

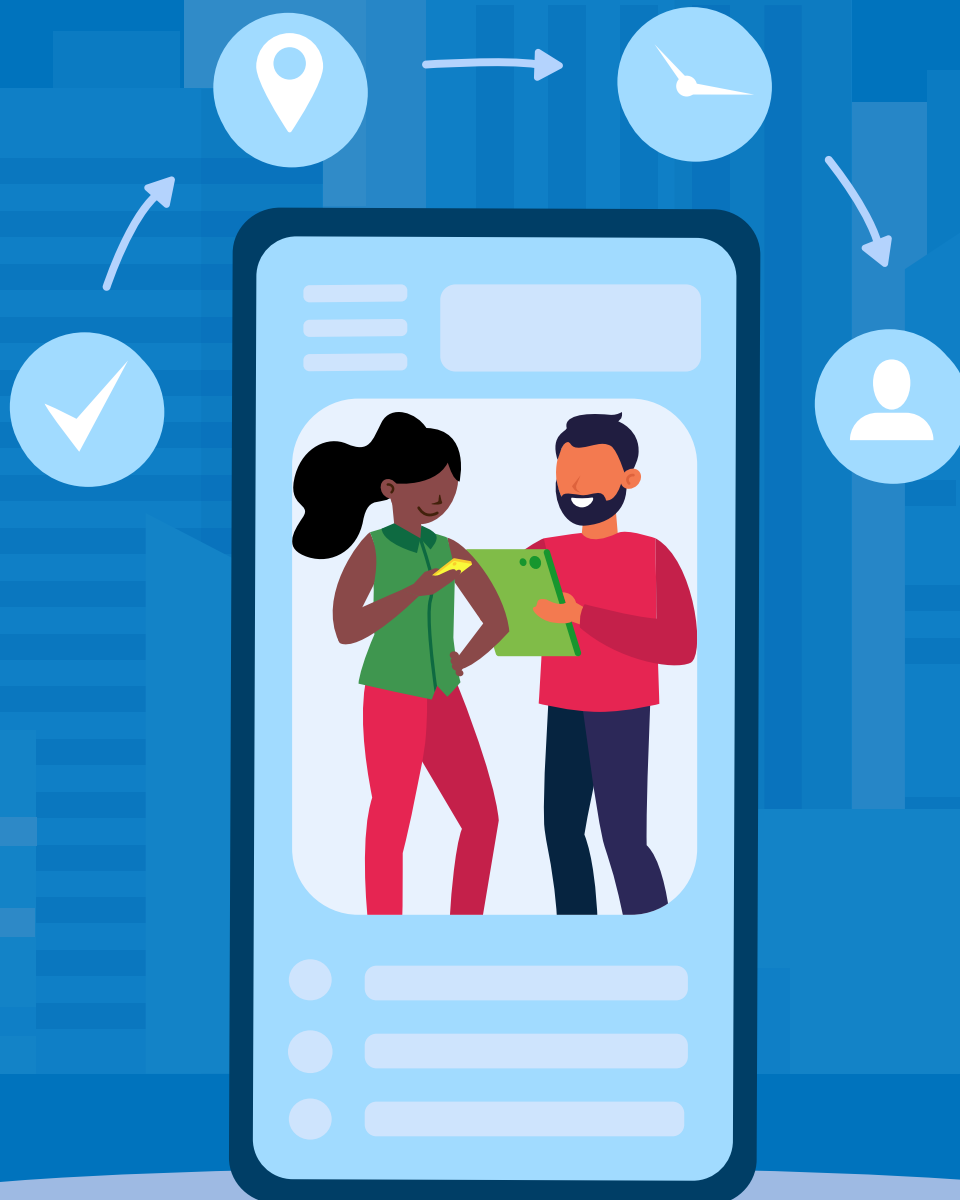


International
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PROSPECTS



Emerging practices to improve access to and working conditions on digital labour platforms for refugees and host communities



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Executive summary

Online labour platforms have emerged as a new way of organizing work that is rapidly expanding across the world. The platform economy has the potential to connect refugees with the global economy, allowing them to make a living and to upskill. While the digital gig economy brings opportunities, it also raises challenges in terms of adequate access to labour and social protections.¹

This paper documents emerging practices by digital labour platforms and other agents and intermediaries facilitating access to platform work² that have the potential to improve access to work and working conditions for refugees and host communities. However, this does not mean that the emerging practices mentioned are all fully aligned with decent-work principles or international labour standards, nor that they are all endorsed by the authors.

These emerging practices present a win-win scenario for both the workers from communities affected by forced displacement and the platforms themselves. Platforms can attract socially conscious clients, tap into a larger pool of talent and benefit from a diverse workforce. Workers from communities affected by forced displacement can help platforms expand the range of services they offer and win new markets, providing a more competitive marketplace and increasing its appeal to clients.

These practices are clustered in four categories: (i) facilitating access to work, (ii) reducing work-related risks and costs, (iii) improving working conditions, and (iv) providing opportunities to build skills and expertise.

- **Various organizations facilitate access to work for refugees and host communities** by providing them with access to information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and devices to connect online, or by recognizing refugee identification documents for the purpose of setting up accounts. For example, freelancing platform Upwork streamlines the account-opening process for workers by accepting UNHCR refugee identification. Providing incentives to hire from refugee communities also contributes to enhancing access to online work. These efforts create a more enabling environment for digital labour platforms to open up to workers in forced displacement contexts.
- **Practices to reduce work-related risks and costs** centre around ensuring timely and reliable payments and compliance with existing laws or benchmark practices in the industry. Examples include providing access to reliable payment methods using escrow and helping with tax compliance. Fintech institutions like Payoneer and Wise play a role in providing access to financial services for refugees, who are often excluded from the formal financial sector.
- **To improve working conditions, various practices are adopted**, including setting minimum compensation levels, providing a contract for each project and written policies on working conditions, offering various types of insurance, mediating and resolving disputes, gathering worker feedback and engaging in collective bargaining. For example, the Dükkan freelance working platform has instituted an exploitation prevention system to address freelancer concerns regarding fair wages and low pay, using the national minimum wage as a benchmark for task compensation. In Kenya, the local I-Workers platform mobilizes online platform workers to organize and collectively negotiate working conditions.

¹ The term "refugee" as used in this report includes refugees, beneficiaries of complementary forms of international protection and temporary protection and stay arrangements.

² Given the limited number of platforms that agreed to participate in this research, many of the emerging practices documented in this paper are implemented by other agents or intermediaries that provide services or facilitate the induction of workers into online labour platforms, such as online job intermediation agencies, local NGOs, social enterprises and electronic payment service providers.

- **To support workers in building their skills and work-related experience**, some platforms and agents facilitating platform work provide them with marketplace information on compensation rates and updates on the labour-market demand for freelancing skills. They also provide opportunities to develop and acquire corresponding skills, including through training in basic digital literacy or advanced technical skills, ongoing mentorship, and using apprenticeships and internships to build meaningful work experience. Humans in the Loop, via its Training Center, provides hands-on courses in essential skills for microfreelancing, image collection and annotation for artificial intelligence (AI), allowing trainees to learn and gain an income at the same time.

Digital labour platforms provide potential opportunities for refugees and host communities, but challenges remain, especially for groups facing significant barriers to entering the labour market or accessing education and training, including women, older workers and people with disabilities.

While digital labour platforms have a role to play in the future of work for refugees and host communities, expanding fair practices on these platforms is just one part of a broader effort to ensure decent and inclusive work – both online and offline – for refugees and host community members. Efforts in this regard must be accompanied by improvements in the legal and regulatory framework that allow refugees and host community members to participate in economic activity, as provided for in the 1951 Convention Relating to the States of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (UNHCR 1967), as well as national-level improvements in labour law and regulations, and their enforcement. This can help ensure that platform-mediated work is both viable and decent.

Despite the challenges, there is significant room for collaboration between digital labour platforms and other actors that have a role in creating a conducive environment for the digital economy to expand it in a way that is inclusive, productive and aligned with decent-work principles.



1 Introduction

1.1 The potential of online work for refugees and host communities

The rise of online work has created new ways for workers, including refugees, to access work in the digital economy. Demand for digitally enabled jobs, remote positions, digital platform work and online freelancing is growing rapidly. In 2022, the digital gig economy alone accounted for 12 per cent of the global market (Datta et al. 2023). For some refugees and host community members, especially women and persons facing barriers to traditional employment, online work and digital labour platforms afford them the possibility to earn an income, reach global markets and learn new skills, especially in locations with limited employment options. However, these non-traditional forms of work have also been criticized for numerous practices that exhibit decent-work deficits or are not inclusive of traditionally underserved groups, including refugees, often as a result of legal and regulatory requirements in host countries (ILO 2023b).

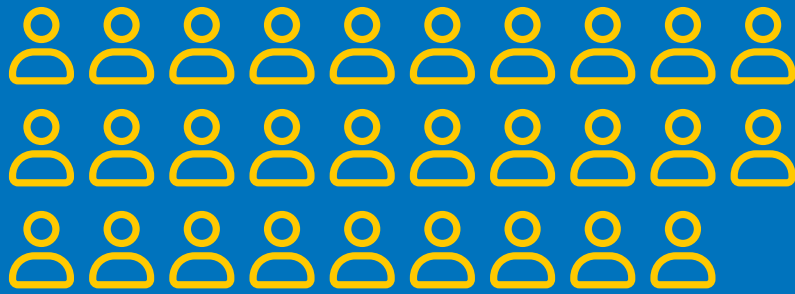
Despite these criticisms, some emerging practices show potential in terms of promoting decent and inclusive work on digital labour platforms. These practices can serve as examples to other digital labour platforms and illustrate the benefits that decent and inclusive work can bring both to workers and platforms. For the purpose of this research, an emerging practice is considered a method or approach that has become more popular owing to its novelty or perceived effectiveness. However, to be considered a good or best practice, it must show proven benefits and sustainability, going beyond mere popularity to deliver consistently superior outcomes and withstand rigorous evaluation. Given the innovative nature of online work and the need for long-term evaluation to identify “good” or “best” practices, this report focuses on “emerging” practices. An emerging practice can be implemented by the platform itself, or by supporting agents or intermediaries in the digital economy.

1.2 Research approach

This research has been developed through a mixed-methods approach, including a broad literature review, expert interviews, key informant interviews and an online survey. The literature review covered key documents from the ILO, UNDP and UNHCR, and involved a broad scan of relevant literature from other organizations (all sources are referenced, as applicable). This helped identify the state of the current debate regarding key issues in online and platform work, as well as some emerging practices by platforms and other organizations. The literature also encompassed academic publications and industry documents, including numerous websites and reports from major platforms. Interviews were conducted with experts, as well as with digital platforms, social enterprises, trade unions, NGOs and INGOs, and staff from various UN agencies and other organizations working with refugees and host communities. These interviews covered a range of issues and questions relating to work on digital labour platforms and focused on identifying and documenting details of good emerging practices. Questions were tailored to each interviewee but broadly similar, in general.

To identify emerging practices globally, the research team conducted an online survey (non-quantitative). The survey was disseminated to stakeholders and across many locations. Given the variety of contexts and varying understanding of “emerging practices” the research team did not specifically define the latter term but instead, left it to interviewees to share practices and their rationale for naming them. A total of 16 participants completed the survey (a detailed breakdown is provided in Annex 3).

If the information provided in the survey indicated an emerging practice, the platforms and organizations concerned were then interviewed. These interviews addressed various issues, with a focus on identifying and documenting details of emerging practices to facilitate platform and online work for refugees and host communities. Again, the questions were tailored to each interviewee but broadly similar, in general.



In total, 29 respondents were interviewed (see Annex 3). Information was complemented with that obtained thanks to the ILO Learning Labs Series Promoting Decent Work in the Digital Economy and the UNDP project Digitally Enabled Livelihoods for Forcibly Displaced and Host Communities (ILO 2023b).

The research team also conducted key informant interviews with platform workers from refugee and host communities to learn about their experiences of working on digital labour platforms and of trying to find work through digital labour platforms. In total, nine platform workers were interviewed (see Annex 3). To enhance our understanding of the experiences of refugees and host communities engaged in online work, the research drew on findings from UNHCR community-based workshops in select locations in Africa and the Middle East (UNHCR 2024).

Though this research casts a broad net to document emerging practices for inclusive online work on digital labour platforms, it should not be considered a comprehensive review. The numbers of platforms, supporting agents and intermediaries, and countries in which they work are far greater than can be covered by this research. Further, accessing information was challenging, as very few digital labour platforms responded to requests for interviews. Interviews with other stakeholders helped identify emerging practices by digital labour platforms, but the motivations for and implications of these could not be confirmed with the platforms themselves. Given the limited number of emerging practices by digital labour platforms identified, examples of other organizations supporting refugees and host communities to engage in online work were collected. These organizations include entities facilitating online work for refugees and financial institutions. This work will hopefully provide insight to digital platforms and other stakeholders regarding steps that can be taken to make online and platform work decent and inclusive.

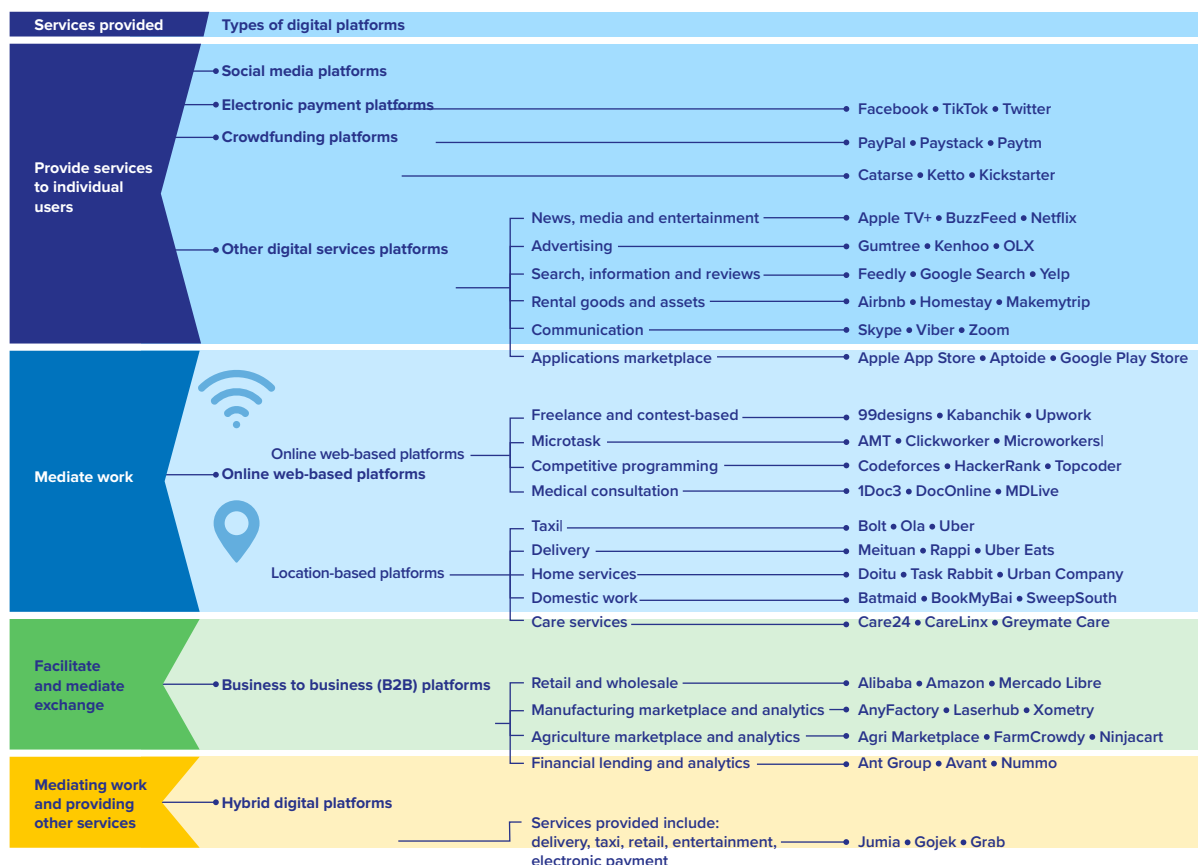
2 Digital labour platforms

2.1 What are digital labour platforms?

Digital platforms consist of a diverse range of online tools that facilitate different activities, such as electronic payments, the sale of goods and services, and interpersonal communication. As economies around the world have increasingly adopted digital technology, digital tools – including platforms – have become commonplace.

Among the various types of digital platform (illustrated in Figure 1), digital labour platforms facilitate transactions or mediate work between clients and workers, thus acting as a third party. These platforms can either be web-based, where tasks are performed online, or location-based, where completing the work requires being in a physical location. For digital labour platforms, the worker’s labour is an important or even the primary source of added value in the transaction or service delivery. For example, we consider public-transport platforms such as Uber to be digital labour platforms, because the driver’s labour is a significant and essential part of the total value addition, even though the service provision also requires capital – in this case, a vehicle. By contrast, an online travel portal, via which a client books a rental car, is considered a rental platform, not a digital labour platform, since the primary source of value is the rental of an asset, not the labour of a worker.

Figure 1. Landscape of digital platforms



Source: ILO 2021.

Some platforms facilitate a single type of work, such as connecting clients with individuals providing cleaning services. Other platforms facilitate a few closely related types of work – for example, a single transport platform that facilitates taxi, delivery and courier services, with drivers free to move between the various types of work. Lastly, some platforms facilitate work across a range of sectors, from legal services to interpreting and graphic design. These platforms, especially, tend to have workers with a broad range of skills, with some being very highly specialized in certain areas. The duration of tasks to be performed also varies, from short gigs to long-term engagement.

Digital labour platforms use different business models. Some only go as far as facilitating a match and do little else to ensure that the transaction takes place and meets the expectations of either party. They can also give full control to workers to set their own price or negotiate with a potential client. Workers and clients are generally free to agree on many aspects of how, when and where the work is done. Platforms that offer a range of different types of services – especially highly specialized services – often allow workers and clients to control many aspects of the work. This is, in part, because the platform does not have the technical capacity to assess the quality of the work.

Other platforms have a high degree of control, such as algorithmically matching parties for transactions, setting prices, determining worker earnings, facilitating payments, providing dispute resolution, and collecting and communicating feedback from clients/workers. Some platforms, such as transport platforms, facilitate “gigs” that generally last for a matter of minutes. Others facilitate work of longer duration through long-term or fixed-rate contracts. Some platforms even provide the option of facilitating an employer-employee working relationship, though those that do this sometimes do so through a separate unit or service package that more closely resembles an employment agency or remote-work intermediary.

Digital labour platforms have a wide range of approaches to pricing and different cost structures. Fees and commissions charged to clients and workers vary considerably between platforms, a subject discussed in the next section. However, many platforms are commercially oriented and therefore aim to be profitable, so they can provide a return to investors. This commercial orientation provides a clear incentive for long-term sustainability, which is, in turn, an important part of ensuring refugee self-reliance in the long run. However, it can also create challenges and risks, including monopolistic or problematic labour practices, which do not sit well with the goal of promoting decent and inclusive practices.



2.1.1 Web-based platforms

Web-based platforms facilitate work or service delivery through the internet, meaning the work often crosses international borders and workers can be based in any location. Web-based platforms can facilitate a range of different types of work, with the most common being digital freelancing and crowd work. It is important to note, however, that the lines between these types of work are often not clear. In general, freelance work is associated with longer timelines and higher skill levels, while crowd work is associated with smaller tasks and fewer skills. Among all types of digital labour platform, freelance-work platforms offer the highest earnings for workers. Average hourly pay (including both paid and unpaid working time) on online freelancing platforms is US\$7.60, whereas for crowd-work (or microtasking) platforms, it is US\$3.30 (ILO 2021).

Digital freelancing entails a wide range of online services, whose duration can vary significantly, from an hour to a multi-month project. Digital freelancing platforms attract a significant number of workers, often across a diverse range of skill sets, from semi-skilled digital workers to highly skilled professionals. Some platforms aim to attract highly skilled workers to provide quality services at competitive prices (Upwork 2022a), rather than only offering the lowest-priced services from a large pool of semi-skilled workers. Notably, on some platforms, the supply of workers with certain skills significantly outstrips the demand for those skills, so further growth may be viewed negatively by platforms if it contributes to a perception of “clutter” or worsens the client experience.³ More than any other type of digital labour platform, freelancing platforms are likely to facilitate self-employed work. Skill requirements can often be high and barriers to entry are often, though not always, low. However, much like the analogue economy for freelancers and small businesses, opening a digital “shopfront” is no guarantee that clients will come, or the business will be a success.

Crowd-work or microtasking platforms offer a large number of tasks, often very small in scope and generally not requiring any specific skill set in order to complete. Examples of crowd-work tasks include image annotation and survey completion. With crowd-work platforms, the rates of pay are generally set by the platform or client, so the worker chooses whether to complete the task at the stated price. Some crowd-work platforms aim to offer low prices to clients, so have an incentive to attract a large number of workers, including refugees and host community members, to an oversaturated labour market. While some crowd-work platforms are open to all workers that meet selected criteria, such as possessing valid identification or a bank account, others select crowd workers based on a range of characteristics. For example, some platforms aim to have a geographically diverse crowd in order to meet the needs of their clients, so may actively recruit from locations where their crowd is underrepresented.

2.1.2 Location-based platforms

Location-based platforms mediate work or service delivery that takes place in a specific physical location. Much like web-based platforms, they facilitate many types of work, and do so in many ways. The transport sector, which includes taxi, courier and food delivery platforms, among others, is the largest sector for location-based platforms. These platforms often exercise a high degree of control over workers, including matching the worker and client and setting the price charged to the client and the earnings for the worker. They also often facilitate payments and collect and share reputational information. Location-based platforms also facilitate other types of work, including cleaning services, care services, and repair and maintenance.

2.1.3 Other agents and intermediaries facilitating access to the digital platform economy

While digital labour platforms themselves represent a potential avenue for workers to find and connect with livelihood opportunities online, often it is other agencies and intermediaries in the ecosystem that facilitate access to platforms, thus bringing those opportunities to refugees and other marginalized communities.

³ Upwork's 2022 Annual Report noted that “we currently have a surplus of talent in relation to the number of clients actively engaging talent for most categories of services on our work marketplace. As a result of this surplus, we primarily focus our efforts on retaining client spend and acquiring new clients, as opposed to acquiring new talent and retaining existing talent.” See Upwork 2022a, 51.

Enterprises and organizations facilitating platform work

Web-based and location-based work facilitated or mediated by digital labour platforms can also be facilitated by enterprises with some of the same characteristics as platforms, but with a different business model. The key difference is that these enterprises play a central role throughout the transaction, by developing the business, overseeing the work, and delivering the service to the client. Clients generally contract directly with the enterprise, which then makes the work available to its crowd. Prices for both the client and the crowd worker are generally set by the enterprise. Examples of this business model include Appen Online and Humans in the Loop, though the latter considers itself a social enterprise.

Not all businesses using this model directly engage with their crowd. Humans in the Loop connects with local organizations, which provide services such as recruitment and payment of workers. These organizations can help facilitate market entry and access for unbanked people, helping to address the barriers to entry that can otherwise prevent refugees and host community members from accessing work. Functionally, these local organizations often work in a similar way to agencies that are registered on platforms such as Upwork or Amazon MTurk.

Agencies

Some web-based labour platforms, such as Upwork and Amazon MTurk, facilitate work between clients and agencies, which may be structured as private businesses but may also be an NGO, cooperative, collective or social enterprise.⁴ Agencies can be useful for clients who are looking for an organization to complete a large project. In some cases, agencies and clients can sign long-term, multi-year contracts. While refugees and host community members can work through an agency, they can also organize or participate in grass-roots organizations that are owned and led by refugees and host community members. The Dadaab Collective Freelance Agency is one example of this model of refugee-led agency.

For workers from refugee and host communities, agencies can play an especially important mediating role between the worker and the platform, by:

Reaching refugees who are unbanked or do not have a way to receive payments;

Purposefully selecting beneficiaries, especially vulnerable or underrepresented groups, to ensure that they can also access work;

Assisting in business development, which can be especially challenging for new platform workers;

Navigating various host-country legal and regulatory restrictions on, or de facto barriers to work; and

Taking on bigger projects that require multiple people.

Agencies, local NGOs and local social enterprises can exhibit characteristics traditionally associated with employers. For example, some agencies often have a significant degree of control over workers or members. They handle client communications and receive client payments, which are then disbursed to individual workers. They determine who within the agency is assigned to the work, though many

⁴ For an example of this model, see <https://www.upwork.com/agencies>

agencies do not require workers to exclusively work through them, allowing them to freelance for other clients. Agencies often review work, performing quality control, before it is submitted to the client. Some agencies play a role in tax compliance. Many agencies provide training and mentorship services to members and can also pay for platform subscriptions, connections and training courses for members, sometimes at a bulk discount. Many of these intermediary functions are important for refugees and host community members. However, the degree of control that agencies exercise over freelance workers raises questions about whether the relationship between digital labour platforms and those same freelancers is best defined as an employer-employee relationship.

Non-government organizations and others

The ecosystem around digital labour platforms contains a host of other actors, including government and workers, especially workers from refugee and host communities – whose roles and experiences are described later. Other important actors in the ecosystem include trade unions, employers' organizations, providers of skills training and education, and community-based organizations. Trade unions are beginning to organize digital platform workers. For example, in Argentina, the Association of Digital Platform Economy Personnel is creating a new trade union comprising digital platform workers, which will be affiliated to Argentina's main trade union federation (ILO 2023a). Some unions are also playing a role directly with refugees and host community members. For example, in Jordan, the government started an office within the trade union to help refugees access work permits, which could facilitate access to work through digital labour platforms, or elsewhere in the economy (ILO 2023a). Employers' organizations have had some engagement with platforms, but the latter are sometimes reluctant to engage with employers' organizations if they classify their workforce as self-employed. Trade unions face the same situation when trying to serve platform workers, as they are often classified as self-employed.

There are also various skills training and education providers that prepare workers for digital platforms. Many of these programmes are supported by international development partners. For example, the Norwegian Refugee Council supports the Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative, which trains refugees for online work as digital freelancers. Training is offered in such areas as graphic design, digital marketing, data entry, translation, digital journalism and photography, among others (Ireland 2021). There is also a range of organizations around the world that provide mass online open courses and other free digital training that is available to all, including refugees and host community members.

2.1.4 Basic functions of digital labour platforms

Though digital labour platforms operate in different sectors and employ varying practices, there are some basic functions that define platform work and shape how users experience it. Sometimes, these functions shape the degree to which work is inclusive and decent. Because these functions are common to most platforms, we do not consider them as emerging practices.

Functions include:

— **generating digital records:** because they mediate work through the internet, digital labour platforms generate data about the transactions they facilitate. This is valuable not just to the platform but also to its workers and clients. If properly used, these digital records can contribute to formalization of platform work and benefit workers in many ways, such as:

- ▶ providing evidence in a dispute resolution process between a worker and a client;
- ▶ providing work history to help workers move to a new job or find other work;
- ▶ keeping a digital record of transactions and payments;
- ▶ enhancing tax compliance of all parties on the platform;
- ▶ providing an independent log of hours worked, which can reduce the risk of wage theft and
- ▶ facilitate timely payment (Hunt et al. 2018).

- **facilitating matches and transactions**, often faster than previous digital or analogue matching. Studies have shown that apps speed up matching in the transport sector, reducing the amount of time that drivers wait between journeys and increasing the total number of journeys they can complete in a day.⁵ This can help workers increase earnings, with significant evidence suggesting that app-based drivers make more money than traditional tax drivers (ILO 2021, 160). This can also lead to other changes, including increased competition, that limit earnings gains or reduce average fares per journey. The facilitating role of digital platforms can be especially important for refugees and host community members if it reduces the need for local knowledge or language skills, or lowers interaction barriers in general;
- **incentivizing voluntary registration of economic actors**: driven by the incentive of accessing economic activity, individuals – often in the informal economy – voluntarily register with digital labour platforms. This creates a centralized source of information on economic actors, though, often, information is not shared with authorities. Nonetheless, it provides a potential pathway for workers to access information, or for governments to provide social protection to groups that were previously difficult to access. It can also enhance statistical accuracy, which indirectly benefits users but can also pose data protection risks.

Web-based platforms also facilitate access to global or regional labour markets. This has the potential to help refugees and host community members reach beyond their local labour market, which may have restrictions on their participation. Facilitating access to global or regional labour markets can provide an alternative to cross-border migration and its associated risks and costs.

Many digital labour platforms do not limit the number of workers who can work through them, as long as those workers meet the basic entry requirements, such as being of minimum working age, possessing a specific set of skills and having a recognized identity document. For example, almost anyone meeting the criteria can sign up to Upwork or Uber in most countries. This open approach can, by itself, help refugees and stateless persons access work opportunities. However, ID-related requirements can pose a hard stop for the digital inclusion of forcibly displaced persons (UNHCR 2020a). Additionally, one clear drawback to open access is that there are no limits on the number of individuals who can sign up and try to find work through a platform, which can lead to a significant oversupply of workers.

Some of the common basic features of digital labour platforms also present challenges for workers, including refugees and host community members. For example, because work through both location-based and web-based labour platforms is geographically dispersed, it is more difficult for workers to organize and bargain collectively (ILO 2021). Often, workers will not physically meet each other in the course of their day-to-day work. This increases the challenges associated with organizing and bargaining. Because work arranged through platforms generally does not take place at a single, permanent, fixed location, it can also present regulatory challenges. Inspections, for example, can be more difficult and time-consuming when workers are mobile or home-based. Tax laws can also be more difficult to enforce, especially when payments are not digital or mediated by the platform. Digital platforms also require a basic level of digital skills, part of the broader digital divide that can exclude workers from digital platforms. Lastly, some level of resources is required to access digital platforms – at a minimum, access to electricity (whether on- or off-grid), the internet and an internet-enabled device, generally a phone or computer. These gaps are often more pronounced for women and girls, who experience the gender digital divide. These prerequisites can unintentionally exclude refugees and host community members, or make their access more difficult.

⁵ In India, for example, traditional taxi drivers reported a wait time of 93 minutes between journeys, while for platform-based drivers, the wait time was 16 minutes. See ILO 2021, 163.

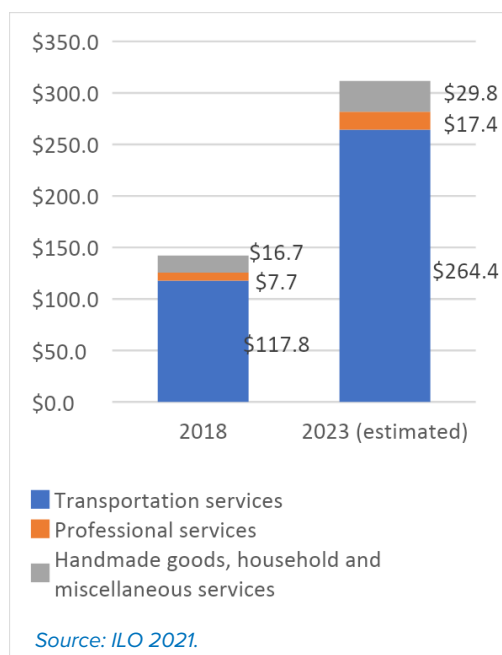
2.2 The platform economy

Demand for digitally enabled jobs, remote positions, digital platform work and online freelancing is growing rapidly.

The digital gig economy has grown significantly in recent years, with some studies estimating that it accounted for as much as 12 per cent of the global work force in 2022 (Datta et al. 2023).

In most countries, however, it continues to be a small part of the overall economy. While estimates vary, a 2019 report found that the global “gig” economy (which includes both digital labour platforms and asset-sharing platforms, like AirBNB) had gross revenue of US\$204 billion and could reach US\$455 billion in 2023, a compound annual growth rate of 17.4 per cent (Mastercard and Kaiser Associates 2019).

Figure 2. Digital labour platforms gross volume (in US\$ billions)



This estimate, made before the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated the growth of the platform economy, is almost certainly low. The number of digital labour platforms has also grown significantly, from 142 in 2010 to 777 in 2020 (ILO 2021).

A report from the World Bank estimates that there are 545 online platforms alone (Datta et al. 2023). Some sectors have grown even more dramatically, many on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Growth was especially rapid in the taxi and delivery platform segment, which increased nearly tenfold during this time (ILO 2021, 19; Bajjal et al. 2023, 29). In Southeast Asia, for example, food delivery grew from a gross volume of US\$5 billion in 2019 to US\$17 billion in 2022, a compound annual growth rate of 50 per cent (Google et al. 2022).

The largest subsector of digital labour platforms is, by a significant margin, transport. Platforms in this sector accounted for an estimated US\$117.8 billion in transactions through digital platforms in 2018 – 83 per cent of the total volume. In 2023, they are estimated to reach US\$264.4 billion and account for 85 per cent of the total volume of transactions. Web-based labour platforms account for a much smaller part of the platform economy, just US\$7.7 billion in 2018, though they are expected to more than double, to US\$17.4 billion, by 2023. Crowd work (or microwork) platforms, which are one type of online labour platform, account for just a small part of the gross volume of transactions for these platforms. This disparity is similarly reflected in the total investments in digital labour platforms. Of the US\$119 billion invested to date, US\$62 billion has gone to taxi platforms and US\$37 billion to delivery platforms, while just US\$3 billion has been invested in web-based platforms (ILO 2021, 30).

2.2.1 Digital labour platform workforce⁶

There is no definitive, global estimate of the number of workers that have used or are actively using a digital labour platform. The number of active workers is generally thought to be modest, perhaps between 1 and 3 per cent of overall employment (Schwellnus et al. 2019). This varies between countries, however, with surveys in Switzerland showing that only 0.4 per cent of adults worked on digital labour platforms in the previous year, compared with 4 per cent in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (ILO 2021, 49).

The majority of workers using digital labour platforms are men, though the share of men and women workers varies across different types of platforms. Women account for about 40 per cent of workers on web-based platforms but make up less than 10 per cent on some types of location-based platforms, such as taxi and delivery services. However, in terms of earnings, there is only a small wage gap between women workers and male workers. For women workers, median earnings for an hour of paid work on a web-based labour platform were US\$2.90, versus US\$3.00 for men. However, the difference in median earnings was more significant if both paid and unpaid time were included, amounting to US\$1.90 for women and US\$2.20 for men. A significant share of web-based platform workers is highly educated – some 60 per cent. In developing countries, 80 per cent of women engaged in online freelancing are highly educated.

There are various reasons why people elect to work through a digital labour platform, but motivations differed somewhat between men and women. The majority of women digital platform workers said they did this work to complement pay or because of the job flexibility. The latter was the top reason why they used a web-based platform, with considerably more women digital platform workers than men saying they needed job flexibility or the ability to work from home. Few female workers (less than 10 per cent) said that they worked on digital labour platforms because they could not find other employment, because the pay was better than other jobs or to improve their skills and career. The clear majority of both women and men platform workers were satisfied with their work. Notably, 20 per cent of female workers were very satisfied and 46 per cent were satisfied, while only 6 per cent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. While only a minority of platform workers reported experiencing discrimination, this was more common among women workers – 21 per cent compared with 17 per cent of men workers.

Many workers who register with a digital labour platform never actually find work through that platform. This is especially the case with web-based labour platforms. According to one estimate, there are 163 million registered profiles on web-based labour platforms. Of these, just 9.3 million workers have ever worked and just 2.2 million have earned at least US\$1,000 or worked on at least ten projects (Kassi et al. 2021). Worker turnover on digital labour platforms is high, with one study finding an attrition rate of 68 per cent among Uber drivers after just six months (Cook et al. 2018). While platforms did experience significant growth during the COVID-19 pandemic, they also saw increased numbers of workers, with one refugee worker noting: “During the pandemic there were so many jobs available on platforms, but now, it is not consistent” because of stiff competition.⁷

Not all platforms release information on the number of workers that have registered or worked, nor do many of them release detailed information about gender or other worker characteristics. Online labour platform Upwork, for example, does not regularly provide updates on the number of its workers, though in January 2024, the figure was “over 18 million” (Shewale 2024). Another large online labour platform, Freelancer.com, noted in 2022 that it had a total of 6.7 million new registered users, bringing the total number of registered users over the life of the platform to 64.4 million.⁸ The majority of all workers, including 88 per cent of women workers, would like more work and say that there is not enough work available (ILO 2021, 149).

⁶ Unless specified otherwise, all figures in the following three paragraphs are taken from ILO 2021, sections 4.1.2 to 4.2.2.

⁷ Male Somali refugee, Kenya – Interview 001.

⁸ Note that these figures also include registered users for other projects owned by the same company, so may somewhat overstate the total number of Freelancer.com users.

Web-based labour platforms represent a small but competitive part of the platform economy, therefore. On many of them, the supply of labour is greater than the demand for that labour. Web-based platforms account for “more than one fifth of active global gig workers but less than 5 per cent of global disbursement flows” (Mastercard and Kaiser Associates 2019). For example, Upwork, one of the largest online labour platforms, had gross services revenue of US\$2.1 billion in 2019. After subtracting the platforms’ share of that revenue (13.1 per cent), the platform’s total sales volume was just US\$101 per registered user per year.⁹ Another large platform, Freelancer.com, had just 1.2 million new jobs in 2022 and an average project value of US\$250 (Freelancer Limited 2022).¹⁰ As discussed in section 2.1.1, this dynamic (surplus of talent in relation to demand) is explicitly acknowledged by some platforms.

Figure 3. Total disbursements to workers in 2018 and 2023 (estimated, in billions), according to platform type



Source: Mastercard and Kaiser Associates 2019. Note that the 2023 projections were made before the COVID-19 pandemic, which may affect their accuracy.

This highlights one of the key challenges faced by the platform economy – the limit on total size. In 2018, the majority of disbursements to workers – 75 per cent – were made by digital platforms in transport services. Professional services platforms accounted for just 7 per cent of disbursements, or US\$6 billion.

2.2.2 Economics of digital platforms

Platforms charge fees to both clients and workers, though fee levels and transparency around them varies among the platforms. Numerous web-based platforms have transparent fee structures. For example, Guru.com lists worker fees, which range from 5 to 9 per cent, on its website. Worker fees are 10 per cent on Upwork.com and 20 per cent on Fiverr.com. Clients also pay fees. For example, on Fiverr, clients pay a 5.5 per cent fee, plus an additional US\$2 fee on purchases under US\$50. On Upwork.com, clients pay a 5 per cent fee plus an additional US\$5 contract initiation fee. Fees often include costs associated with making payments and with services that workers and clients receive. Location-based platforms differ in their approaches to fees; however, many transport platforms do not have a fixed

⁹ Upwork no longer releases data on the number of registered users, so a more recent calculation was not possible.

¹⁰ Note that these figures also include registered users for other projects owned by the same company, so may somewhat overstate the total number of Freelancer.com users.

percentage fee or disclose their fee structures transparently. Uber’s service fees, for example, vary by country, and studies have shown that they also vary between journeys, with Uber sometimes taking a fee of more than 30 per cent for journeys in the United States (Konishi et al. 2023).

Though digital platforms have grown significantly, many platforms still lose money, raising questions about their sustainability. Some of the largest online labour platforms are not profitable. Fiverr, for example, notes in its annual report that it has “incurred operating losses in the past, expect[s] to incur operating losses in the future and may never achieve or maintain profitability” (Fiverr 2022). In 2022, Upwork recorded a net loss of US\$89 million on revenues of US\$566 million and gross transaction volume of US\$4.1 billion. Some of the largest transport platforms were not profitable, either. Uber lost more than US\$9 billion in 2022, despite revenues increasing nearly ten-fold from 2016 to 2022. Southeast Asia’s Grab lost US\$1.63 billion that same year (Macrotrends.net n.d.). These losses have been supported by investors, though this may not continue in the face of changing global economic circumstances.

Platforms face a number of challenges to achieving profitability. One key challenge for all platforms is scale; it is very difficult for any platform to become profitable without achieving significant reach in its operations (Close et al. 2022). For web-based platforms, another challenge is efforts by clients and workers who meet on a platform to subsequently move their working relationship off the platform. Both parties have a financial incentive to do this: to avoid platform-related fees. Upwork, which has taken steps to address this problem, noted that these measures have led to “user dissatisfaction, increased user circumvention, and a decline in user activity on our work marketplace” (Upwork 2022b). Workers note that while there are incentives to circumvent platforms, there are also incentives not to do so. Platforms provide important dispute resolution and payment services that reduce the risks faced by workers, including refugees and host community members. “If you want to build your Upwork profile, you work within the platform”, one worker noted, but “if you’re more concerned about the money, you go outside the platform”.¹¹

2.2.3 Types of work facilitated by digital labour platforms

Digital labour platforms facilitate a variety of work requiring basic to highly specialized skills, across a wide range of economic sectors. Transport platforms, which is the largest digital-platform sector, generally require semi-skilled workers. Other location-based platforms facilitate higher-skilled work, such as repair services, electrical work, plumbing, etc. Work on web-based labour platforms also encompasses a wide range of skills. Some types of crowd work, such as taking surveys or annotating images, generally only require a moderate level of skills. Other types of work that are mediated through web-based platforms are highly skilled – for example, legal services, software development and other IT-related services. The skill levels of digital freelancers can vary dramatically, but some of the most in-demand skills on freelancing platforms are in areas such as technology (Upwork 2022b). Some platforms even curate their crowd and target only high-skilled workers. There is often a relationship between the level of skills and the degree of platform control – with platforms often exercising a greater degree of control over less skilled work.

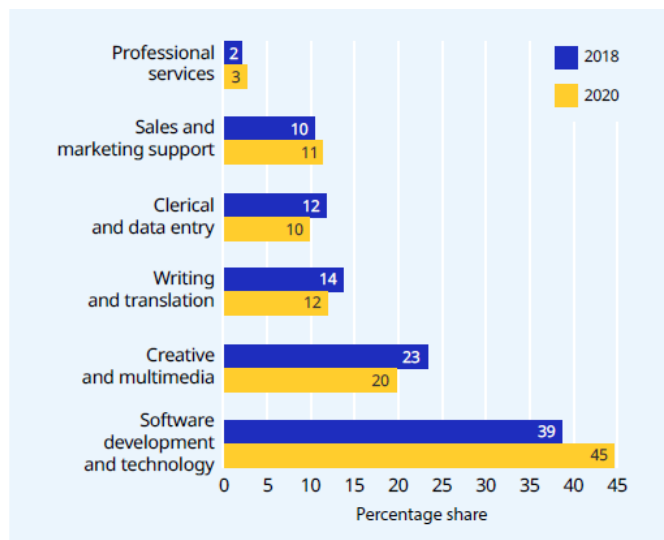
The demand for digital workers varies considerably across different skill sets; however, there is some evidence of greater demand for higher-skilled and specialized workers. Those from refugee and host communities interviewed for this research had firsthand experience of this. One interviewee noted that the market for medical interpreting work was better than for general interpreting work, not because the pay rates were better but because there were far fewer qualified interpreters, thus significantly increasing the chances of getting a job. Another echoed this sentiment, stating that “these days, many refugees are not skilled enough to go for Upwork. To go to Upwork you need a unique skill. It’s competitive.”¹² This can be a particular challenge for refugees and host community members, as they tend to have “significantly lower rates of higher education access and often interrupted education”, and can be disproportionately likely to lack digital skills (Charles and Cook 2023). While there are free skills development tools available, such as on the Coursera for Refugees platform, some work requires special certifications that have an associated cost. For example, medical interpreting requires special certification, for which candidates must take a 40-hour training course that costs US\$300.

¹¹ Male Somali refugee, Kenya – Interview 006.

¹² Male Somali refugee, Kenya – Interview 007.

While skills needs are diverse and dynamic, evidence from web-based platforms shows that digital skills are both in demand and growing. Data from the ILO in 2020 revealed that 45 per cent of demand was for “software development and technology” (ILO 2021). At the other end of the spectrum, professional services constituted a relatively small share of overall demand. The skill sets of refugees and host community members are diverse. Some have high levels of skills – for example, Ukrainian refugees, many of whom worked on freelance platforms before and after war in Ukraine started. One major freelancing platform, Upwork.com, noted that, between the start of the conflict in Ukraine, in February 2022, and April 2023, nearly 80,000 workers based in or displaced from the country had worked on the platform, collectively earning more than US\$200 million (Upwork 2023). Other groups of refugees, such as the Rohingya, many of whom have been displaced from Myanmar to Bangladesh, have lower levels of skills due to longstanding discrimination and lack of educational opportunities. This creates a greater barrier for them to access work, **especially on more highly skilled platforms.**

Figure 4. **Global demand for labour across occupational categories on five major web-based platforms, 2018 and 2020**



Source: ILO 2021.



2.3 Platform work and the legal and regulatory framework for refugees and host community members

2.3.1 International conventions and standards

International conventions and standards play an important role in shaping the world of work, including platform work, for forcibly displaced persons and host community members. Some international conventions are specific to refugees, while others influence the framework for labour more broadly. Many of the latter are international labour standards (ILS), which are legal instruments drawn up by the ILO's constituents (governments, employers and workers) that set out the basic principles and rights at work.¹³ As of 2023, there is no standard exclusively for platform work, though discussions on standards-setting are due to take place in 2025.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (1951 Convention) set out the right of refugees and the responsibilities of State Parties relating to access to employment and economic opportunities, as well as rights at work and other related rights. Access to rights in the 1951 Convention depends on the legal status of the person in the host country and on the level of treatment of others in the country. State Parties are required to allow asylum-seekers, meaning persons who have made an application for international protection but a decision has not yet been taken, access to self-employment. Recognized refugees must also be allowed to access wage-earning employment and liberal professions, which include professions for which diplomas or other qualifications are required and that can be carried out independently, for example lawyers, physicians, architects, engineers, and artists. Access to wage-earning employment should be at the same level as the most favourable treatment for other non-nationals. Once they have completed three years of residence or have a spouse or child who is a citizen of the country in which they are residing, recognized refugees must be provided with the same access to wage-earning employment as nationals. Access to self-employment and liberal professions should be as favourable as possible, but at a minimum it must be at the same level as for other non-nationals who are generally in the same circumstances.

The 1951 Convention also requires State Parties to provide recognized refugees with the same rights at work as nationals including with regard to working conditions and pay, as well as social security programmes (UNHCR 2021a). Refugees should also be afforded other rights essential to equitable access to decent work, including freedom of movement, freedom of association, identity and travel documents, intellectual property rights, access to qualifications, training and education, as well as access to effective remedy and courts. The role of states and relevant stakeholders in supporting jobs and livelihoods of refugees is further elaborated in the Global Compact on Refugees (UN General Assembly, 2018). The Global Refugee Forum, which is held every four years, offers an opportunity for states, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, academics, refugees and other stakeholders to make multi-stakeholder commitments to advance the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, including Objective 2, to enhance refugee self-reliance (GRF 2023).

International refugee law is complemented by international human rights law and other international standards affecting rights of refugees. Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (UN General Assembly 1966), State Parties are required to take steps progressively to realize for everyone within their jurisdiction, including refugees, the opportunity to gain a living by freely chosen decent work. States must do so in a non-discriminatory manner, to the maximum of their available resources, including through international assistance and cooperation, and by all appropriate means, particularly legislation. States may nevertheless limit the access to the labour market to promote the general welfare in a democratic society, provided it is so determined by law and compatible with the nature of the right to work and rights at work. Developing countries may furthermore distinguish in a non-discriminatory manner between nationals and non-nationals, including refugees, with due regard to human rights and the national economy and without denying the right to work entirely. States are nevertheless expected to make continuous efforts to promote and achieve full, productive and freely chosen employment through the development and adoption of an active and inclusive employment policy (UN General Assembly 2018).

¹³ ILS are formed of Conventions (or Protocols), which are legally binding international treaties that may be ratified by Member States, and Recommendations, which serve as non-binding guidelines.

The ILO's Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205) provides the most refugee-specific guidance in the ILS. The Recommendation calls for special attention to be paid to population groups and individuals who have been made particularly vulnerable by the crisis, including “internally displaced persons, migrants, refugees and other persons forcibly displaced across borders”.¹⁴ With some conditions, it calls on countries to include refugees in actions taken regarding employment, training and labour-market access – in particular, to:

promote refugees' access to technical and vocational training;

promote their access to formal job opportunities, income-generation schemes and entrepreneurship;

facilitate the recognition, certification, accreditation and use of refugees' skills and qualifications, and provide them with access to tailored training and retraining opportunities

enhance public and private employment-agency capacity to support refugee labour-market access

make specific efforts to support refugee women, young persons and other vulnerable people;

facilitate portability of work-related and social-security benefit entitlements.

The Recommendation calls for countries to promote equality of opportunity and treatment for refugees regarding fundamental principles and rights at work under relevant labour laws and regulations. This includes educating refugees about their labour rights, enabling their participation in representative organizations and taking steps to combat discrimination and xenophobia in the workplace.



¹⁴ ILO, 2017, R205 – *Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation*.

Currently, there is no international labour standard specifically for digital labour platforms, but dialogue on this need is ongoing and further discussions are planned for the 2025 International Labour Conference. The views of employers, workers and governments on key issues to do with the platform economy differ. Governments have cited important regulatory gaps, both international and national, that need attention regarding such issues as algorithmic management, gender equality and inclusion in digital platforms (ILO 2022, 71). Employers and workers, meanwhile, hold divergent views on issues including “algorithmic management, wages, working time, the employment relationship and collective bargaining”, and even on such key questions as the definition of the term “worker” and whether both employees and the self-employed should be included in the scope of the discussions (ILO 2022, 70). Workers have raised a number of issues that, in their view, are inadequately covered by ILS, as outlined in Box 1.

Box 1. Platform-work issues that are inadequately covered by ILS, according to workers

- Remuneration for time spent waiting for tasks
- The right to digital disconnection
- The protection and governance of workers’ personal data and right to privacy
- Fairness and transparency of algorithmic management of ratings, account deactivation and surveillance
- Individual and collective information and consultation rights
- The existence of adequate dispute-resolution mechanisms
- Effective labour inspection and access to relevant data and records by the competent authorities
- The cross-border nature of platform work
- The regular payment of wages and rates
- Commission charges and fees
- Platform work contracts

Though there is no dedicated labour standard for platform work, many other standards are relevant to this area. The Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204) provides guidance to countries on increasing formalization of jobs and economic units, which is relevant for digital labour platforms regardless of whether workers are classified as employees or self-employed. The Recommendation calls on countries to promote fundamental principles and rights at work for those in the informal economy and to extend social-security and maternity protections, decent working conditions and a minimum wage to all workers in the informal economy – which would include workers using digital labour platforms, however those workers are classified. It also calls on countries to address tax evasion and avoidance of paying social contributions, and to design and implement labour laws and regulations, while also taking steps to make formalization easier and less costly, especially for micro- and small enterprises.

ILS also provide guidance on social security and social protection. The Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) outlines minimum social security standards in areas including medical care and a wide range of work and family-related benefits. The Convention calls for coverage of a minimum share of the population, though this does not create a specific requirement for individual businesses, including platforms. The Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) notes the State’s primary responsibility for social protection and encourages states to have universal social protection systems that include those working in the informal economy. It also notes that basic social security guarantees should apply to at least “all residents and children”, though not necessarily refugees.

Numerous other conventions are relevant to work through digital platforms. The Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) calls on countries to develop an “inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work”.¹⁵ This approach should be broadly applicable, including to platform workers, regardless of contractual status. The Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) calls on countries to have a national policy on occupational safety, occupational health and the working environment in order to prevent accidents and injuries due to work by minimizing hazards in the workplace. This Convention’s concept of “workplace” includes anywhere that workers need to go for work and that is under the direct or indirect control of the employer. The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) calls on countries to have a national policy to promote equal opportunity and treatment in work, with the goal of eliminating discrimination based on race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin.¹⁶ Lastly, there are other international standards that indirectly affect the ability of refugees and host community members to work on digital labour platforms. For example, regulations on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism can make it difficult or impossible for many refugees and host community members to receive payment for their work.

International conventions and standards provide a solid legal framework for decent and inclusive work for refugees, significant challenges affect the implementation. Though the 1951 Convention provides for rights of refugees to access decent work and for, standards of treatment, many State Parties have made reservations to the decent work articles of the Convention. Importantly, where State Parties maintain reservations, the ICESCR and ILS still provide for decent work for refugees. Practical barriers also continue to exist – for example, in obtaining identification documents, using financial services, or moving freely throughout the country – that reduce refugees’ access to economic opportunities. The application of ILS to refugee work also varies, because ILS often leave it to national stakeholders to develop their own legal and regulatory framework. A good example of this is employment classification: ILS do not create a single, universal definition of an employee but instead, encourage countries to define this in national law using indicators such as the nature of employer control of the work and characteristics of the worker’s remuneration.¹⁷

This national-level variation and the diversity of work on platforms make inter-country comparison difficult. For example, the question of whether compensation is due during times when the worker is logged into the platform and waiting for an assignment is closely connected to the determination of whether that worker is an employee, self-employed contractor, or dependent worker. Some types of platform work, such as highly skilled IT services, are likely legitimate self-employed work, so compensation for time waiting would not apply. However, other types of platform work are likely disguised employment, so compensation for time waiting would apply.



¹⁵ ILO, 2019, C190 – *Violence and Harassment Convention*.
¹⁶ ILO, 1958, C111 – *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention*.
¹⁷ ILO, 2006, R198 – *Employment Relationship Recommendation*.

2.3.2 National legal and regulatory frameworks

The ability of refugees and host community members to work, including through digital labour platforms, is heavily influenced by the national legal and regulatory framework. Some countries restrict the rights of refugees as outlined in International refugee and human rights law. One recent study, covering 51 countries that, together, host 87 per cent of the world's refugees, found that they all, in some way, restrict refugees' ability to exercise their right to work in practice (Guerrero et al.). Fifty-five per cent of refugees live in a country where they face significant practical restrictions to access formal employment or self employment. Several countries do not allow refugees to move freely around the country, which limits their ability to participate in the biggest economic subsector of digital labour platforms – transport services.

Box 2. Recent reforms to improve access to work for refugees and host community members

Numerous countries have undertaken legal and regulatory reforms to improve refugees' access to work, either *de jure* or *de facto*. Colombia, which hosts an estimated 2.8 million overwhelmingly Venezuelan refugees and migrants, has passed laws granting them work rights. In 2018, Colombia created a *Permiso Especial de Permanencia (PEP)*, a temporary and ad hoc special permit providing Venezuelans with authorization to work and access public services. In 2021, the Colombian government launched the *Temporary Protection Status* – a ten-year regularization status for eligible Venezuelans in the country that covers access to a broad range of rights, including formal employment and financial inclusion, among others. In Kenya, the 2021 Refugee Act was adopted to govern refugees and gives them the right to engage in gainful employment or enterprise, and practise a profession or trade in which they hold a qualification (Kenya 2021). However, the so-called *Shirika* action plan – a collaborative effort between the Government of Kenya and UNHCR Kenya to promote the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees within this new legal framework is yet to be rolled out.

The rise of digital labour platforms has created new challenges in applying national labour laws and regulations. One of these relates to the classification of platform workers, an issue on which numerous other considerations, such as compensation, depend. Many national legislatures have yet to address classification, though some have. For example, Spain passed the 2021 Riders Law, which classified all workers on food delivery platforms as employees (PeiChin and Large 2022). Other jurisdictions modified employment tests to improve clarity or make classification as an independent contractor more difficult. California's Assembly Bill 5, which has since been given effect by both a referendum and court cases, requires hiring entities to pass a three-pronged test to classify workers as independent contractors. The three prongs are: being free from control and direction of the hiring entity; performing work outside the usual course of the hiring entity's business; and being customarily engaged in an independently established trade, occupation, or business of the same nature.¹⁸ There have also been numerous court cases that found that platform workers should be classified as employees, including in Switzerland, Spain, Argentina, the Netherlands and Taiwan.

Other jurisdictions have classified platform workers as independent contractors. Often, these decisions have been made by courts, as in cases in New Zealand and Australia. A few jurisdictions in the United States of America have passed "marketplace contractor laws" that classify platform workers as independent contractors (Prince 2022). Brazil's government issued a decree for platform drivers to register as individual micro-entrepreneurs, a status that allows them to access social and other protections (US Chamber of Commerce 2020). However, a third approach adopted in some jurisdictions classifies platform workers as dependent contractors. The UK Supreme Court, for example, found that Uber drivers should be classified as "dependent contractors" and therefore entitled to some employment benefits,

¹⁸ State of California Labour and Workforce Development Agency, "ABC Test".

even though they were not considered employees (Peiris n.d.). There have been similar decisions in Canada and Italy, while other jurisdictions, such as Germany, have considered introducing this category of worker. This gap in the legal and regulatory framework can inadvertently benefit refugees and host community members if it helps them access work.

Compensation has also been an important question, with numerous jurisdictions, such as India and the Canadian province of Ontario, extending minimum-wage protections to digital platform workers (Viet Nam Social Security, 2021). Ontario also created an obligation for platforms to provide a recurring pay period and pay day, and pay all amounts earned, without deductions or withholdings (Rigolo and Hickey 2022). The US state of New York introduced a new regulation providing platform workers with an hourly minimum wage of nearly US\$18, which platforms are required to calculate based on total time logged into the platform, including waiting time (Davis 2023). Indonesia established a minimum per-kilometre fare (Lee 2022), while France now requires platforms to reimburse drivers for the cost of occupational accident or illness insurance (PeiChin and Large 2022).

Other parts of the national legal and regulatory framework – such as financial regulations – also affect the ability of refugees and host community members to work through digital labour platforms. Almost all countries have laws and regulations on anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT), without which they can face severe limits on their access to the global financial system. Some countries face sanctions owing to AML/CFT blacklists or other reasons, which can hamper the ability of refugees to receive payments. Many countries also have know-your-customer (KYC) regulations that require people to provide identification in order to open bank or mobile-money accounts, or they place limits on unverified accounts. Many countries retain tight regulations that limit refugees' access to financial services – for example, Lebanon's restrictions on receiving remittances without ID (UNHCR 2020a). However, others have shown that KYC innovations can be inclusive of refugees. In Jordan, for example, the Ministry of the Interior issued biometric ID cards for Syrian refugees that recognize their residency and help them access services. These cards can be used to access financial services like JoMoPay, the country's main mobile payments platform, but they are not yet accepted for bank accounts (AFI 2019).

2.3.3 Codes of conduct and normative frameworks for global platforms

In the absence of international standards or well-developed national legal and regulatory frameworks, some industry and academic groups have developed normative frameworks for platform work. There is significant variation in how these groups view good practices and decent work on digital platforms, which perhaps reflects the varying interests and diverse forms of work facilitated through digital platforms.

The World Economic Forum has developed and published a Charter of Principles for Good Platform Work (WEF n.d.). The Charter is supported by a range of companies, including some of the world's largest digital labour platforms and technology firms. It aims to “collectively identify and commit to key principles that in their view should underpin good platform work”. The Charter recognizes some of the benefits of platforms and platform work, while also noting that these business models pose challenges for the current policies that govern work. It outlines eight principles, but in some controversial areas, it takes a clear industry position. For example, it calls for a minimum wage only for workers classified as employees and only proportional to the time spent actively working. The WEF principles generally do not create many specific obligations for platforms. Another example is the Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct, a voluntary code developed and subscribed to by a number of digital labour platforms, mostly from Germany.¹⁹

¹⁹ See [crowdsourcing-code.com](https://www.weforum.org/publications/crowdsourcing-code-of-conduct/).

World Economic Forum “Charter of Principles for Good Platform Work”



Diversity and inclusion of workers from all national, religious, gender, sexual orientation and ethnic backgrounds, including persons with disabilities.



Safety and well-being, including dignified working conditions, protections for worker health and safety, zero tolerance of abuse, violence and harassment, and transparency about tasks.



Flexibility and fair conditions that are accessible, transparent, and easily understood. This includes clear grounds for account deactivation, worker freedom to decline tasks, and transparency around the use of algorithms.



Reasonable pay and fees, including full transparency about earnings before workers accept tasks and minimum wages (with conditions) for workers classified as employees and who do not set their own rates. It also calls for tips to be kept by workers and strict rules around non-payment.



Social protection, including collaboration between governments and platforms to help workers access these protections, even for workers who are not classified as employees. Social protections should be portable and pro-rated.



Learning and development, including supporting individual professional development and multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure worker access to education and upskilling.



Data management, including the workers’ right to view their platform history in a transferable, straightforward format and platform efforts to share information about the platform economy.

Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct



Tasks in compliance with the law. Members commit not to offer any projects that contain illegal, discriminatory, fraudulent, demagogic, violent, or anti-constitutional content.



Clarification on legal situations. Members will inform crowdworkers about the legal regulations, including around taxation, that are connected to crowdworking.



Fair payment. Members commit to pay a fair and appropriate project-based wage, which is clearly communicated, includes transparent payment conditions and is paid at least monthly.



Motivating and good work. Members commit to provide user-friendly and intuitive platforms with support options, providing crowdworkers with motivating and fulfilling work.



Respectful interaction. Platforms commit to mediate diligently and build relationships between all parties based on reliability, trust, honesty, openness and mutual respect.



Clear tasks and reasonable timing. Tasks for crowdworkers should be clearly defined and based on realistic estimates that give crowdworkers time to complete them.



Freedom and flexibility. Crowdworking is voluntary, and performed independent of time, location and long-term commitment. Crowdworkers choose which tasks to accept and refusing tasks should not have negative consequences or result in pressure from the platform.



Constructive feedback and open communication. Members should provide the best possible assistance and technical support, and ensure open and honest communication.





Regulated approval process and rework. Crowdwork approval processes should be in writing and transparent. Rejections should be clearly justified and accompanied by an option to rework, whenever possible. Platforms should have fair and neutral complaint processes.



Data protection and privacy. Members commit not to reveal personal data of crowdworkers without their written consent, and only release anonymized data.

While industry codes of conduct tend to have more general principles that are sometimes more favourable to the views of digital platforms, Fairwork, a research project by the Oxford Internet Institute, has created a set of ten principles for both cloud work and location-based platform work that are more specific and oriented towards worker views. The Fairwork Principles are used to rate the performance of digital platforms. Unlike the Crowdsourcing Code or the WEF principles, the Fairwork Principles are used to produce an academic assessment and are not an industry-implemented code. The ratings are insightful but also highlight challenges associated with assessing a wide range of platforms against a single set of criteria. For example, collective governance and bargaining may be appropriate and beneficial when platforms control important aspects of work, such as setting pay, facilitating transactions, or verifying output quality, but for platforms that facilitate highly skilled freelance workers who are limited in number and exercise significant control over their work, collective bargaining may not be appropriate and could be anti-competitive.

Table 1. Fairwork Principles

Cloudwork (Online Work) Principles	Location-based Platform Work Principles
<p>1.1. Workers are paid on time and for all work completed.</p> <p>1.2. Workers are paid at least the local minimum wage.</p> <p>2.1. Precarity and overwork are mitigated.</p> <p>2.2. Health and safety risks are mitigated.</p> <p>3.1. Clear terms and conditions are available.</p> <p>3.2. Contracts are consistent with workers' terms of engagement on the platform.</p> <p>4.1. There is due process for decisions affecting workers.</p> <p>4.2. There is equity in the management process.</p> <p>5.1. Workers have access to representation and freedom of association.</p> <p>5.2. There is collective governance and bargaining.</p>	<p>1.1. Ensures workers earn at least the local minimum wage after costs.</p> <p>1.2. Ensures workers earn at least a local living wage after costs.</p> <p>2.1. Mitigates task-specific risks.</p> <p>2.2. Ensures safe working conditions and a safety net.</p> <p>3.1. Provides clear and transparent terms and conditions.</p> <p>3.2. Ensures that no unfair contract terms are imposed.</p> <p>4.1. Provides due process for decisions affecting workers.</p> <p>4.2. Provides equity in the management process.</p> <p>5.1. Assures freedom of association and the expression of worker voice.</p> <p>5.2. Supports democratic governance.</p>
<p>Fairwork, "Cloudwork (Online Work) Principles". </p>	<p>Fairwork, "Location-based Platform Work Principles". </p>

3 Platform work

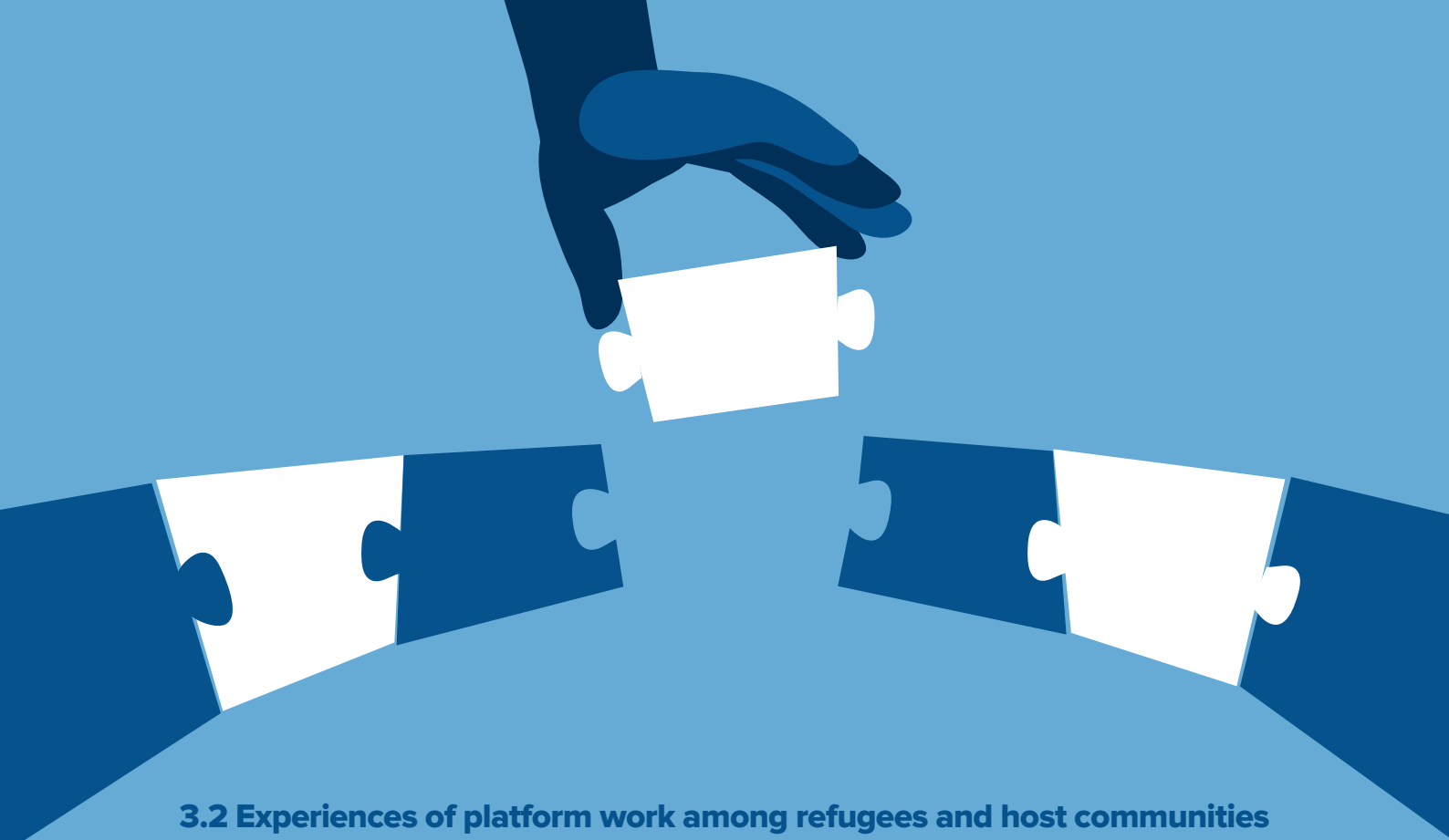
3.1 Barriers to platform work for refugees and host community members

The right of refugees to work is outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, as are other rights often necessary to earn a living, such as the right to freely move about a host country. However, in many countries, in practice, refugees and host community members are not able to enjoy these rights, owing to national laws, discrimination, or other factors. These barriers are compounded by limited connectivity, limited financial inclusion and skills deficits, such as a lack of local language skills, which only add to the barriers faced by refugees and host community members.

Because of these barriers, refugees often end up working in the informal economy – as do many members of host communities. The informal economy provides little income security or consistency, and does not provide access to important labour rights or social protections. Informal workers are more likely to experience exploitation and abuse, as well as penalties from authorities (Ginn et al. 2022). Work in the informal economy is not a substitute for access to formal work for either refugees or host community members. Digital labour platforms occupy an area of legal and regulatory uncertainty that allows refugees and host community members to access work when they might not otherwise be able to do so. This is especially true for web-based platforms, whose international nature means, in practice, that there is little enforcement regarding local work rights. These types of complex interacting issues illustrate both the expectations of and the challenges for refugees working through digital labour platforms.

Nevertheless, digital labour platforms offer potential for refugees and host community members to access paid work. Web-based platforms, especially, can connect refugees with work opportunities in other countries or regions, and for some workers, this has been transformative. Location-based platforms, similarly, have been widely adopted and while specific data for refugees is not available, one report found that 17 per cent of workers on online web-based platforms and 15 per cent on app-based delivery platforms were migrants (ILO 2021). The economic opportunities for countries are also significant. For example, in Jordan, where just one in 15 refugee women participates in the workforce, it has been estimated that refugee women could boost the country's GDP by US\$145 million annually if the employment and earnings gap between them and other Jordanian women were eliminated (IFC 2021).





3.2 Experiences of platform work among refugees and host communities

The experiences of platform workers from refugee and host communities vary considerably. Some have been able to earn a decent livelihood, but others have not yet secured a steady stream of work, despite significant training. They note encountering a range of barriers, including two commonly cited ones: lack of officially recognized identification and lack of access to affordable formal financial systems. Regarding the former, many refugees and host community members cannot access a type of officially recognized ID that is required to work on and be paid by digital labour platforms. This challenge affects not just refugees and host community members but some 850 million people worldwide who do not hold any recognized ID (Clark et al. 2023). Sometimes, challenges linked to identification are more technical – for example, when the type of ID held is not compatible with the registration form on a digital platform. Regarding access to affordable formal financial systems, many refugees and host community members struggle with this and are therefore unable to receive payments for work on digital labour platforms. This is directly connected to the lack of identification. As discussed earlier, in section 2.3.2, many countries also have KYC regulations, place limits on unverified accounts or retain tight regulations that limit refugee access to financial services.

Financial regulations also affect the ability of refugees and host community members to work through digital labour platforms – see section 2.3.2. Further, many refugees and host community members are located in countries that do not use a major currency, such as the US dollar or the euro. This results in conversion fees that can sometimes be more than their earnings, even in cases where pay is above the local minimum wage.

Refugees and host community members regard the high level of competition on some platforms, especially freelancing platforms, as another challenge. Such competition is a characteristic of some web-based platforms and is due to the supply of labour outstripping demand. It has both positive and negative consequences: on the one hand, it provides an incentive to improve skills and competitiveness through ongoing education, which many workers have done; on the other, refugees can sometimes be at a disadvantage if they lack the same access to training opportunities as other workers on digital platforms.

Both refugees and platform-based agencies that work with them have noted the difficulty of obtaining work. One agency reported that it only had enough work to keep digital annotators busy between 15 and 20 per cent of the time. Though they wanted to hire annotators as employees, they could not do so because they lacked the necessary volume of work. This directly affected the agency's ability to invest in the capacity of workers.

3.3 Other digital income-generating activities

Digital labour platforms are just one of the digital jobs or livelihoods options for refugees and host community members. Some refugees and displaced persons relocate to find work, while others seek digital employment or digital self-employment. These are often complemented by other activities, as refugees and host community members regularly engage in multiple livelihood activities and jobs. Globally, refugees often struggle to access decent work, especially in full-time formal employment. Only 45 per cent of refugees live in countries where they can, practically speaking, access either formal wage-earning employment or self-employment (UNHCR 2023). These barriers to formal, full-time employment contribute to the use of various online tools by refugees to advance their livelihoods, including:

- 
- e-commerce platforms** – refugees and host community members often use e-commerce platforms to sell goods, expanding their geographical reach, sometimes even internationally. However, these platforms differ significantly from digital labour platforms in terms of control of the work, so do not face similar demands regarding worker classification. E-commerce platforms may help promote decent work through educational tools – for example, on workplace health and safety;
 - social media and communication platforms**, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok, are often used by refugees and host community members to promote a self-employment activity or small business, or sell (or resell) goods and services (such as transport);
 - online recruitment agencies and job boards to find work in third countries** – resources such as Jobs4Refugees.org and Workeer.de provide refugees and host community members with information on jobs and apprenticeships. Others, such as Talent Beyond Boundaries and Gateway2talent.com, help skilled refugees and displaced workers connect with employers in the United States, Europe and other locations, while also helping facilitate a work-based labour mobility process. Talent Beyond Boundaries' site has a database of more than 100,000 registered professionals who are refugees or displaced persons. These jobs involve physical migration to third countries, mostly developed ones. Other resources, such as LinkedIn and Indeed, are not specific to refugees and host community members but are open to them;
 - online recruitment agencies, job boards and other sources to find work, including remote work, in their current location** – these can connect refugees and host community members with employment opportunities, including remote work. While some employers hire directly, many remote employers use third-party services as their employer of record. Employer-of-record services can help employers hire and onboard refugees residing in countries other than the employer's home country. These intermediaries act as legal representatives of employers abroad to secure compliance with applicable employment laws and taxation requirements. For example, Remote for Ukrainians²⁰ provides employer-of-record services at no cost to employers open to hiring and onboarding displaced workers from Ukraine.

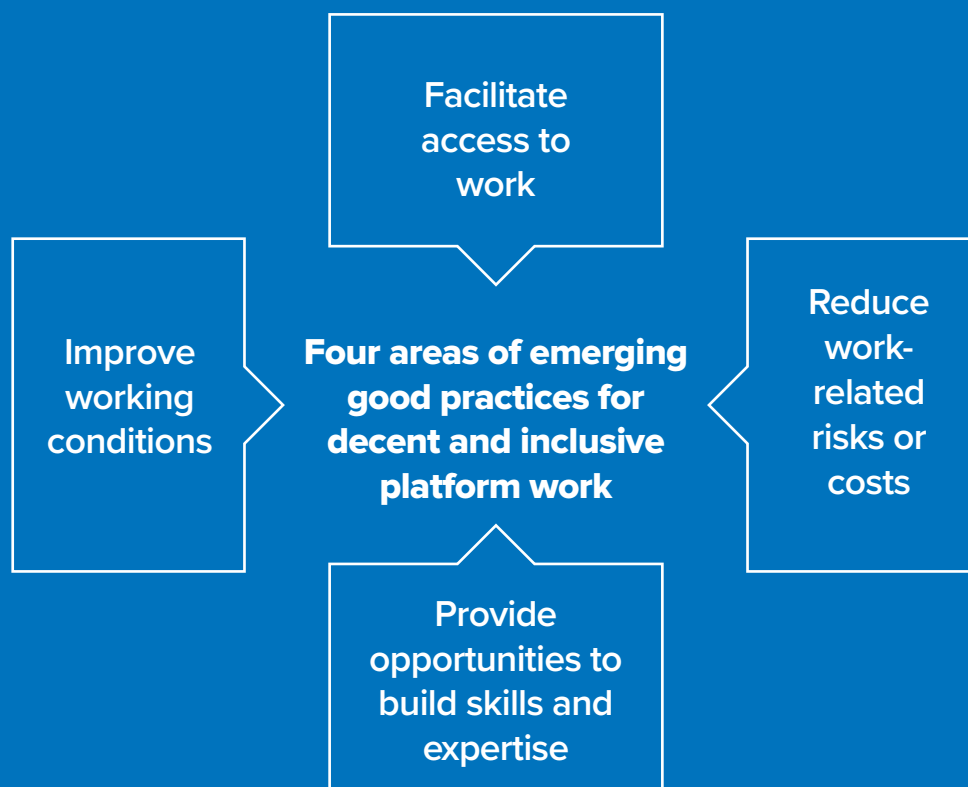
Each of these avenues can play an important role in supporting livelihoods for refugees and host community members. While many digital tools are available to them to support their livelihoods, there are important differences in costs, benefits and protections provided by each tool. The use of social media to sell goods and services is common, but it is also associated with informality and self-employment. Online employment agencies or job boards can facilitate entry into formal employment for refugees and host community members. Note that people often use multiple online tools simultaneously.

²⁰ See the "[Remote for Ukrainians](#)" website.

4 Emerging practices advancing inclusiveness and decent work on online labour platforms

Aligning working conditions on online labour platforms with decent-work principles benefits workers, digital labour platforms and businesses. Besides compliance with labour standards, the platforms also get access to a diversified workforce, creating a more competitive marketplace that can attract a wider client base. Yet, while some platforms have initiated steps towards advancing inclusion and better working conditions for refugees and host community members, there remains significant scope for improvement. In the digital platform ecosystem (see section 2.1.3), other supporting actors — including local NGOs, financial service providers, platform-based agencies, social enterprises and international development actors — have stepped in to help fill some gaps. While each actor undoubtedly has a role to play, individual efforts are not enough and synergies need to be forged in order to create a conducive environment for inclusion.

This chapter takes stock of some emerging practices that are advancing inclusion and better working conditions for refugees and host community members. These practices can be categorized into four mutually reinforcing objectives.



It is important to note that by adopting promising practices, platforms/actors do not necessarily adhere fully to decent-work standards. For instance, a platform may make a step towards inclusion by recognizing refugee identity documents, while still failing to provide fair compensation to its workers. Or a location-based platform may engage large numbers of refugees purely to keep labour costs low. The practices documented below therefore serve as illustrative examples only, and their inclusion is not to be taken as an endorsement.

4.1 Facilitate access to work

The effective inclusion of refugees and host communities starts with, but requires more than, allowing them to access the same job opportunities as all other members of society. Even in countries where refugees have the legal right to wage-earning employment, there are many practical barriers that could still limit their access to work.

4.1.1 Affordable and reliable internet connectivity, devices and workspaces

According to UNHCR, refugee households are 50 per cent less likely than the general population to have an internet-enabled phone, while around 20 per cent of refugees live in rural areas with no connectivity at all (UNHCR 2016). Securing the basic equipment and infrastructure for platform work thus constitutes a significant challenge for refugees and host communities. Besides the initial investment needed when starting out in platforms to purchase a wireless-enabled device, such as a laptop, tablet, or phone, maintenance costs – including electricity and internet connection – also need to be factored in.

Several digital labour platforms and other actors in the ecosystem have been implementing initiatives to help address this gap. They include:



Shortlist, a job placement platform for skilled professionals, which launched a financing programme to help eligible youth in Kenya secure devices that would allow them to engage in cloud work. Also open to refugees, this initiative provides a more affordable payment plan consisting of a down payment of 15 per cent of the device's full price followed by zero-interest monthly payments structured up to a year, depending on financial capacity;



freelancing platform Ureed.com, which collaborates with microfinance companies to provide freelancers with the possibility to access financial schemes to purchase necessary equipment and cover related costs, such as data packages;



Concat, a web development company based in Lebanon and the United Kingdom, which is led by refugee and female employees, and supports team members by providing them with access to an uninterrupted power supply, thus ensuring internet access even in case of electricity blackouts;



GiveInternet, a nonprofit platform, which allows individuals to sponsor laptops and internet access for students living in refugee camps, rural areas and underserved communities and who are participating in upskilling programmes by partner training institutions. It also teams up with social enterprises that refurbish devices from companies, offering more affordable device options;



Re:Coded, a nonprofit in the Middle East, which lends laptops to participants in its coding bootcamps who do not have devices. Students can also opt in to receive internet data support, which they receive in the form of bank or cash transfers;



mobile network operator Vodacom, which built cell towers in Tanzania's Nyarugusu refugee camp to provide 3G coverage. Its investment was recovered in less than three months, proving that refugees can also be a valuable customer segment (UNHCR 2016).

Adequate physical workspaces are also identified as a critical need to facilitate the access of refugees and host communities to work on digital labour platforms. Over the years, UNHCR has opened, in various locations around the world, Community Technology Access Centres, which work similarly to a cyber café and offer basic computer training classes. Other office equipment, such as printers and scanners, are also made available (UNHCR 2020b).

In the Nakivale refugee settlement in Uganda, spaces equipped with electricity, internet connectivity and some devices are being made available by community-based organizations such as Unleashed, Her Dreams Count, and Stand for Change and Unity. However, these spaces remain limited and more workstations are needed. As part of the PROSPECTS partnership in Uganda, the ILO and StartHub Africa, an entrepreneurship ecosystem actor, are working with local organizations to map out potential co-working spaces.

4.1.2 Recognized refugee identity documents

The requirements concerning identity documents, such as providing copies of passports or national ID cards, can represent a barrier for refugee populations trying to access platform work. Many refugees leave behind or lose these documents along their journey. In recognition of this challenge, platforms such as Upwork and Gebeya are starting to accept alternative documents to which refugees may have access, including alien cards issued by host countries or documentation issued by UNHCR. In Ethiopia, refugees with UNHCR ID cards are also able to request government-issued work permits. Obtaining identification documents enables refugees to access their rights, freedoms and basic services, including telecom, banking and financial services, which are also needed to work on some platforms.

4.1.3 Engagement with refugees and host community members

Many digital platforms and businesses in the digital economy do not actively recruit workers. However, some are now partnering with different actors in the platform-work ecosystem to specifically target and include refugees and host community members in their workforce.

One emerging way of doing so is by collaborating with refugee-led organizations (RLOs). By collaborating with those who understand firsthand the unique challenges of forced displacement, platforms and employers can tailor their recruitment, training and support services to be more accessible and relevant to the actual needs and aspirations of refugees and host communities. For instance, Jobtech Alliance, a collective of actors in Africa's jobtech ecosystem, helps onboard refugee talent among its platform members. Depending on criteria provided by platforms, qualified refugees are identified through two partner RLOs: Young African Refugees for Integral Development and the African Youth Action Network (Hassan 2024). The members supported by the Alliance include e-commerce platform Jumia, which has engaged some refugees as independent offline sales agents. This initiative also broadened Jumia's business reach to the refugee community.

Refugees working in the digital economy are also starting to organize and form specialized talent pools. For example, the Dadaab Collective Freelancing Agency is a refugee-led digital agency based in the Dadaab refugee camp that has secured large, long-term contracts with a number of global and regional online labour platforms, such as Upwork and Amazon MTurk. The Collective bids for work opportunities as an agency and then distributes the work internally.²¹

Another way of reaching out to refugee talent is through partnering with training providers and local NGOs who offer upskilling or reskilling programmes for refugees and host communities.



²¹ See the Collective's profile on [upwork.com](https://www.upwork.com).

Box 3. Humans in the Loop

Humans in the Loop (HiTL) is a social enterprise in Bulgaria connecting conflict-affected individuals to digital work, focusing on data collection and image labelling in the artificial intelligence (AI) and machine-learning industries. It works with people with diverse skills, ranging from those with basic digital literacy to professionals in the health industry.

Partnering with local organizations

HiTL collaborates with a network of NGOs and training providers worldwide to recruit, train and manage workers (ILO 2023f). This partnership model helps HiTL connect with local communities, implement quality-control standards, and overcome some of the context-specific barriers workers face, such as lack of access to e-banking services. In such cases, HiTL pays the local partner, who then disburses cash to workers directly.

Facilitating income-generating opportunities through microwork

HiTL secures data annotation projects in Western Europe and the United States, then distributes tasks to annotators in different countries, where conflict-affected individuals are trained to acquire relevant skills to perform these tasks online. The trainees are engaged in paid mock work projects before being onboarded, so that they are familiar with the responsibilities and pace of a real-life project.

Since its founding in 2017, HiTL has worked with more than a hundred AI companies, providing online work opportunities to more than a thousand people and distributing more than EUR 1.2 million in earnings. Its inclusion policy has also resulted in a multilingual workforce providing client support across multiple time zones, which is particularly valuable for AI companies dealing with high-risk predictions and detections.

A few platforms also provide special incentives to encourage clients to hire refugees and host community members. Ureed.com, for example, waives platform service fees for clients who specifically hire from this group (ILO 2023c). Another example is discussed in Box 4 below.

Box 4. Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is an international agency dedicated to the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through aid for trade. In coordination with the Norwegian Refugee Council, ITC implemented the Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative (RESI), via a two-pronged intervention: promoting the development of commercially valuable skills and market linkages for refugees and host communities; and supporting local SMEs in growing and creating economic opportunities for populations affected by displacement. Piloted in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp in 2017, RESI was expanded to the Kakuma camp in 2018.

Providing incentives to engage freelancers from displaced and host populations

After identifying creative digital skills, such as photography and film editing, among refugees in Kakuma, RESI partnered with the online marketplace GrowthBond to introduce an online "learn and earn" platform that could help refugees and host communities gain or further develop skills in digital marketing. They were also coached on how to earn an income on online freelancing sites and how to engage with clients. Freelancers were then given small projects with local companies to test their new skills and build their portfolios. Participating local businesses received financial credits to hire the freelancers and were invited to business management workshops.

Lastly, there are a few online labour platforms that implement special initiatives specifically for refugees and host communities, such as Gebeya, in partnership with UNHCR, who developed boundlessskills.com, and Upwork's Opportunity Unlimited (see Box 5).

Box 5. Opportunity Unlimited

Freelance platform Upwork, in collaboration with the Tent Partnership for Refugees, launched the Opportunity Unlimited initiative to help displaced professionals access remote employment opportunities.

Tailored support for displaced professionals

Through a dedicated portal, refugees can create an account on the platform using their UNHCR-issued document or an asylum-seeker certificate or temporary visa. They can then access various resources, such as skills-based training, guidance on setting up strong profiles and marketing their portfolios, as well as information on social services in their area. Through partnerships with local NGOs and other digital service providers, refugees are also supported to access workplaces, the internet, work supplies and reliable payment systems.

Upwork informs its clients about the refugee talent pool. Those participating as a hiring partner receive support in identifying freelancers who meet their specific needs.

4.2 Reduce work-related risks or costs

4.2.1 Pay and fee transparency

Having clear and transparent pay and fee structures promotes fair compensation and enables platform workers to make informed decisions. Refugees, similarly to many other workers on digital labour platforms, might rely on their income to cover basic needs, so clarity about payment schedules and potential deductions allows them to adequately plan ahead.

On online freelance platforms, fees typically represent a percentage of the contract's value and are usually explicitly outlined on the platform's website. For example, Fiverr charges a 20-per-cent fee and Upwork applies a 10-per-cent fee. Additionally, certain platforms, like Freelancer.com, impose charges for a range of services, including arbitration, account maintenance (applicable to accounts inactive for at least six months), and penalties for off-platform work or transactions.

While a number of location-based platforms also levies fees, these are often not transparently communicated. Algorithms are also used to estimate final payment to workers on online labour platforms, yet the parameters influencing these calculations are not disclosed or clearly explained to workers. This has led to various reports of workers experiencing algorithmic wage discrimination or being paid different hourly wages for similar work (Dubal 2023).

4.2.2 Reliable payment methods

Ensuring that refugees and members of host communities can effectively receive payments is crucial for their inclusion in work through digital labour platforms.

As previously discussed, a significant hurdle preventing refugees from accessing financial services is the lack of identification documents that are recognized by many financial institutions. This means that many are not able to pass know-your-customer requirements. Some emerging practices in accepting refugee documents were discussed above in section 4.1.2.

Many online payment platforms also require their users to link a bank account for funds withdrawal,



posing a barrier for unbanked workers. Cash pickup is an alternative offered by some platforms, such as PayPal's HyperWallet, which uses the MoneyGram network of 350,000 agents worldwide, but this payout method may be subject to fees. It is important, therefore, for digital labour platforms to consider the various realities faced by underserved groups, such as refugees, when selecting viable payment methods.

Other actors, such as agencies, local NGOs and social enterprises, have also been acting as intermediaries, receiving payments on behalf of workers and distributing them accordingly. While this could be helpful, these arrangements often come at a cost both in terms of time and money, which could, in turn, reduce the earnings of refugees. Besides this, other informal transfer methods include asking relatives and friends in other countries to receive payments from clients/platforms on their behalf, or the use of networks of brokers outside of traditional financial systems, such as halawa. However, these unregulated practices may expose workers to risks of fraud and abuse.

4.2.3 Payment assurance or escrow

Even when refugees do have access to formal financial systems, another challenge faced is the uncertainty of payments on digital platforms. Many refugees state that one of the biggest risks they face when using digital platforms is non-payment.

One practice employed by some digital platforms to mitigate this is requiring clients to provide either a PayPal account or a credit card, which the platform then verifies. Clients with verified payment methods are indicated as such on the platform, offering workers a clearer basis on which to decide whether to engage in work with them. Platforms like Fiverr, Upwork and Freelancer.com also incorporate escrow payment options, in which the client puts the money into an escrow account before the work commences and then the worker is paid incrementally from those funds as hours are billed or milestones hit. Escrow payments act as a financial buffer, ensuring that funds are already allocated for payment, thus significantly reducing the risk of non-payment for workers.

However, for online work that is arranged outside of formal digital labour platforms, such as through direct contacts on social media, workers often find themselves with limited recourse in the event of non-payment.

4.2.4 Timely payments

The timing of payments is critically important for workers, especially for refugees and members of host communities, who often depend on this income to meet their immediate needs. The time it takes for payments to be processed and made available to workers is influenced by a variety of factors. Payment speed can depend on how long it takes clients to approve work, as well as security periods. Upwork, for example, has a five-day security period for many contracts, and makes funds from hourly contracts available after ten days. Fiverr keeps funds in pending status for two weeks, except for certain clients, for whom the wait time is one week. Other platforms can take 30–45 days to pay workers.

Additionally, the payment method chosen significantly affects the speed at which workers can access their earnings. For instance, payments processed through PayPal are generally quicker than those made via wire transfers to local bank accounts.

4.2.5 Assistance with tax compliance

Navigating regulation on taxation can be complex, especially for refugees and host community members. Tax compliance is made even more challenging by language barriers, especially when it comes to filling out forms and communicating with relevant government offices.

In some countries, digital labour platforms are required by law to withhold taxes from workers' earnings and remit these directly to the government. Such a measure could inadvertently ease the tax compliance burden on the workers themselves while enhancing overall tax compliance.

Freelancer.com and Upwork, for example, withhold value added tax (VAT) or goods and services tax (GST) and remit it to various authorities in countries like Switzerland, South Africa, Serbia, Nigeria and Kenya, as well as in the European Union. Upwork does the same in Malaysia for the sales and services tax. In Ukraine and Canada, the platforms collect and remit indirect freelancer taxes, while in Mexico, they collect and remit income taxes.

4.3 Improve working conditions

4.3.1 Minimum levels of compensation

Some digital labour platforms set minimum rates of pay for all work facilitated, regardless of the location of the worker. For example, Fiverr has a minimum price of US\$15 per gig and Upwork pays a minimum of US\$3 an hour or US\$5 for a project. While these rates may not always align with the minimum-wage thresholds in the worker's country of residence, freelancers are able to set their own rates.

Other platforms monitor bids and limit those that are too low for the project or skills required. Ureed.com actively monitors and benchmarks rates, rejecting bids that are outliers because they are either too high or too low in consideration of the worker's profile. Gebeya also allows workers to set their own rate, but within a fixed range. Both platforms provide workers with information on average freelancing rates for similar skills, helping them competitively price their services without undercutting their value (ILO 2023c).

A less common approach undertaken by platforms is adhering to national minimum-wage policies based on their location. For example, Humans in the Loop observes this in countries where it is operational.

4.3.2 Clear project contracts and policies on working conditions

Some platforms provide workers with contracts for each project, detailing the scope of the work and expected outputs. These contracts can help workers document their previous work experience and develop references for the future.

For instance, on Upwork, clients extend offers to freelancers, specifying such project details as title, description and payment terms. Workers are then free to accept, decline, or negotiate these offers. Humans in the Loop negotiates contracts, including pricing, with affiliated NGO partners for each project, and makes changes to those contracts, as well as to final compensation levels, if there are any changes that lead to extra work for the annotators. Freelancing platform Gebeya offers those registered on its platform free basic training to understand the obligations, responsibilities and expectations involved in service contract agreements. There is also a 24-hour support channel for talent regarding contractual matters and other concerns.

Similar to contracts, clear written policies regarding working conditions foster transparency and understanding among all parties involved. Some platforms or social enterprises ensure this by providing a public statement about their working conditions. For example, Humans in the Loop has a Fair Work policy, which outlines its commitments regarding recruitment, communication, payments and how the organization handles interactions with clients.

Having terms of engagement that are clearly stated and easily understandable is one of the World Economic Forum's principles for good platform work, while providing detailed project descriptions is part of the Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct (see section 2.3.3). However, these documents serve as guidance and are non-binding, so they do not impose any legal obligation on platforms.

4.3.3 Insurance

Insurance coverage offered by digital labour platforms varies significantly, with many platforms providing coverage exclusively during work-related tasks. For instance, in certain European countries, like France and the United Kingdom, Uber offers insurance to its independent partners from the time a job is accepted until 15 minutes after its completion. This coverage encompasses medical expenses, benefit payments for extended hospitalizations, occupational injuries resulting in income loss, disability benefits and death-in-service payments. For partners who have completed a minimum number of journeys during a recent time period, the programme also offers “off-trip” coverage, including sickness, maternity, paternity and jury service payments, albeit subject to financial limits.²²

Similarly, Deliveroo offers insurance for drivers in some EU countries while they are working until up to an hour after completion. The coverage includes medical and dental expenses, hospital stays, and temporary or permanent incapacitation.²³ It also provides some coverage for mental health services, parental leave payouts and jury duty payouts.

A small range of platforms offer coverage for extended periods. Humans in the Loop has a health insurance fund accessible to workers who have participated in a project within the past year. Benefits are capped at no more than the individual’s earnings over that period and are subject to a maximum benefit limit of US\$5,000. However, this fund represents a direct cost borne by the social enterprise. It is important to note that private health insurance is no substitute for inclusive national social protection systems. However, only 40 per cent of countries are estimated to provide access for refugees to national social insurance schemes (covering health insurance and other schemes) (UNHCR 2023).

4.3.4 Dispute mediation and resolution

Setting up strong, in-house dispute resolution systems is good practice for platforms to manage grievances that may arise between clients and workers, and prevent them from escalating into major conflicts.

Some platforms like Upwork and Freelancer.com allow both parties to share their narratives, submit evidence and engage in dialogue. The platforms also have access to communications that took place on the platform, providing insight into the transaction. Based on this information, the platforms can issue a decision and take the appropriate actions, including payment to workers.

Other platforms, however, do not offer such mechanisms. Outsourcing platform Amazon MTurk, for instance, explicitly states in its participation agreement that it does not intervene in disputes between workers and requesters, as it does not consider itself a party to these transactions.²⁴

4.3.5 Worker feedback

A well-functioning feedback mechanism is an important tool to foster decent working conditions and empower the voices of platform workers. Such a system could also help inform platforms of the specific concerns faced by refugees and host community members. For platforms, establishing feedback loops can also improve their performance, increase worker satisfaction, tailor the support services they provide and allow them to adapt and evolve to meet the changing needs and expectations of workers. This takes place on different levels, with some feedback mechanisms being highly individualized, while others are more collective.

²² See Uber, “Partner Protection Insurance with Allianz Partners”.

²³ See Deliveroo, “Get Peace of Mind with your Deliveroo Insurance”.

²⁴ See Amazon Mechanical Turk, 2020, “Participation Agreement”.

Box 6. Dükkan

Background

Dükkan, a freelancing platform available in Turkish, English and Arabic, was launched in 2021 by UNDP Türkiye and Bangladesh. Its primary goal is to provide digital opportunities for displaced individuals, especially Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye, leveraging their strong ICT skills. Tasks completed on the platform span software development, graphic design, voice-over, interpreting and video editing.

To onboard refugee freelancers, Dükkan actively collaborates with local organizations, with a special focus on recruiting women. As of October 2023, the platform has more than 160 clients and 560 freelancers, with 30 per cent of the freelancers being women.

Enhancing quality and return to work

Dükkan establishes a feedback loop between freelancers and clients, especially after task completion. This not only enhances the work experience for freelancers and improves client satisfaction but also paves the way for future collaborations on future projects. In addition, gathering insight and incorporating the suggestions of workers helps continually enhance job quality and productivity (ILO 2023e).

Dükkan uses the national minimum wage as a benchmark for task compensation. Additionally, task managers review and adjust client-submitted tasks to ensure fair working conditions before making them accessible to freelancers. Capacity development assessments are also conducted with freelancers to identify topics on which additional support may be needed, including project timeline calculation, conflict resolution, Turkish law for freelancers and pricing.

4.3.6 Engaging in collective bargaining

Some platforms have engaged in social dialogue and collective bargaining with worker representatives, resulting in agreements that yield benefits shared broadly among workers. Most of these existing agreements are still new and many of them are of an experimental nature (Hadwiger 2022). While there are no clear examples yet of refugees and host community members directly benefiting from such initiatives, these practices hold promise for inclusivity.

One of the first collective agreements signed by a platform and a trade union was between Hilfr, a platform for private cleaning in Denmark, and the United Federation of Danish Workers (3F). As a result, after 100 hours of work via the platform, workers get to choose if they want to obtain employee status or continue freelancing. Those who wish to change their employment status are covered by the agreement covering minimum salary, pension, healthcare, insurance, etc.²⁵ In Spain, for instance, JustEat and the Workers General Union and Confederation of Workers' Commissions signed a collective agreement for delivery workers, covering working time, wages and working conditions (IOE 2022a). In the United Kingdom, the General, Municipal, Boilermakers' and Allied Trade Union (GMB) and Deliveroo signed a union-recognition deal covering the platform's self-employed riders. This recognized the GMB's right to collectively bargain on behalf of these workers and guaranteed a pay floor. Additionally, it facilitated dialogue on critical issues, including riders' health, safety and well-being (IOE 2022b).

²⁵ See <https://hilfr.dk/en/about-super-hilfrs>

4.3.7 Community-building

In forced displacement contexts, workplaces are important spaces that encourage collaboration between refugee and host communities and strengthen social cohesion. These interactions could then lead to the development of cross-cultural understanding and break down stereotypes. Digital platforms could play a part in facilitating these interactions, whether for cloud- or location-based workers. Platform work can result in feelings of isolation, also potentially exacerbating psychological stress resulting from forced displacement experiences. Community-building activities organized by platforms can help prevent or mitigate these effects by providing a sense of belonging.

Through the Opportunity Unlimited initiative, Upwork has also launched five country groups (in Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Poland and Ukraine) for refugees to connect with other displaced professionals and share challenges related to work and their lived experiences of displacement.

In Kenya, Amazon Web Services (AWS), a cloud computing platform offered by e-commerce multinational Amazon, opened a co-working space equipped with devices and internet connection for refugees and host community members working on its MTurk outsourcing platform (ILO 2023e). This is particularly valuable in the delivery of team-based tasks, which foster collaboration and social cohesion.



4.4.1 Transparent information on demand for work

Many workers invest a significant amount of time in seeking work on digital labour platforms, or developing the skills needed to be competitive on those platforms. Given this, it is important that workers, including refugees and host community members, have access to information about the marketplace for the services they are providing (or hoping to provide) on digital labour platforms. This empowers them to make informed choices about how much time to spend bidding on work and developing new skills, as well as deciding which services to offer through the platform. Both Gebeya and Ureed.com provide access to information on average freelancing rates on these platforms, which helps workers better understand the levels of pay for different skills. Upwork also releases lists of the top ten specific skill sets in a range of different areas.

Box 7. NaTakallam

NaTakallam is a social impact start-up founded in Lebanon in 2014 with a mission to create employment opportunities for refugees, especially women, and to promote cultural exchange. Connecting language learners with displaced persons worldwide, it enables refugees to work as online tutors, teachers, translators and cultural-exchange partners. Originally focused on Arabic, its coverage expanded to include Persian, French, Ukrainian, Russian and more. The NaTakallam platform acts as a central hub for matching learners and instructors, scheduling sessions, handling payments, facilitating communication and receiving feedback. Language instructors and translators are also offered capacity development opportunities.

Promoting cultural exchange

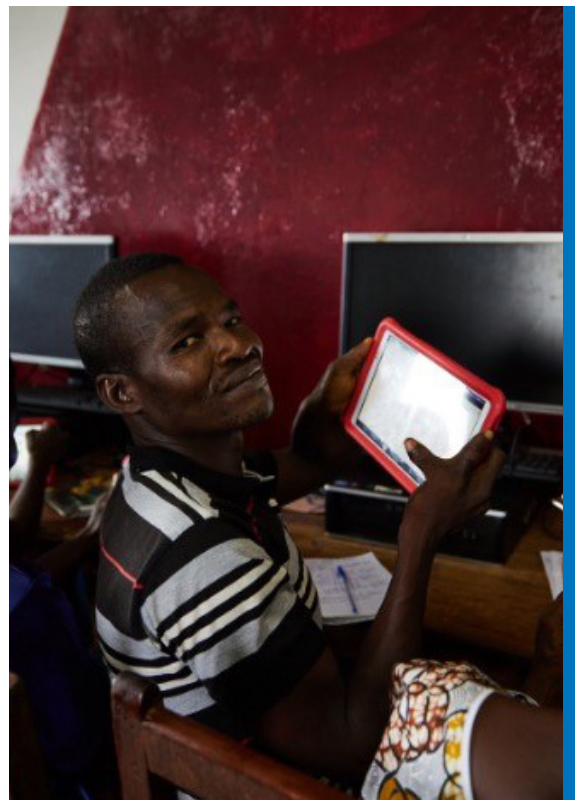
By facilitating exchanges between learners and tutors from diverse backgrounds, NaTakallam promotes social cohesion and cultural awareness. Beyond language practice sessions, newsletters, forums and events are also organized to further engage instructors and learners. Through NaTakallam, refugees have connected with more than 12,000 unique language learners and more than 300 schools and universities through virtual language and cultural-exchange sessions, and have provided translation services to more than 100 clients.

4.4 Provide opportunities to build skills and expertise

4.4.2 Digital skills training

Proficiency in digital applications has become increasingly vital for participation in both the traditional and digital labour markets. Despite growing demand, a significant gap exists in terms of access to skills development opportunities for underserved groups such as displaced populations and host communities.

Many digital labour platforms and organizations are addressing this gap by offering a variety of training and upskilling programmes, ranging from basic digital literacy to more advanced skills, including coding, graphic design, animation and web development. Workers who have used Amazon MTurk indicated that the platform provides free training in areas such as search engine optimization (SEO), data entry, marketing, market development, web development and digital marketing,²⁶ as well as in the likes of preventing digital risk when working with clients on the platform. Other locally based organizations providing innovative training include Learning Lions in Kenya (Box 8).



²⁶ Male Somali Refugee, Kenya – Interview 009.

Box 8. Learning Lions

Founded in 2015, Learning Lions is an NGO based in Turkana county, northern Kenya, where traditional sources of income are extremely limited owing to infertile soil and poor infrastructure. As an alternative, Learning Lions helps equip its students with IT skills for them to access entrepreneurial or freelancing opportunities.

One significant milestone for Learning Lions was the recognition of its training by the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) authority in Kenya. Alumni can now receive a Kenyan TVET certificate via recognition of prior learning (RPL), giving them a formal education qualification that could increase their employability.

Skills training

The Learning Lions campus offers an all-inclusive experience for learners, as they live and study on-site. This gives each participant access to computers and the internet for the duration of their training. Alumni can also rent devices for a small fee, allowing them to work immediately, post-training.

Learning Lions' digital skills training comprises three levels, ranging from a digital literacy programme to an advanced track, which refines freelancing abilities. It also partners with companies to train talent pools for their specific needs. For instance, its collaboration with Cocomore, a German tech agency, focuses on training in PHP, Java and Drupal languages for front-end development roles in the company.

Empowering women and girls

In view of the low rates of school enrolment and participation of women and girls in training programmes, Learning Lions is collaborating with the Kenyan government to establish a girls' secondary school (ILO 2023g). The Learning Lions curriculum will be incorporated into regular classes and club programmes. Upon graduation, these girls will have completed the first two levels of Learning Lions' training. If they choose not to pursue higher education or vocational training, they can, instead, undergo specialized training to explore their interests in graphic design, system administration, or other fields.

Without intentional support, gender gaps in participation in the digital economy can widen. Certain groups, including women, may face unique constraints when it comes to investing in their skills development (ILO 2024). Platforms thus have great potential to provide tailored support to help women overcome barriers to entry.

Re:Coded (see Box 10 below) creates spaces for women in its programmes to connect and get specific advice on breaking into a career in tech, as well as finding support and community. It also offers gender-specific training and support by partnering with local organizations that provide mental health and psychosocial support and gender-based violence support – including case management – throughout training programmes.

4.4.3 Soft skills and language training

While technical skills remain crucial, the ability to communicate effectively, collaborate seamlessly and adapt to changing environments has become equally important. According to the World Economic Forum, soft skills are essential for thriving in the workplace of tomorrow. The lack of soft skills among refugees and host communities has been regarded as one of the most significant barriers to them working effectively in the global market.

Some platforms and organizations provide training specifically in essential soft skills, such as collaboration, innovation, critical thinking and time management. For example, social enterprise Na'amal, through its Work Readiness Programme, helps participants build skills and networks to

enhance their competitiveness in the digital labour market. The skills training component includes 16 modules that introduce learners to soft skills like innovation and entrepreneurial thinking, collaboration and communication, goal-setting, motivation and time management. Na'amal also facilitates work opportunities for its trained talent through partnerships with platforms such as Upwork, start-up impact sourcing platform EqualReach and crowd-work platform Appen.

4.4.4 Mentorship

Many agencies, local NGOs and local social enterprises provide one-on-one mentorship to offer tailored support (see examples in Boxes 9 and 10). Mentors can provide valuable insight, share industry knowledge and offer practical advice to help workers navigate the complexities of platform work and the digital economy more widely. For refugees, who may face unique challenges in accessing professional networks, mentorship programmes serve as invaluable sources of support and guidance.

Box 9. Gaza Sky Geeks

Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG) – the first co-working space, accelerator and code academy in the Gaza Strip – was launched in 2017 by a Mercy Corps initiative, with support from Google for start-ups.

GSG's Code Academy offers intensive tech-education training, professional skills development and job-readiness support for aspiring professional coders and developers. Notably, the participation rate in the Code Academy for women is 72 per cent, and there are more than 130 student alumni, with 65 per cent of graduates currently employed.

Mentorship for freelancers

The GSG's Freelance Academy is a three-month mentorship programme to support graduates of the Code Academy in pursuing a freelance career. It consists of sessions dedicated to various topics, such as building competitive online freelancing profiles, social media marketing and networking. In addition to the acquired training, participants benefit from GSG's partnership with Upwork. GSG aids students in setting up accounts on the platform and provides guidance on securing their first client and securely withdrawing payment. The Academy currently has 2,225 graduates, with 61 per cent female participation and 95 per cent securing at least one gig during the programme.



Box 10. Re:Coded

Re:Coded was launched in 2017 to help bridge the gap of underserved, displaced talent and female tech talent in the Middle East and North Africa lacking training and work opportunities. Since then, Re:Coded has trained thousands of people in its programmes across seven countries, including Iraq, Yemen and Türkiye.

Market-driven training and career support

Re:Coded offers immersive coding and design bootcamps, leading students from beginner to entry-level mastery. The goal is to help learners find work within six months of graduation by providing them with the skills, networks and career coaching to land their first job. An impressive 92 per cent of graduates secure employment within six months of graduation and the annual salaries of the graduates are three times higher than pre-programme. During bootcamps, industry mentors conduct workshops, mock technical and behavioural interviews, and CV and portfolio review. Re:Coded also actively matches graduates with hiring partners.

4.4.5 Apprenticeships

When seeking online work, relevant work experience is often stipulated as a prerequisite. However, this can be a problem for refugees and host community members. Some organizations have thus incorporated apprenticeship programmes to facilitate individuals in acquiring the essential work experience they need and provide a hands-on learning environment. For example, Humans in the Loop initiates pilot projects in collaboration with local partners who assist in reaching potential annotators. Through this approach, individuals participate in paid mock work projects before formally joining the team.

4.4.6 Partnerships for work opportunities

Another effective approach adopted by organizations to assist refugees and host communities is creating opportunities for relevant work experience after undergoing training through strategic partnerships. These collaborations often involve forging connections with potential employers or service providers.

For instance, Humans in the Loop (Box 3) and Learning Lions (Box 8) signed a partnership agreement that supports young people, including refugees, to access online freelancing and annotation work for businesses developing artificial intelligence technology in various sectors. This resulted from a successful pilot project by the ILO that brought together both partners and in which 40 of Learning Lions' trainees in the Turkana region and Kakuma Refugee Camp underwent upskilling for annotation and online work with Humans in the Loop.



5 The future of platform work for refugees and host communities

Online labour platforms have emerged as a new way of organizing work that is rapidly expanding across the world. The platform economy has the potential to connect refugees with the global economy, allowing them to make a living and to skill up. While the digital gig economy brings opportunities and provides flexibility, it also raises questions about adequate access to labour and social protections.

Numerous governments and actors in the platform ecosystem are actively working on approaches to govern the relationship between platforms and workers more clearly and to improve labour and social protections. For freelance platforms, it is possible that regulations could create new obligations to ensure compliance with labour law, especially around the classification of workers. Regulatory changes could have numerous effects beyond simply changing classification or working conditions, including increasing costs for platforms, decreasing take-home earnings for workers and affecting demand for platform work. They could even lead to the inadvertent exclusion of refugees, especially those facing legal restrictions on accessing formal employment, or on working in specific occupations and sectors. Economic conditions can further affect the profitability of platforms and their financial capacity to sustain an operational model that improves inclusion and working conditions, especially for refugees.



Regulatory and economic changes are further compounded by rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), that will shape the types of work that will be available in the future, as well as the skills needed to be competitive for that work. As AI grows in importance, its effects are most likely to affect low-skilled workers and increase the digital divide for refugee populations and other groups already facing vulnerability in the labour market. These workers may require greater levels of training and support to be competitive on the digital labour platforms of tomorrow.

Digital labour platforms have a role to play in the future of work for refugees and host communities. However, expanding good practices on these platforms is just one part of a broader effort to ensure decent and inclusive work for refugees and host community members – both online and offline. This must be accompanied by improvements in the legal and regulatory framework that allow refugees and host community members to participate in economic activity, as outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, as well as national-level improvements in labour law and regulations and their enforcement. This can help ensure that platform-mediated work is inclusive, viable and decent.



Annex 1. Online screening survey for organizations working with refugees

Introduction

The growth of digital labour platforms, which mediate either online or location-based work, matching supply and demand between groups of users (such as drivers and riders on a transport platform), is one of the most notable labour-market trends in recent years. Digital labour platforms are creating an important new avenue for jobs and livelihoods to reach marginalized places and people, including refugees. The characteristics of platform work can vary significantly, with some practices raising significant concerns about refugee inclusion and decent work, and others demonstrating high standards and good practices.

This research – commissioned by UNDP, ILO and UNHCR – seeks to identify and share examples of good practices from digital labour platforms that have an inclusive approach to refugees and host communities and incorporate decent work principles into their practices. The research aims to show the effects of these practices on both the digital platforms and the users working through these platforms. The goal is to help promote decent and inclusive policies and practices for engagement of refugees and host community members.

The following survey seeks to identify good practices of digital labour platforms, but we would also be happy to learn about interesting good practices from other types of platforms (such as e-commerce platforms). Good practices may be present in a range of areas, and we encourage respondents to share any practices they are aware of and that they feel are relevant. These could focus on refugees and host community inclusion – for example, practices that:

promote easy access and inclusion for a diverse range of refugees, other displaced persons and host community groups, such as women, youth (of legal age to work) and persons with disabilities;

specifically target or incentivize recruitment and opportunities for refugees, other displaced persons and host community members;

provide refugees, other displaced persons and host communities with targeted coaching, mentoring and skills development, such as communicating in English and soft digital skills;

ensure non-discrimination (based on country of origin, documentation, etc.) in all aspects of recruitment, onboarding and ongoing work;

provide platform staff, employers and users with basic knowledge of refugee protection and awareness of sensitivity and flexibility regarding displacement-related differences.

They could also focus on decent work practices, including but not limited to:

- ▶ **worker classification;**
- ▶ **remuneration (inclusive of earnings, benefits and social protection contributions), including its levels, accessibility, modes, frequency and gender equity;**
- ▶ **access to or provision of social protection;**
- ▶ **work health, safety and security;**
- ▶ **online safety, including preventing and mitigating digital risk and cyber crime, and addressing misinformation, disinformation and hate speech;**
- ▶ **formalization;**
- ▶ **dispute resolution, including worker feedback mechanisms;**
- ▶ **social dialogue and engagement with worker associations;**
- ▶ **prevention of forced and child labour and gender-based violence;**
- ▶ **training, skills development and recognition of certifications or prior learning.**

Thank you very much for sharing your time and insight.



1. Introduction

1.1. Name

1.2. Email

1.3. Job title

1.4. Organization of respondent

1.5. What work does your organization do with refugees, other displaced persons and host communities?

1.6. In your view, do many refugees and host community members work on digital platforms?

1.6.1. If yes, why do you think that is?

1.6.2. If not, why not?

1.7. What are the common platforms used by refugee communities (including those focused on goods, services and labour)?

1.7.1. How are these platforms accessed?

1.7.2. Does this differ between different subgroups of the refugee community, such as youth, women, elderly persons, LGBTIQ+, or persons with disabilities? If so, why?

1.7.3. Are there specific platforms used only by the refugee community, or do they use the same platforms as host communities?

2. Good practices on digital labour platforms

2.1. Are you familiar with any good practices by digital labour platforms or other platforms, specifically in terms of including refugees, helping them improve their livelihoods, or providing them with decent work?

2.1.1. Yes: CONTINUE SURVEY BELOW

2.1.2. No: Do you know of anyone who may be familiar with good practices?

2.1.2.1. Yes: Can you please share their name and contact details?

2.1.2.1.1. Name: _____

2.1.2.1.2. Contact details: _____

2.1.2.1.3. Would you like to add another person?

2.1.2.1.4. After completing, continue to Part 5 – Overview of good practice in the legal and regulatory framework.

2.1.2.2. No: Continue to Part 5 – Overview of good practice in the legal and regulatory framework.

2.2. What is the good practice?

2.3. Which platform is implementing this good practice?

2.4. Which of the following best describes why you think that this is a good practice?

2.4.1. It is informed or inspired by international labour standards.

2.4.2. It enhances refugee inclusion or self-reliance.

2.4.3. It has been developed through dialogue and consultation processes.

2.4.4. It is better than practices of other platforms in the same context.

2.4.5. It aligns with a voluntary code of conduct or self-imposed standard.

2.4.6. Another reason: _____

2.5. To the best of your knowledge, does this practice comply with national law?

2.6. Are you directly involved with the platform that is implementing the good practice, with beneficiaries of the good practice, or do you otherwise have significant knowledge of the good practice?

2.6.1. If yes, are you willing to answer a few questions about the good practice by either:

2.6.1.1. completing a more detailed survey

2.6.1.1.1. (IF YES, THE SURVEY WILL CONTINUE TO PART 3, BELOW.)

2.6.1.2. or having a brief discussion about the good practice?

2.6.1.2.1. (IF YES, TAKE THE RESPONDENT TO QUESTION 4.1, WHERE THEY CAN INDICATE AVAILABILITY)

2.6.2. If no, can you recommend someone working with the platform, the beneficiaries, or who otherwise has significant knowledge of the good practice and who can share more details about the good practice and its benefits?

2.6.2.1. Name: _____

2.6.2.2. Contact details: _____

2.6.2.3. After completing, continue to QUESTION 4.2 (about additional examples of good practice).

3. Detailed questions on good practice

3.1. Overview of the good practice

3.1.1. Why did the good practice come about?

3.1.2. What challenges were faced in the implementation of this good practice?

3.1.3. What changes were made to improve the practice, in response to challenges faced or lessons learned?

3.2. Good practice and inclusion

3.2.1. In your view, how does this good practice show a commitment towards including refugees, other displaced persons and host community members?

3.2.2. Which aspects of inclusion are evident in this good practice? (select all that apply)

3.2.2.1. Promotes easy access and inclusion for a diverse range of refugees, other displaced persons and host community groups, such as women, youth (of legal age to work), and persons with disabilities.

3.2.2.2. Specifically targets or incentivizes recruitment and opportunities for refugees, other displaced persons and host community members.

3.2.2.3. Ensures non-discrimination (based on country of origin, documentation, etc.) in all aspects of recruitment, onboarding and ongoing work.

3.2.2.4. Provides refugees, other displaced persons and host communities with targeted coaching, mentoring, and skills development, such as communicating in English and soft digital skills.

3.2.2.5. Provides platform staff, employers and users with basic knowledge of refugee protection and awareness of sensitivity and flexibility regarding displacement-related differences.

3.2.2.6. Includes refugees, other displaced persons and host communities in the development of the good practice.

3.2.3. FOR ALL BOXES CHECKED, ASK THE FOLLOWING:

3.2.3.1. Please describe the specific aspects of the good practice that support or ensure inclusion.

3.3. Good practice and decent work

3.3.1. In your view, how does this good practice show a commitment to supporting decent work?

3.3.2. Which aspect or aspects of decent work are evident in this good practice? The platform... (select all that apply):

3.3.2.1. Correctly classifies workers as either employees or independent contractors.

3.3.2.2. Provides fair remuneration.

3.3.2.3. Ensures payments are easily accessible.

3.3.2.4. Provides benefits or social protection contributions.

3.3.2.5. Provides remuneration in a way or with a timing that is fair.

3.3.2.6. Ensures gender pay equity.

3.3.2.7. Helps workers access or directly pays for social protection.

3.3.2.8. Provides for worker health, safety and security.

3.3.2.9. Prioritizes online safety, including preventing and mitigating digital risk and cyber crime.

3.3.2.10. Addresses misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.

3.3.2.11. Contributes to formalization of workers.

3.3.2.12. Has a dispute resolution or worker feedback mechanisms.

3.3.2.13. Engages in social dialogue and with worker associations.

3.3.2.14. Takes steps to prevent forced and child labour.

3.3.2.15. Takes steps to prevent gender-based violence.

3.3.2.16. Engages in training and skills development for workers or recognizes skills certifications or prior learning.

3.3.3. FOR ALL BOXES CHECKED, ASK THE FOLLOWING:

3.3.3.1. Please describe the specific aspects of the good practice that support or ensure decent work.

3.4. Good practice – benefits and notable features

3.4.1. What mechanisms does the platform have in place to ensure transparency and accountability of its operations?

- 3.4.2. How did the platform benefit from this good practice, both financially and otherwise?
- 3.4.3. How do refugees and host communities benefit from this good practice?
- 3.4.4. Does this good practice have any innovative features that can be replicated elsewhere?
- 3.4.5. What other contexts and platforms are best suited to implement this good practice (e.g. areas without a socially oriented competitor)?
- 3.4.6. Can you recommend one or more contacts at the business/organization implementing the good practice, or one or more contacts of beneficiaries, who could help us learn more about this practice?
 - 3.4.6.1. Yes: Can you please share their name and contact details?
 - 3.4.6.1.1. Name: _____
 - 3.4.6.1.2. Contact details: _____
 - 3.4.6.2. No: Continue to 4.2.

4. Availability for further discussion and additional examples of good practice

4.1. Thank you for agreeing to have a discussion about this good practice. A member of our research team will contact you shortly via email to fix a time for the call. Could you please indicate your contact details and preferred contact times below:

- 4.1.1. Email address: _____
- 4.1.2. Preferred times for the call (please include time zone): _____

4.2. Are you familiar with any additional examples of good practice?

- 4.2.1. Yes (REPEAT THE SURVEY FROM QUESTION 2.2)
- 4.2.2. No (SKIP TO PART 5)

5. Overview of good practice in the legal and regulatory framework

Digital labour platforms are relatively new, and the legal and regulatory framework that governs them varies considerably between countries. Some countries have been active in developing the legal and regulatory framework, either through new laws and regulations or by applying existing laws and regulations to cover digital labour platforms appropriately.

5.1. Are you familiar with any good practices regarding the legal and regulatory framework for digital labour platforms, specifically in terms of refugee inclusion, livelihoods, or decent work?

- 5.1.1. Yes: CONTINUE SURVEY BELOW
- 5.1.2. No: Do you know of anyone who may be familiar with such good practices?
 - 5.1.2.1. Yes: Can you please share their name and contact details?
 - 5.1.2.1.1. Name: _____
 - 5.1.2.1.2. Contact details: _____
 - 5.1.2.1.3. Add another person.
 - 5.1.2.1.4. After completing this: "Thank you for your time" (END SURVEY)
- 5.1.2.2. No: "Thank you for your time" (END SURVEY)

5.2. What is the good practice?

5.3. Which of the following best describes why you think this is a good practice?

- 5.3.1. It is informed or inspired by international labour standards.
- 5.3.2. It enhances refugee inclusion or self-reliance.
- 5.3.3. It has been developed through dialogue and consultation processes.
- 5.3.4. It is better than practices of other platforms in the same context.
- 5.3.5. It aligns with a voluntary code of conduct or self-imposed standard.
- 5.3.6. Another reason: _____

5.4. Are you directly involved with the development or implementation of this good practice in the legal and regulatory framework, or with beneficiaries of the good practice, or do you otherwise have significant knowledge of the good practice?

- 5.4.1. If yes, are you willing to answer a few questions about the good practice by either:
 - 5.4.1.1. completing a more detailed survey
 - 5.4.1.1.1. (IF THIS BOX IS SELECTED, CONTINUE TO 6.1)
 - 5.4.1.2. or having a brief discussion about the good practice?
 - 5.4.1.2.1. (IF THIS BOX IS SELECTED): Could you please indicate your contact details and preferred contact times below:
 - 5.4.1.2.2. Email address: _____

5.4.1.2.3. Preferred times for the call (please include time zone): _____
(SKIP TO SECTION 7)

5.4.2. If no, can you recommend someone working with the platform, the beneficiaries, or who otherwise has significant knowledge of the good practice and who can share more details about the good practice and its benefits?

5.4.2.1. Name: _____

5.4.2.2. Contact details: _____ (SKIP TO SECTION 7)

6. Detailed questions on good practice in the legal and regulatory framework

6.1. Overview of the good practice

6.1.1. Why did the good practice come about?

6.1.2. What challenges were faced in the development or implementation of this good practice?

6.1.3. How has the good practice changed over time, in response to challenges faced or lessons learned?

6.2. Good practice and inclusion

6.2.1. In your view, how does this good practice show a commitment towards including refugees, other displaced persons and host community members?

6.2.2. Which aspects of inclusion are evident in this good practice? (select all that apply)

6.2.2.1. Promotes easy access and inclusion for a diverse range of refugees, other displaced persons and host community groups, such as women, youth (of legal age to work) and persons with disabilities.

6.2.2.2. Specifically targets or incentivizes recruitment and opportunities for refugees, other displaced persons and host community members.

6.2.2.3. Ensures non-discrimination (based on country of origin, documentation, etc.) in all aspects of recruitment, onboarding and ongoing work.

6.2.2.4. Provides refugees, other displaced persons and host communities with targeted coaching, mentoring, and skills development, such as communicating in English and soft digital skills.

6.2.2.5. Provides platform staff, employers and users with basic knowledge of refugee protection and awareness of sensitivity and flexibility regarding displacement-related differences.

6.2.2.6. Includes refugees, other displaced persons and host communities in the development of the good practice.

6.2.3. FOR ALL BOXES CHECKED, ASK THE FOLLOWING:

6.2.3.1. Please describe the specific aspects of the good practice that support or ensure inclusion.

6.3. Good practice and decent work

6.3.1. In your view, how does this good practice show a commitment to supporting decent work?

6.3.2. Which aspect or aspects of decent work are evident in this good practice? The platform... (select all that apply):

6.3.2.1. Correctly classifies workers as either employees or independent contractors.

6.3.2.2. Provides fair remuneration.

6.3.2.3. Ensures payments are easily accessible.

6.3.2.4. Provides benefits or social protection contributions.

6.3.2.5. Provides remuneration in a way or with a timing that is fair.

6.3.2.6. Ensures gender pay equity.

6.3.2.7. Helps workers access or directly pays for social protection.

6.3.2.8. Provides for worker health, safety and security.

6.3.2.9. Prioritizes online safety, including preventing and mitigating digital risk and cyber crime.

6.3.2.10. Addresses misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.

6.3.2.11. Contributes to formalization of workers.

6.3.2.12. Has a dispute resolution or worker feedback mechanisms.

6.3.2.13. Engages in social dialogue and with worker associations.

6.3.2.14. Takes steps to prevent forced and child labour.

6.3.2.15. Takes steps to prevent gender-based violence.

6.3.2.16. Engages in training and skills development for workers or recognizes skills certifications or prior learning.

6.3.3. FOR ALL BOXES CHECKED, ASK THE FOLLOWING:

6.3.3.1. Please describe the specific aspects of the good practice that support or ensure decent work.

6.4. Good practice – benefits and notable features

6.4.1. What mechanisms does the platform have in place to ensure transparency and accountability of its operations?

6.4.2. How did the platform benefit from this good practice, both financially and otherwise?

6.4.3. How do refugees and host communities benefit from this good practice?

6.4.4. Does this good practice have any innovative features that can be replicated elsewhere?

6.4.5. What other contexts and platforms are best suited to implement this good practice (e.g. areas without a socially oriented competitor)?

6.4.6. Can you recommend one or more contacts at the business/organization implementing the good practice, or one or more contacts of beneficiaries, who could help us learn more about this practice?

6.4.6.1. Yes: Can you please share their name and contact details?

6.4.6.1.1. Name: _____

6.4.6.1.2. Contact details: _____

6.4.6.2. No: Continue to SECTION 7

7. Consent

7.1. Do you give your consent for the UNDP, ILO and UNHCR to use some or all of the information that you have shared about this good practice in our public Repository of Good Practice?

7.1.1. Yes

7.1.2. No

7.1.3. If yes, what is your preference regarding the information that we publicly disclose and the information that we keep private? (Note: if you request that we keep information private, we will use generic non-identifying language such as “a worker from Kenya”, “a transport platform”, etc.):

	Yes, this information can be made public	No, this information should not be made public
My full name		
The organization for which I am working		
The country where I am presently working		

7.1.4. What is your preference regarding the use of direct quotes from our interview in the public Repository of Good Practice?

Yes, you can quote me directly	
Please share the quotation with me for my review before using it in a publication	
No, please do not quote me directly	

7.1.5. Thank you for your time. (END SURVEY)

Annex 2. Refugee perspectives from workshops

Project overview

The Repository of Good Practices implemented by digital labour platform operators and intermediaries towards ensuring decent and inclusive engagement of refugees and host communities in digitally enabled work aims to document good work practices by digital labour platforms, employers using digital labour platforms and governments that shape the legal and regulatory environment. It focuses on practices related to refugees and host communities, especially in the areas of refugee inclusion and decent work. These include such areas as rights at work, decent recruitment and wages, non-discrimination, gender balance and other international labour standards. While we hope to document good practices that benefit all workers, we are especially interested in examples that benefit certain groups, such as women, youth (of legal working age), elderly persons and persons with disabilities. The repository will be publicly available and the information will be widely shared, with the goal of facilitating other platforms to adopt similar practices and promoting evidence-based policy-making. Through this, we hope to ensure decent working standards on digital labour platforms for digital refugee workers.

Follow-up questions

If and when examples of engagement with digital labour platforms occur organically during workshops and the opportunity arises for further discussion, it may be useful to have questions to inform this dialogue. These questions are not meant to be implemented as a questionnaire. Instead, they can be drawn from to inform dialogue either during the initial workshop or a follow-up conversation (perhaps a one-on-one discussion), as the workshop team decides is appropriate. A consent form is included, which can be used to obtain consent and gather contact details for a follow-up discussion. Questions include:

Do you currently work, have you previously worked, or have you tried to find work through a digital labour platform?

- ▶ What kind of work are/were you engaged in or seeking?
- ▶ On which platform(s) do/did you work or seek work?
- ▶ How much do/did you work for the platform? (e.g. full-time, part-time, number of hours, etc.)
- ▶ Was it your primary work and source of income?

Why did you choose to find work on a digital labour platform?

- ▶ Why did you choose this specific digital labour platform to find work? (*We do not want to lead respondents but are curious if this is solely owing to income potential, or if good practices regarding working conditions or access also play a role.*)

If you tried to find work on a digital labour platform but were unsuccessful, why do you think that was?

What are some of the biggest advantages and disadvantages of working through a digital platform?

Do you feel like the digital platform, or the employer that hired you through a digital platform, treats you fairly with regard to:

- ▶ your pay?
- ▶ your working conditions?
- ▶ other aspects of your relationship with the platform?

Have you noticed any measures in the digital labour platform that make it easier for refugees – especially certain groups, such as women, youth (of legal working age), elderly persons and persons with disabilities – to find work? If so, please describe them.

Does the platform you use do any of the following? If so, please tell us more.

- ▶ The platform is very easy to access and use.
- ▶ The platform helps me develop my skills.
- ▶ The platform has clear policies about work.
- ▶ The platform follows the policies it has about work.
- ▶ The platform takes steps to ensure my safety at work.

Do you think that any of the practices of the platform you use are “good practices”? *(Note: we do not want to lead respondents by defining good practice. Instead, leave it open and see what responses we get.)*

Would you recommend this platform to others? If so, why? If not, why not?

What recommendations do you have for the platform to improve practices and help address the challenges and disadvantages you have encountered in the past?

Annex 3. Number and type of interviews and surveys completed

Survey	Women respondents	Men respondents
Digital labour platforms	3	0
Social enterprise/business	3	1
Non-governmental organization	4	2
Trade union/employer organization	0	1
UN agency	0	2
	10	6

Key informant interviews	Women respondents	Men respondents
Digital platforms and social enterprises	5	3
Non-governmental organization	1	1
Trade union/employer organization	0	1
UN agency	4	5
Platform workers from forcibly displaced and host communities	0	9
	10	19

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