровой трансформации экономики и общества, а также выявляются общие проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются эти страны в данной области. Изучение национальных регуляторных рамок и статистических данных из Бразилии, России, Индии,

Китая и Южной Африки позволило авторам определить основные тенденции в развитии платформенной занятости, выявить «узкие места», вызванные отсутствием общего понимания данного феномена, создать социо-демографический портрет платформенного работника и рассмотреть вопросы, касающиеся коллективного представительства интересов работников с акцентом на социальное партнерство. В исследовании учтены специфические особенности стран БРИКС, что позволяет использовать его выводы и предложения для гибкого регулирования их платформ с целью достижения баланса интересов государства, бизнеса и работников.

Ключевые слова

платформенная занятость, цифровой труд, цифровые трудовые платформы, БРИКС

JEL: F02; J64; J68.

Introduction

Digital technologies and their development around the world are becoming the driving force of social and economic transformation. Global labour market is no exception. Under the influence of digitalization, the new forms of employment, platform employment in particular, are becoming more widespread.

With growing scale and variety of digital platforms, the number of platform workers increases alongside changes that occur in labour organization and its professional and qualification structure. Determined by specific factors, these processes are forming consistent trends that need to be identified in order to effectively regulate the development of new segments of the labour market.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) notes that the greatest impact of digital economy on employment is felt by online platforms (ILO, 2021b).

In the early 2015, the ILO held a Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Non-Standard Forms of Employment that represented the views of the government, the Employers' group and the Workers (ILO, 2016). As a result of the meeting, the ILO issued a report (2016) outlining the main challenges of the new non-standard forms of employment that have been the focus of attention of national and international organizations, countries and their associations to this day.

Firstly, platform workers are less protected than workers in «standard» employment. The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the need to address the existing social security gaps related to platform workers, including their lack of access to unemployment insurance, job retention programs, sickness benefits, and the occupational safety and health issues (OECD, 2020). Secondly, firms that rely on platform employment may have to face consequences of management decisions made without full understanding of the risks involved. Next, what may be desirable and beneficial for the individual in the short term may have negative consequences in the long term for society as a whole, calling for government interventions in cases like underinvestment in innovation, slowing productivity growth, risks to sustainability

of social security system and poor macroeconomic performance. The resulting fourth challenge of platform work development might be defined as social consequences that require further research (ILO, 2016).

The platform employment also exerts impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite the flexibility of platform employment and other possible benefits, it is associated with challenges related to irregularity of work, low income, unfavorable working conditions, social security deficit and difficulties in advocating for one's interests through public associations. Most platform workers lack access to social security networks; this not only exacerbates inequality and decent work deficit (SDG 10 «Reducing Inequalities», SDG 8 «Decent Work and Economic Growth»), but also threatens people's health (SDG 3 «Good Health and Well-being»). During the COVID-19 pandemic, workers exposed to health risks without access to social security were pushed into poverty (SDG 1 «No Poverty») (Dhir et al, 2023).

International organizations seek the solutions to the challenges of platform employment in implementing certain measures; these are woven through all their reports, declarations and speeches on the world of work. The above-mentioned 2016 ILO report notes the need for measures to address inadequate working conditions, support effective labour market transitions, promote equality and non-discrimination, safe and healthy workplaces (for which improvement of labour inspection system is necessary) and ensure freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (ILO, 2016). Many of these challenges have been highlighted in Declarations and other documents adopted at different years within the OECD, G20 (e.g. ILO, OECD, 2020; ILO, 2021a), BRICS (e.g. BRICS, 2015; BRICS, 2017; ILO, ISSA, 2018; ILO, ISSA, 2022), etc. The most challenging global task is to ensure social security for all. According to different international organizations, measures aimed at resolving this issue should be based on a human centric approach to the Future of Work, with individuals occupying the central place in economic and social policies.

The BRICS countries have common position on platform employment, emphasizing the need to «develop regulations covering new or non-standard forms of work that ensures full respect for workers' rights and access to social protection» (BRICS, 2015, para. 6) and «adequate social security coverage for workers across different contractual arrangements including non-standard forms of employment, supporting the mobility of workers, complementing effective and efficient contributory social insurance schemes with non-contributory schemes» (BRICS, 2017, para. 16).

The increasing importance of platform employment is noted in every BRICS country, raising the issue of the non-structured and/or very starting nature of labour regulation in this sphere. It is therefore essential to identify the specific features of platform employment in the BRICS countries and the trends in its development under the influence of digital transformation of the economy and society. This will help develop proposals for flexible regulation of the platform work to achieve a balance of interests of the government, business and workers.

Approaches to the definition of platform employment

Platform employment around the world is actively explored in various aspects: legal formalization of employer-employee relations, peculiarities of platform workers representation in the form of digital trade unions, prospects of uniting platform employers and organizers in various organizational forms, the need to increase the level of social protection of platform workers, and others. There are no established and generally accepted approaches, but certain trends can be observed in both practical and theoretical areas. The most acute issue at hand is the lack of common framework of categories and concepts, as well as the absence of unambiguous criteria for classifying those employed as platform workers, which complicates both the prevalence estimation of platform employment and cross-country comparisons.

Although platform employment is in focus of labour regulation in all the BRICS countries, only India has a legal definition of this type of employment.

According to the Code on Social Security of India (2020), the ‘gig and platform economy’ refers to a labour market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to organised traditional permanent jobs. Workers in this context are often referred to as “gig and platform workers” and typically work on a flexible basis, often using online apps or platforms to find and perform work. The task of defining gig and platform workers becomes crucial for identifying the beneficiary group that needs to be targeted through the laws. Chapter 1, section 2(35) of Codes on Social Security defines a gig worker as “a person who participates in work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship”.

At the same time the very same document defines “platform work” as a work arrangement outside a traditional employer-employee relationship in which organizations or individuals use an online platform to access other organizations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities that may be notified by the Central Government, in exchange for payment (section 2(60)); a platform worker means a person engaged in or undertaking platform work (section 2(61)).

Legal definition of the platform employment creates opportunities to identify the specific traits of this phenomenon. However, it cannot fully distinguish between platform employment and other new forms of employment, such as gig-workers.

In Brazil, the existing labour regulation of platform employment is rather double-natured. On the one hand, there is a Tripartite GT aimed at new forms of employment being drawn as a new form of regulation, hypothetically proposing the idea of special status of platform work; on the other hand, the Draft Bill of Autonomous Platform Work enshrines the status of a platform worker as self-employed and suggests using a special tax system for this group. The term “self-employed platform worker” is introduced (Pateo et al, 2024). Yet, despite the legal initiatives aimed at regulating platform employment, the definition or the status, rights and obligations of the platform worker are still yet to be stated in law.

In Russia we observe a similar problem. A pressing need for effective government regulation of new employment forms including self-employment and platform employment is obvious, but the introduction of necessary measures is hindered by the absence of, first, legal classification of forms of employment of the population that would have included new forms of employment and second, legal interpretation of the main platform employment categories and their relation to legal status of platform workers and digital labour platforms. The Federal Law “On Employment of the population in the Russian Federation” is considered to be the fundamental normative legal act defining the legal, economic and organizational basis of government policy in the field of employment of the population and government control over compliance with legislation on employment of the population. The constantly updated old version of this law adopted in 1991 was replaced in 2023 by a new version of the law that takes into account the modern realities of the labour market (No. 565-FZ of December 12, 2023). At the preparatory stage, legislators planned to include the chapters on self-employment and platform employment. In the text of the Draft Law of Federal Law No. 275599-8 “On Employment of the population in the Russian Federation”, an attempt was made to define platform employment as the activity of the citizens (platform workers), implying personal performance of work and (or) the provision of services on the basis of contracts, that is organized using information systems (digital employment platforms) that ensure interaction between the platform workers, customers and operators of digital employment platforms via Internet. During the discussion stage, it was decided to exclude the chapters on self-employment and platform employment from the draft and make separate “satellite laws”. At the moment, the work on the draft law “On platform employment” is being completed and it will soon be ready for submission to the State Duma.

In the absence of the specific law, in Russia with respect to platform employment an approach common for many countries is used – to identify platform employment with self-employment, and to correspondingly attribute all of those working on digital labour platforms to the field of self-employment. The reason for this lies partly in the late distinguishing of the phenomenon of platform employment as a special form of employment. The controversy of this approach is shown, in particular, by the results of a large-scale sociological survey conducted by the Center for Strategic Research (CSR): only about half (46%) of the surveyed platform workers are self-employed, 29% are registered in labour relations as employees, 12% operate as individuals under a civil contract without registration as self-employed, 6% are sole proprietors. 7% of the respondents do not have legal registration of work on the platform. This heterogeneity of platform workers, together with large variability of types of existing platforms, significantly complicates regulating this form of employment and also makes it difficult to adopt at the legislative level such concepts of platform employment and digital labour platform that would suit all the interested parties (Zabelina & Sergeeva, 2024).

It can be concluded that at this point Russian legislation has not yet worked out its interpretation of the main categories of platform employment, the legal status of platform workers and digital labour platforms, their rights and obligations. The lack

of common understanding gives rise to numerous discussions at the level of platforms and academic community, in public organizations and government agencies. The last few years have marked a growing concern on the part of the government about the regulation of platform employment, which is reflected in the development of a draft law on platform employment.

It may be useful to consider China's practice of defining the platform workers. Its approach to defining platform employment is constantly changing in parallel with the changing understanding of the phenomenon. Initially, workers who carry out their activities through platforms, primarily couriers and taxi drivers, were employees for hire of platform companies, such as Ele.me, and therefore fell under the regulation of the Labor Code. Along with the increase in the coverage of platform employment, expenses for employees and the risks associated with their employment increased, leading to changes in business models: the outsourcing companies with which the platforms cooperated have started actively developing. It is important to note that drivers and couriers were still registered as employees in the outsourcing companies or employment agencies. At the same time, the Recommendations on Labor Protection and Social Protection of the Rights and Interests of Employees of new Forms of Employment clearly state that the responsibility for observing and protecting the rights of platform workers lies with the platforms; in case of violation of the rights of workers, for example, by an outsourcing company, the platform company bears full responsibility in accordance with the law (clause 1.4).

Given the companies' desire to reduce costs and risks, the expansion of employee autonomy, despite some restrictions pertained to the algorithm of applications and platforms, brought about the increases in the number of platform workers registered on special flexible employment platforms as self-employed. The self-employed, hired workers and outsourced workers thus fall into the legal field of platform employment in China. However, limiting platform employment or "attributing" it to one specific category seems inappropriate and does not reflect the existing reality.

The experience of China vividly illustrates the induction trajectory of understanding and regulating the platform employment. In terms of the content analysis of the phenomenon, this approach seems most promising since it creates foundation for integrating new forms of employment into the legal system of regulation by creating new mechanisms of interaction between the parties thus ensuring the future effectiveness of the policy. Dynamic understanding of platform employment unhindered by the already existing legal categories will help create new labour regulation, reducing the risks of designing even more "new" forms of employment that are likely to be invisible or deliberately disregarded.

In South Africa, platform work has no legal definition and seems to be heavily understudied, both theoretically and in terms of practical analysis. Platform employment is evading current definition of employment, which in South Africa is traditionally characterized by the existence of a relationship between an employer and employee. The definition then is further characterized by control versus autonomy, when the own account workers are viewed as having autonomy of their work and are supposed

to provide tools of trade for themselves. Platform workers are usually identified as own account workers, and, as Kavese, Mbali & Anyikwa (2022) showed, the gig economy relies on self-employed or independent contractors (freelancers) and, consequently, on workers classified as self-employed or independent contractors.

The lack of common understanding of platform employment not only prevents the inclusion of this phenomenon in the legal framework, but also limits cross-countries comparison and thus severely complicates the process of adopting and adjusting other countries' practices of platform employment regulation. Estimating the scale of platform employment also becomes much more difficult.

Platform employment in the BRICS countries

Statistical data related to platform employment is rather insufficient so in the absence of a unified approach to understanding platform employment it seems futile to evaluate the scale of platform employment in the BRICS association and its place in the global labour market. The only estimation possible is the individual country analysis.

In Brazil, National Labour Force Survey indicates that in 2022 there were 2.1 million platform works, which amounted to 1.7% of Brazilian occupied workers in that period (4.9% of all own-account workers). Among these workers, 1.49 million are working via service platforms (including both private transportation and delivery services) and roughly 600 thousand workers are in "e-commerce platforms" (Pateo et al, 2024). These estimations still differ greatly from the Agência IBGE data, according to which there were 1.5 million people working with the use of digital platforms and service applications in Brazil in 2022 (Agência IBGE Notícia, 2023). Although we can assume the existence of a positive trend in the platform employment growth in Brazil as the estimates of 2020 are within 500 thousand workers (Miguez & Menendex, 2021), there are no structured and unified data to support this hypothesis.

In Russia, in 2023 the platform employment reached 3,415.3 thousand people, including 3,243.7 thousand people in main work and 171.6 thousand people in additional work, which is 7% lower than the average annual value of 2022 (3,501.9 thousand people). The share of platform workers in the employed population of Russia in 2023 is 4.6% (compared to 4.9% in 2022) (Rosstat, 2024). A comparison with 2022 shows a slight decrease in the involvement of the Russian population in platform employment.

The results of the Higher School of Economics sociological survey show a somewhat different picture of the spread of platform employment in Russia. According to the estimates of the HSE Institute for Social Policy based on sample surveys of the population conducted with a unified methodology in 2022–2024, the involvement of the population (aged 18–72 years) in platform employment in Russia increased from 14.6% in April 2022 to 16.0% in April 2024, in regular platform employment the coverage rose from 3.2 to 3.5%, and in episodic platform employment — from 11.4 to 12.5%. In 2024, the share of platform employment as the main job was only 14.4% of the employed population and slightly more than half of regular platform employment (Sinyavskaya

et al, 2024). That is, according to the HSE sociological survey, the involvement of the population in platform employment seems to be significantly greater than the Rosstat estimates indicate.

It can be assumed that one of the likely reasons for such discrepancy in estimates is the difference in the wording of the questions used in the questionnaires. For example, the HSE questionnaire asks to define one's belonging to a specific group of people both in terms of the main occupation (study, work, pensioner, etc.) and in relation to platform employment ("this is my main job", "in the format of part-time work", etc.), whereas according to the methodology of Rosstat, the questionnaire suggests answers to the question: "Did you use websites or applications of Internet platforms for customer search, order fulfillment (Yandex.taxi, Avito, Profi.ru etc.) in your main/additional work last week?" It is quite obvious that Rosstat's approach to platform employment estimation has its limitations in terms of separating platform employment as such from the usual work of businesses where platforms are used, for example, in the field of marketing, public procurement or delivery (Zabelina & Sergeeva, 2024). Thus, a positive answer to the question about the use of Internet platforms in the process of commercial activity comparatively better reflects business activity than the platform employment. In addition, the question of the Rosstat Labour Force Survey questionnaire suggests answers about belonging to platform employment over a short period of time, e.g. last week, which may also affect the assessment of the scale of platform employment due to the irregular and very flexible nature of such employment.

Indian statistical data indicate that in 2020–2021 7.7 million workers were engaged in the gig economy in India, constituting 2.6% of the non-agricultural workforce or 1.5% of the total workforce (NITI Aayog, 2022). These numbers are expected to reach 23.5 million workers by 2030, representing 4.1% of India's total workforce. The researchers point out relatively high growth rates of the population involvement in the gig economy — 13% a year (Dhanya et al., 2024).

It is essential to note that over 82.5 % of gig workers in India are informal employees, which is not surprising considering that over 90% of India's workforce is informal (Dhanya et al., 2024). Hence, the development of platform employment alongside the new challenges can be characterized by the 'problems of the old', meaning that the labour market regulation challenges of the past remain acute in the new forms of employment.

In 2020, the Government of India enacted the Code of Social Security (CoSS), which granted legitimacy to the new form of work and paved the way for comprehensive reforms (NITI Aayog, 2022). However, beyond existing government schemes and development policies, and given the platforms benefits, a new approach is needed that would factor the changeable future of work due to digitalization and aim at creating opportunities for women and people with disabilities (Ramachandran & Raman, 2021).

The value generated by China's platform economy accounts for 22% of the world's platform economy. The number of «flexible» workers in China is steadily increasing, totaling more than 200 million in 2021, equal to 29.3% of the employed population (ChinaIRN, 2022). Platform workers constitute an important and growing

part of this group, with 84 million service providers and 6.31 million platform workers in 2020 (China Sharing Economy Development Report, 2021). According to China Labour Bulletin, the number of platform workers in 2015 amounted to 50 million, indicating a rather rapid growth of the involvement of the population in new forms of employment. More and more enterprises contribute to this process by using workers in flexible employment: in 2021 they amounted to 61.1% of all Chinese enterprises.

Estimation of platform employment in South Africa seems to be comparatively harder because, unlike China, South Africa does not differentiate, or tend to differentiate, platform workers from other forms of employment, usually seeing them as own account workers. Whereas in other BRICS countries there is some work done to ensure the expansion of labour regulation onto the platform employment, for example, by drawing new bills, there is no such trend in South Africa at the moment with other labour-related issues being in focus of changes in labour legislation. However, some attempts are being made to evaluate the scale of platform employment in South Africa. Some data indicate that in 2020 there were approximately 100 thousand workers in web-based crowdwork and 35 thousand in location-based platform work (Fairwork, 2020). These numbers are consistent with academic research, according to which there are about 135 thousand of platform workers in South Africa (Naidoo, 2020). This size of the digital-platform labour market represents 1 per cent of those in employment.

Even though platform employment is a completely new issue that needs to be addressed in South African legislation, the society already expresses serious concerns about the quality of work of the platforms. Recent studies show that many platforms do not provide workers with a minimum wage or decent working conditions. Some of the regulatory concerns are justified by the legal status of the workers as «independent contractors» (Mokofe, 2022). In South Africa, attempts have been made to change the nature of work in the platform economy by assessing the performance of the country's 13 largest platforms according to the five principles of fairness: fair pay, fair conditions, fair contracts, fair management, and fair representation for platform workers (Fairwork Project) (Van Belle et al, 2023).

To sum up, the trend for the development of platform employment is observed in every BRICS country; its major 'bottleneck' is the non-structured and immature labour regulation in the sphere. In this context, the paper's objective is to identify the specifics and trends in the development of platform employment in BRICS countries under the influence of digital transformation of the economy and society in order to develop proposals for flexible regulation of the platform work to achieve a balance of interests of the government, business and workers.

Socio-demographic profile of the platform workers

The expansion of platform employment, visible in all countries, contributes to the complication of the very structure of platform employment because of the increasing heterogeneity of groups of "platforms" and "platform workers".

In India, a survey was conducted with a focus on three metro cities — Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Delhi- among platform workers across five on-demand categories: cab & bike pooling, beauty & wellness, parcel delivery, and food/grocery delivery (total number of samples — 904). The findings indicate a higher representation of male gig workers in the gathered samples i.e., around 87 per cent, while women (13 per cent) are underrepresented in this sector (Dhanya et al., 2024). The underrepresentation of women is particularly noticeable in the transportation-based services where male workers overwhelmingly prevail. On the other hand, women gig workers are concentrated on beauty and wellness services. It is more difficult for women to access transportation-based services because of safety concerns, insufficient driving skills, cultural or traditional restrictions, and some other factors.

Similar traits are observed in other BRICS countries. According to Brazilian National Labor Force Survey, in 2022 the drivers and deliverers among platform workers are mostly represented by men (95% of all workers (Pateo et al, 2024). The South African research proved transport industry to be predominantly male, whereas women dominate community, social and personal services (Ramulongo, 2024). In Russia, despite the approximately equal representation of men's and women's involvement in platform employment, we can see a specific localization of male and female platform employment by type of economic activity. According to Rosstat Labour Force Survey the highest localization of men (almost 65% in total) is found to be in three industry sectors: transportation and storage (31.3% of all male platform workers); wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (19%), construction (14.4%). The highest localization of women (almost 58%) was also revealed in three areas: the provision of other types of services that include various personal services (25.2%); wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (19.7%) and professional, scientific and technical activities (13.1%). The predominantly male spheres of economic activity in platform employment in Russia are the following: transportation and storage (93.5% of men from platform workers by type of activity), construction (89.8%), information and communication activities (72.7%), predominantly female — activities in the field of health and social services (83.8%); provision of other types of services (80.5%), education (76.6%) (Rosstat, 2024).

Moreover, all the BRICS countries demonstrate high involvement of young adulthood in platform employment and a relatively high level of education of platform workers. For example, the already mentioned Indian survey showed that the largest group of platform workers is between 22–40 years of age indicating the high interest of the earlier and older young age group in gig work. The same is noted for Brazil: the National Labor Force Survey revealed that the young people between 25 and 39 years old are prevalent in the structure of platform employment. Similar findings can be drawn from the Russian official statistical data: in the age structure of platform workers in Russia, there is a predominance of such age groups as 30–39 years (36.3%) and 40–49 years (26.2%), which is typical for both men and women. The same can be said about China, where the socio-demographic portrait of the platform workforce is represented

by a woman aged 18–35 years old, working as a seller or courier in online trading (Zolotina et al, 2023); or South Africa, where mostly young to middle age population dominate platform employment. This can be explained by the ability of youth to more efficiently access and use smart phones and technology in comparison with the older generations (Ramulongo, 2024).

Concerning the level of education, around 90% of the gig workers in India, according to the survey data, are from between secondary to graduate levels (Dhanya et al., 2024). In Brazil the majority (61,3%) of platform workers have completed their secondary education and 14,2% have university degree (Pateo et al, 2024). In China most platform workers have secondary or higher education (Zolotina et al, 2023). As for Russia, the educational level of platform workers is also high: 80% of those living in the city and 68.5% of those in rural areas have specialized secondary education, while 40.5% of urban platform workers have higher education (Rosstat, 2024).

Spatial differentiation of platform workers is also one of the specific traits of platform employment in the BRICS countries. South Africa highlights the assumed predominance of urban platform workers, as most of the own account workers are located in the country's three economic hubs, i.e. three regional areas leading in terms of GDP contribution; they are also most urban (Ramulongo, 2024). In the Indian survey, conducted in metro cities, the same logic can be seen. China Labour Bulletin proves the same for China, as many platform workers live in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen (China Labour Bulletin, 2023). Russia is no exception, as in the structure of platform employment urban residents represent 82.2% of platform workers.

It is now clear that spatial, professional, age and gender differentiation of platform employment is typical of all the BRICS countries. Active involvement of young people in platform employment underscores the high potential of using platform employment as an effective tool of reducing unemployment within the framework of the youth policy. The heterogeneity of the group of platform workers is obvious already at the level of industry analysis. In all the BRICS countries, it is possible to identify industries with a significant predominance of men (transportation) or women (social and personal services), which suggests the need to create a comprehensive system for regulating platform employment, taking into account not only possible discrepancies between platform workers in a professional context, but also possible specific features of platform work in each individual segment.

Social partnership in the field of platform employment

All the BRICS countries note the high importance of social representation of platform workers; at the moment, the focus is on actively persuading platform workers to participate in the trade union movement and on expanding the functions of trade unions themselves. In China, for example, the law on trade unions has been amended to allow employees of new forms of employment to join trade unions. In India, Brazil

and Russia, trade unions have been actively involved in the discussion of new legislative initiatives.

In India, the trade unions (All India Gig Workers Union, Indian Federation of App-Based Transportation Workers etc.) participated in legislative consultation over the Code on Social Security 2020. Moreover, in 2024 the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers submitted their recommendations to the Jharkhand government concerning the Jharkhand Government Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Bill, 2024 (Dhanya, 2024). In Russia, representatives of the “Novy Trud” [New Labour] trade union also take part in the discussion within the Working Group of the draft law on platform employment, which is a companion law to the previously adopted new version of the Federal Law “On Employment of the Population in the Russian Federation”.

However, the involvement of platform workers in trade unions remains relatively low. For example, data from the eighth survey of Chinese workers (2018) show that the union participation rate for platform practitioners is only 26.5%, with 20.8% of full-time new employment form workers joining union organizations; the others prefer non-institutional means to protect their rights (Cui & Li, 2024). The same trend is noted for Russia: the Higher School of Economics’ sociological survey showed that at the moment there is no consensus in the social cluster of self-employed and platform workers regarding a possible representative lobbying for their interests. The lowest level of protection expectations (2%) among respondents is associated with the work of trade unions. Brazilian Carvalho e Nogueira longitude analysis revealed that only 35.7% of delivery drivers responded positively to the right to strike and collective agreement (Pateo et al, 2024). Because of the relatively low interest of platform workers in the trade unions, they have to use other, non-institutional, means of protecting their rights, usually in the form of strikes or protests. For example, in Russia starting in 2019, strikes of workers of the Yandex.Go, Uber platforms took place in different regions of Russia. In October 2021, a strike took place in the Moscow region, organized by workers of Yandex.Go and Citymobil. The reason for the strike was the reduction of the minimum order’s charge. In July 2020, workers connected to the Delivery Club platform went on strike in Moscow because of their fee earnings’ non-payment and an unfair system of fines (Zabelina & Sergeeva, 2024). India Swiggy workers protested in Bengaluru in 2022 demanding a fixed salary of Rs. 26000/month (Navva DHNS, 2022). In December 2021, Urban Company sued its workers for protesting outside the official premises of the company in Gurgaon (Urban company, 2022).

Although strikes and protests remain the most common practice of protecting platform workers’ interests, there are some changes for the better. Many of the platforms themselves take up social responsibility and introduce mechanisms that provide social guarantees to platform workers. For example, Urban Company (India) provides life insurance cover, disability cover and accidental hospitalization and OPD treatment cover to ensure the security and well-being of its employees (Dhanya, 2024). Didi (China) cooperated with commercial insurance companies to design special schemes for online taxi drivers, including pensions, medical insurance and accident insurance

(Cui & Li, 2024). Yandex.Taxi, Yandex.Food and Yandex.Market (Russia), in partnership with Mango insurance company, launched a pilot program of care “For their own” for direct partners of the service — self-employed and individual entrepreneurs, so that drivers and couriers could receive accident insurance and payments in case of illness (Zabelina & Sergeeva, 2024).

All the BRICS countries are aware of the growing importance of platform employment as part of the new reality of the labor market, which has made the regulation of platform employment an integral part of government policy. Given the complex nature of the relations arising from platform employment, it seems especially important to rely not only on the existing experience of legislative regulation, but also on the interests of platforms and platform workers when choosing the direction of development of political regulation. To this end, as the study showed, the BRICS countries are trying to involve all platform employment participants in a dialogue regarding the ongoing and potential legal changes.

Conclusion

Despite the development of legislative regulation in the field of platform employment and related achievements, there are many challenges on the way to public welfare that need to be taken into account.

The first challenge is the lack of clear definitions and common understanding of platform employment both at the national and international level. All countries note difficulties in separating platform workers from other types of employment, which is necessary for further development of legislative regulation in this area.

Secondly, there are great difficulties with the current system of statistical assessment. The problem lies in the non-inclusion of platform employment in the official statistics; or, if such statistics are available, in the fragmentary nature of the data studied, which does not allow the researchers to build at least medium-term trends. Even the conducted sociological studies, as shown by the reports of India and Brazil, are local in nature, and they can hardly be extrapolated to the whole country. The shortage of statistical and sociological information on the prevalence of platform employment and its characteristics is noted in all the BRICS countries. This information should be used to form public policies adequate to the specifics of this phenomenon.

The next point identified as a “challenge” is the lack of social protection noted by platform workers in all the BRICS countries. The solution to this problem, in many ways, implies the need to expand the current legislation to include platform workers in the social protection system.

It is also important that the development of current legislation should be carried out along socially important and desirable trajectories, which emphasizes the importance of institutions representing the interests of both platform workers and the platforms themselves. However, as the study showed, despite the growing interest of platform workers in the trade unions, the number of trade union members among platform

workers is low. To some extent, this may be explained by insufficient information that citizens can get about the possibility of participation and the role of trade unions. As a result, some groups of platform workers prefer to turn to other, non-institutional, means of protecting their interests.

An important part of the regulation of platform employment is the need for its parallel development with the development of regulation of the platform economy, in general, in order to increase the level of general welfare. The need for the regulation is clear, but the risks for excessive regulation are always there.

The authors formulated the following recommendations.

The importance of developing a common approach to understanding and classifying platform employment is obvious with the objective need to ensure the measurement of platform employment and its international comparison.

It is necessary to include platform employment in the system of national statistical observations, guided by the approaches recommended by the ILO, ISSA, etc., which will allow for international data comparison. There is a need to improve and unify the tools of the Labor Force Survey to provide a comprehensive description of the phenomenon of platform employment and the possibility of cross-country comparison.

The use of sociological surveys is essential so as to obtain information and feedback on the state of platform employment and workers' satisfaction with government policy measures.

It is important to continue to develop flexible mechanisms for including platform workers in social protection schemes. To improve the social partnership, there should be a focus on the development of institutions for representing collective interests of platform workers; trade unions should more actively negotiate with platforms, assist in conducting research and surveys and participate in the development of labor legislation.

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