The What and How of Measuring Digital Platform Work

Anne E. Polivka*

Bureau of Labor Statistics

I. Introduction

The widespread availability of high-speed internet starting in the early 1990's and the introduction of the iPhone in 2007 have brought sweeping changes in how US commerce is conducted and US labor markets function.[1] With the advent in 1995 of both Craigslist and eBay the selling of goods, particularly used items, has become more efficient and geographically dispersed. Although services to match people have existed as far back as 1100 BC marriage markets during China's Shang dynasty, the use of smart phone apps and websites have created an unprecedent means of rapidly matching people across a diverse range of work and personal activities.

It is widely recognized that in 2005 Amazon Mechanical Turk ushered in digitally-mediated work arrangements by allowing the outsourcing of small, often repetitive tasks to a large pool of workers. The provision of in-person digitally mediated personal services started in 2008 during the Great Recession when Taskrabbit was established as an on-line marketplace to match freelance labor with people looking to hire help for small tasks such as furniture assembly, picture hanging or moving assistance. Fivver in late 2013 and early 2014 established an online two-sided market for customers to purchase and freelancers to sell a variety of digital services including writing, translation, graphic design, video editing, and computer programming services.

Digitally-mediated work arrangements entered the personal transportation industry in 2010 and 2011. In 2010 Uber launched a publicly available mobile app in San Fransico to hail black luxury cars. The first ride-sharing website using regular drivers and cars was established by Wingz in 2011 and Sidecar was established in 2011 as a "vehicle for hire" company.

Despite the fact that the use of websites to arrange for the ordering and delivery of food started in the 1990's with Pizza Hut (1994), followed by World Wide Waiter (1995) and Seamless (1999), wide scale digitally mediated work arrangements in the food delivery sector did not start until the

* The views and opinions in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The author is grateful for extensive discussions with Megan Dunn, feedback from Susan Houseman and enlightening conversations with Gailya Paliga, Anne Bierce and numerous ride-share drivers.

[1] Under the auspices of the Department of Defenses' Advance Research Project Agency (ARPA) an interconnected computer network for communications - ARPAnet - was developed in the early 1970's.. However, widespread use of linked computer networks and thus the advent of the internet did not occur until the 1990's with the development of the World Wide Web by British computer scientist Tim Berners-Less in late 1989 and the roll out of fiber optic cables in the mid-1990's.

mid 2010's with Instacart, SkiptheDish, TapinGo and Foodpanda starting in 2012, Dilveroo, and Doordash starting in 2013 and Grubhub and UberEats starting in 2014.

Although there are conceptual questions about whether online content creation and online content marketing represent an intermediated work relationship, there is no question that these online activities have definitively altered the employment and marketing landscape.[2] Both online content creation[3] and online content marketing[4] started showing up in the economy in a notable way in the mid-1990s.

Specifically, online content marketing is delineated as having started in 1993 when Tim O'Reilly with O'Reilly and Associates launched the first commercial website.[5] Online content creation started in 1994 when Justin Hall published what is considered the first blog; writing what at the time was dubbed an online "journal" about art he enjoyed or had created. In 1996, journalist John F. Oppedahl coined the term "content marketing".[6] The launch of the website Blogger in 1999 made blogging mainstream and increased its use for professional content and personal expression. Googles launch to the public in 1998, the founding of Myspace in 2003, and the advent of iPhones in 2007 further accelerated online content creation and content marketing by increasing creators' and marketers' accessibility to a wider audience. Over the years content creation has expanded to include social media, video, podcasts, and interactive content across numerous platforms leading to unprecedented volume and wide accessibility of content. At the same time, during this expansion, there has been a shift from user controlling their own platforms (websites, blogs) to users leveraging platforms owned by others (social media, video sites). This

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[2] Given the high probability that many content creators will earn little or no revenue from their postings (Made, 2023), for theses creators the question also arises as to whether content creation constitutes employment at all. This determination is further complicated by the fact that many people publish digital material simply as an act of self-expression, a hobby, to create a niche community, or to advocate for a social cause with no expectation of financial reward. The gray area can be particularly large for those who initially posted without the intent of receiving financial compensation but subsequently build a large following that attracts inquiries from corporate sponsors or requests from platforms to monetize their content behind pay walls.

[3] Online content creation is defined as the process of making and publishing content online in various formats such as online text, images, videos and audio files online

[4] Online content marketing is defined as a strategic marketing approach to engage a target audience by creating and distributing online content including videos, blogs, e-books, podcasts, infographics and social media posts that do not explicitly promote a product but instead indirectly generate interest in a product by solving a problem or entertaining viewers.

[5]In May 1993 Time O'Reilly launched the *Global Network Navigator* which was the first web portal and first truly commercia website. According to a statement from O'Reilly at the time, the Navigator also contained the first online clickable advertising. HistoryofInformation.com .

[6] John F. Oppedahl coined the term in 1996 during a roundtable discussion he was leading at the American Society for Newspapers Editors conference. (from Wikipedia 9-13-2025).

shift has offered content creators and marketers broader reach, but less control over the distribution of their content and their revenue streams.

These digitally mediated types of employment—where there is a worker, a customer, and some sort of app or website mediating (3 party relationships)—are often referred to as digital platform employment (DPE) and the apps or websites that facilitate the intermediation are typically referred to as digital labor platforms.[7] Workers involved in this type of employment have been referred to alternately as DPE workers, digital platform workers (DPWs) or simply platform workers.[8]

Although estimates differ there is no question that since the introduction of digital mediation into labor markets, the number of platforms engaged in digital platform employment has skyrocketed. The International Labor Organization (ILO) in the 2021 World Employment and Social Outlook Report estimated that globally the number of digital labor platforms increased fivefold in the second decade of the 2000s; with the number of platforms that mediate work performed online (location free) and those that mediate work performed in-person (location based) combined increasing from 142 in 2010 to over 777 in 2020. Splitting out platforms mediating online work, the ILO estimates that the number of online labor platforms tripled between 2010 and 2020 reaching 283 in 2020.

Using web searches, a literature review, and individual platforms' search functionalities Kässi, Lehdonvirta, and Stephany (2021) of the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), estimated there were 351 online digital labor platforms at the end of 2020 globally. Using a broader definition of web-based online platforms than other studies[9] and a data science methodology based on website traffic to supplement existing data bases, the World Bank (Datta et al, 2023) estimated that there were 545

[7] As will be shown in the discussion below, when defining digital platform employment and digital platform workers, having a definition of a digital platform is essential. The OECD-ILO-Eurostat Handbook on Digital Platform Work and Employment (OECD-ILO-Eurostat, 2023), identifies three key elements in defining what constitutes a digital platform, 1) the digital platform functions as a digital interface designed to generate economic and social value. 2) it acts as an intermediary between three distinct agents (the worker, the customer and the digital interface that is owned and control by an economic unit external to the worker) and 3) the services and tools provided are under the platforms own control. This control enables the platform to exercise a degree of control over the work linked to the platform (OECD-ILO-Eurostat, 2023, p. 41.) Within the context of this definition, a digital platform is identified by its provision of a digital interface that serves as a central hub where users can interact, access services, and share information without needing direct human mediation or a physical marketplace. The platform organizes and enables transactions between workers and customers of goods or services the platform does not own. The digital interface can be viewed as being designed to manage and optimize the flow of information, data, services, and goods between different external users.

[8] Although international standards classify those involved in volunteer work and own use production work as workers, throughout this paper, the term workers will be confined to those who are employed for monetary compensation or are unpaid family workers working 15 hours or more per week.

[9] For example, the ILO study restricted their estimates to platforms that algorithmically matched workers.

online digital platforms globally in 2022, with headquarters in 63 countries and platform workers and clients located in 186 countries.

The rapid growth of digital employment platforms and correspondingly digital platform workers has garnered a great deal of attention from the media, policy makers, and the general public. Despite this interest, what constitutes a digital platform worker has been ill-defined and ambiguous. This lack of clarity has led to non-transparent, inconsistent and widely varying estimates of the number of digital platform workers. In turn, this has made it difficult to obtain a firm and justifiable estimate of the number of digital platform workers and their characteristics. It also has made it difficult to compare estimates across regions, countries and various other domains.

The purpose of this paper is to lay out factors that should be considered when developing a conceptual definition of digital platform employment and implementing an empirical measure of digital platform workers. These factors will be presented in the form of seven questions that those developing a conceptual definition and empirical measure should answer when thinking about digital platform employment and platform workers and the issues associated with them.

The first two questions concern the location and type of work developers may want to include when defining digital platform workers. The next three questions consider the key aspect of platform control over workers and the amount of control a platform must exhibit over workers for people to be described as digital platform workers. The subsequent question concerns the characteristics of customers and how these characteristics can influence whether an individual should be considered a digital platform worker. The final question considers the amount of platform work a person needs to engage in to be classified as a platform worker.

The presentation of these questions will include a discussion of how answers to these questions will affect the size of the digital platform workforce and the ability to address issues concerning platform workers. This discussion will highlight how researchers and analysts with different perspectives and needs may want to craft their definition differently.

Prior to the discussion of these 7 specific questions, some broad general conceptual definitions that have been circulating will be presented. These general conceptual definitions will help provide context for the specific questions that follow.

After presenting these questions, the next section will discuss the conceptual decisions several National Statistical offices have consciously or unconsciously made in their attempts to measure digital platform workers using the questions as a framework. The paper will conclude with a discussion of whether a common (international) definition of digital platform workers is desirable or even warranted and achievable.

II. What to Measure: Conceptual Definition of Digital Platform Employment

A. General Conceptualization and Scope

The first task to undertake when conceptualizing digital platform employment is to have a general idea of what should be measured. Although there is no agreed upon definition, several organizations have broad conceptual definitions of digital platform employment. For example, the ILO in the ICSE -18 (International Classification of Status of Employment established in 2018) describes digital platform employment using the following language

> Digital platform employment includes workers carrying out work through, or on, digital platforms (ICSE-18)

The OECD Handbook on Measuring Digital Platform (OECD 2020) defines digital platform employment as

> *- any productive activity performed by persons to produce goods or provide services carried out through or on a digital platform*

The OECD Handbook also includes the qualifying description that

> *-Digital platform employment, is work performed for others on or through digital platforms with the intention to generate pay or profit*

The Handbook also notes that the digital platform or a phone app controls and/or organizes essential aspects of the activities[10]

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) using the term Electronically Mediated Employment[11] defined digital platform employment as[12]

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[10] The OECD Handbook in a more extensive discussion later in the Handbook includes the language that *the digital platform or a phone app controls and/or organizes essential aspects of the activities, such as the access to clients, the evaluation of the activities carried out, the tools needed for conducting the work, the facilitation of payments, distribution and prioritization of the work to be conducted; and the work is for at least one hour in the reference period. The 2024 UN Handbook On Measuring Digital Platform Employment and Work also includes these additional aspects in its definition.*

[11] In 2017 when BLS was starting to measure and describe digital platform employment, there was no commonly used term. BLS staff adopted the term electronically mediated employment (EME) because they thought this best described the type of work activity being engaged in. BLS has subsequently replaced the term Electronically Mediated Employment with Digital Platform Employment (DPE) and describes workers engaged in Digital Platform Employment (DPE) as Digital Platform Workers (DPW).

[12] In a more extensive discussion in the Monthly Labor Review article about Electronically Mediated Employment (CPS Staff, 2018), BLS noted that in this type of employment arrangement, workers use a company's website or mobile app to connect to clients or customers to obtain short jobs, projects, or tasks; are paid by or through the company that owns the website or mobile app; choose when and whether to work; and may do these short jobs, projects, or tasks in person or online.

> *short jobs or tasks that workers find through websites or mobile apps that both connect them with customers and arrange payment for the tasks. (Current Population Survey Staff, 2018)*

As can be seen from these definitions, there is general agreement at a high level on what constitutes digital platform employment. It is work for pay or profit where an app or website (a digital platform) plays an integral role in connecting workers to customers. This high-level definition highlights that digital intermediation of platforms is key in defining digital platform employment and emphasizes the multiparty nature of digital platform employment. Both of these characteristics distinguish platform workers from others types of workers and places digital platform employment into a unique sector of the broader economy.

In addition to agreement on a high-level definition, there also implicitly is general agreement that digital platform employment is a subset of the digital economy. Where, for clarification, the digital economy is defined using the OECD definition as:

> All economic activity reliant on, or significantly enhanced by the use of digital inputs, including digital technologies, digital infrastructure, digital services and data. It refers to all producers and consumers, including government, that are utilizing these digital inputs in their economic activities

Not all parts of the digital economy and not all digital activity should be classified as digital platform employment. This restriction means there are a broad range of activities that should be excluded from a definition of digital platform employment. For example, work where digital technology such as word processing or video conferencing is used as part of a person's job, work using internal company software such as scheduling or internal customer assignment software, work where financial transactions on behalf of an employer are mediated through platforms, and work using supply chain and production control software all should be excluded from being classified as digital platform employment. In these instances, the digital technology is just a tool of the business/employer and is a function of decisions the business has made about how to operate and organize work. The workers using these tools are employees of the businesses that have adopted the digital technology. Businesses decisions about which tools to use are within the employers' authority and workers use of them is inherent in the employer-employee relationship. These tools and the associated changes they introduce to the workplace are functions of the digitization of work rather than being digital platform employment.

Even within digital technologies that connect workers with potential customers or employers in a tri-party relationship, the high-level definitions outlined above seem to exclude several types of activities from being considered digital platform employment. For example, electronic job searches for permanent jobs on online job boards (such as Indeed or Monster.com) or the posting of resumes and other information about oneself on social media platforms (such as LinkedIn) would be excluded.

To be counted as digital employment, the activity also has to be done for pay or profit; excluding activities such as participation in unpaid online contests or tournaments and volunteer activities conducted online as being counted as digital platform employment. Participation in online contests or hackathons with the intent of gaining professional experience, contributing to crowdsource design competitions or engaging in simulated business projects while they may enhance a person's work skills, do not fall under the rubric of employment because no work is done for pay or profit. Similarly, volunteer activities for private organizations or governments (such as editing online publications, crowdsourcing traffic monitoring, assisting in the digitalization of historical documents or crowdsourcing planetary science activities) while productive and contributing social value should not be considered digital platform employment.[13]

Despite this general agreement on a high-level definition, there still are several factors that need to be considered when developing a more specific and refined conceptual definition of digital platform employment and digital platform workers. The next section presents 7 factors in the form of questions that will help with this conceptualization.

As will be shown, many of the answers to these questions depend on whether one wants to construct a definition of digital platform employment and platform workers that encompasses a broad digital marketplace or whether one wants a narrower definition that concentrates on the employer/customer-worker relationship. The answer to these questions also will depend on why digital platform workers are being measured and how the measure will be used.

B. Factors to Consider in Defining Digital Platform Employment and Digital Platform Workers

Question 1: Does the mode/location of work matter?

The first question to answer when developing a conceptual definition of digital platform employment and platform workers is if it matters where and how the work is done.

As illustrated in the introduction, digital platform work can occur either completely online or it can be done in person, offline. For example, online platform workers can engage in short term tasks such as tagging pictures or translating documents, work as freelancer software developers, or train and evaluate AI models. They also can provide remote personal services such as online tutoring or coaching.

In contrast, for other tasks, while the work is arranged through a digital platform, the work itself is actually performed offline, in person—often at the customer's location. For example, workers

[13] An example of crowdsourcing planetary activities by the US Federal government occurred in 2013 when the NASA teamed up with the asteroid mining company Planetary Resources to hunt for near-earth objects. Fazekas, Andrew (20 June 2013)

can use an app or a website to arrange to provide personal care for people in their homes, pick up and deliver restaurant or groceries orders, or drive people in the workers' personal cars.

Whether work is done online or offline, in-person sometimes is referred to as the mode of work. Alternatively, it sometimes is referred to as the location of work.

When answering the question about whether the location of work matters some may want to include digital platform work regardless of where it is conducted and thus not make a distinction between online and in-person work. Others may want to include both modes of work but make a distinction between online and in-person work. Still others may want to focus only on online work or only on in-person work.

How people choose to define digital platform work along the mode/location dimension can be influenced by why and what they are trying to study. For instance, because workers' classification as employees versus self-employed, independent contractors can depend on local laws and legal "carve outs", those interested in studying workers' classification status and its effects may want to concentrate on in-person workers or at a minimum make a distinction between in-person work and online work. Those interested in studying the interaction between spatial and geographic dynamics and platform work would want to restrict their analysis to in-person platform workers. Research and policy analysis centered on physical safety regulations, and the effect of environmental factors on platform workers also would lend itself to a definition restricted to in-person-work. Finally, people interested in the effect of digital platform work on local labor markets may want to restrict their definition and measurement of platform workers to just in-person work or make a distinction between the effects of in-person workers and online workers

In contrast, people interested in international competition between workers and its effect on wages and employment might want to concentrate on online platform workers. Those interested in the effect of digital platform employment on the economies of developing countries may want to have a similar focus or at least make a distinction between online and in person platform work.

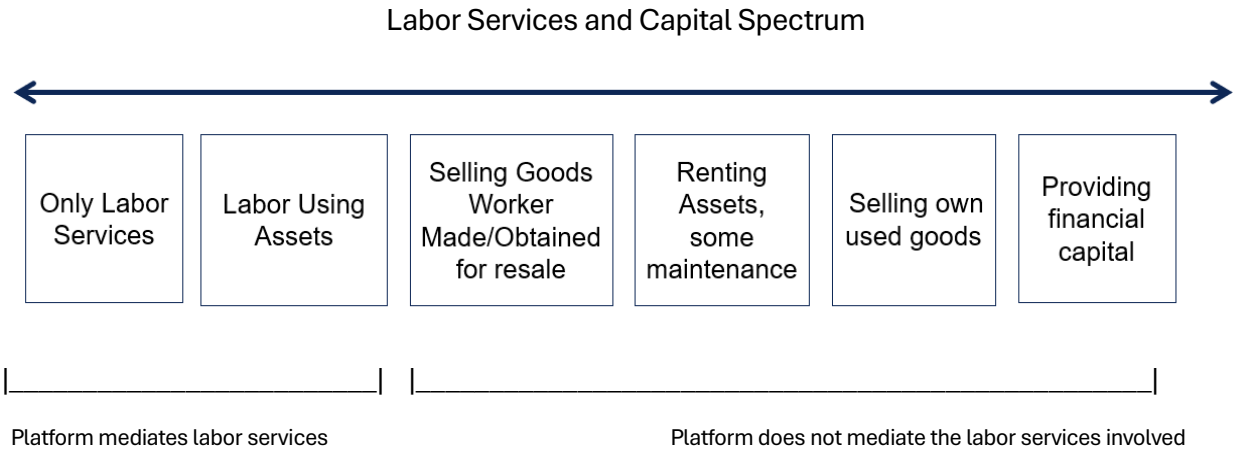
Given the complex issues surrounding people working online for companies and customers based abroad, people interested in these issues may want an even narrower definition of platform workers- specifically individuals providing an online service through a digital platform where the worker resides in a different country than the platform company or the customer. Using this definition, those interested in the application of international law could concentrate on workers for whom it might be difficult to determine the country of employment or what the applicable tax regulations are.

On the other hand, those interested in obtaining a comprehensive measure and who are only interested in the number of digital platform workers may want to include both online and in person platform work without making a distinction based on where the work is done.

Question 2. How much labor is there in the activity and how much of it is mediated by the platform?

The second question to consider when defining digital platform employment is how much labor there needs to be in the activity being mediated by the platform.

Digital platform employment, like all work, consists of a variety of combinations of worker's labor services and capital. These combinations occur along a spectrum, with some work consisting of just the provision of labor services and other work being very capital intensive. With regards to digital platform employment, this can be conceived of as going from work that consists of only labor services provided through a digital platform on one end of the spectrum to only the provision or receipt of financial capital via the internet on the other end of the spectrum. Pictorially this spectrum can be represented as follows (with the left-side representing activities with the least amount of capital and the most amount of labor services and the right-side representing activities with the least amount of labor services and the most amount of capital).



Analysts and survey designers developing a definition of digital platform employment and a corresponding measure of digital platform workers may choose different cutoff points along this spectrum. Even when focusing strictly on the labor services people must, a how much of the labor services needs to be mediated by the platform for someone to be defined as a platform worker.

Those interested in a more restrictive definition may want to limit their definition to only those providing labor services directly mediated by a digital platform. Moving progressively along the spectrum, others may expand the definition to include work activities where platforms do not mediate the labor services but instead mediate the transaction of tangible objects. Finally, some analysts may opt for a comprehensive definition that encompasses nearly all of the activities across the entire spectrum.

Ultimately, where people land along this spectrum when constructing a definition depends both on how much labor is involved in the activity and if the digital platform mediates what labor is involved. For instance, a handmade good sold online could involve a significant amount of labor to produce, but the labor is unmediated by the platform and incidental to the online transaction. Decisions about where to make the cutoff along this spectrum depend on whether people want a concept of digital platform workers that concentrates on the relationship between the worker and the customer/employer or whether people want the concept to be more expansive and includes types of work involving the broader digital marketplace

Less in the abstract, the decision about where to make the cut off really is a decision about what types of activities to include and count as digital platform employment. A definition and measurement restricted to workers providing only labor services through a digital platform would restrict the measurement to people whose work involved a great deal of labor services and almost all of the labor was mediated by the platform. For example, it would include workers who connect to customers to provide personal care, pet services, tutoring or assistance with household tasks such as furniture assembly. In these instances, the person assembling furniture in someone's home is providing the service of furniture assembly, and a person translating a document online is delivering the service of translation.

Labor is the principal input and is the primary activity being transacted. This type of work uses no or minimal physical capital, and the labor service is integral to the online transaction. What is being intermediated by the platform is an individual's labor services and the platform does not "own" the person's labor services in a way a company with employees does. The value the worker and the platform provide stems from the service provided by the worker rather than access to property, capital or assets.

Slightly more expansively in terms of the labor services capital spectrum, people may want to include in their definition work mediated through a platform that involves the combination of labor services and capital of significant value that the worker owns or rents. This would include ride-share driving and delivery of food and groceries. Again, the labor services is integral to the online transaction—what is being mediated is a person's services, albeit using the person's own capital.

Moving more into the digital marketplace, people may want to expand their definition to include work that involves the production of goods offline that are sold online. For example, people using digital marketing platforms such as Etsy or Ebay to sell handcrafted items or used goods specifically procured for resale could be counted as digital platform workers. These activities could involve a significant amount of labor, but this labor is incidental to the online transaction. The platform is not involved in the intermediation of this labor. What is being intermediated is the sale of a good.

Although not a physical good, people also may want to include workers engaged in content creation or content marketing. This content creation and marketing can take a variety of forms including individuals recording and uploading tutorial videos, the production of entertainment podcasts, the posting of blogs containing personal commentary on current events, or the

production of virtual how-to-guides. It also can include the remixing of existing material to reach new audiences. Again, however, as with the selling of a physical good using a digital platform, what is being intermediated in content creation and marketing is a virtual good (the video, podcast or blog), not a person's labor services.

More broadly when considering transactions that take place in the digital marketplace, people may want to consider including the rental of assets that people own. For example, the definition and measurement of digital platform workers could include people who rent their homes or tools using a digital platform such as AirBnB or Rentatool. This would include people who did little or no work themselves with regards to their property, instead perhaps hiring someone else to perform cleaning and maintenance tasks. In addition to the owner potentially providing no labor associated with the rental, what labor is involved is not being mediated by the platform—the platform is mediating the rental transaction, not the provision of labor (by either the owner or people the owner hires). What the platform is mediating is a service associated with a good.

Further up the spectrum of digitally intermediated activities that, while sources of personal income, involve even less labor is the selling of a person's used goods on an online platform. For example, people selling used textbooks, used clothing, used sporting equipment or unneeded furniture on Facebook Market Place Similar to the discussion of the selling online goods a person made, what is being mediated by a platform in the selling of used goods is the sale of the goods, not a person's services. What minimal labor is involved in the selling of used goods online is incidental to the online transaction. Even for those instances where the selling of one's used goods did involve a significant amount of labor or instances where people obtained used goods from others specifically for the purpose of resale, the vast majority of the work involved would not be mediated by the platform. Again, what is being mediated by the platform is the transaction of the sale of the good.

If individuals decide to include the selling of used goods online in their definition of digital platform workers, their definition would begin to reflect activities involved in the generation of personal income as opposed to earnings for work done. Given that not all income generation involves work, people defining digital platform workers may not want to include all people who generate income using a digital platform.

Finally, if one wanted as inclusive a definition of platform employment as possible with regards to income generating activities mediated by a digital platform, one might want to include the provision or obtaining of financial capital to help fund start-up companies or creative projects through crowdfunding platforms (such as Kickstarter).[14] It should be noted, however, for those

[14] *When including income generating activities conducted using a digital platform people also might want to consider the inclusion of participation in predictive markets such as Kalshi or gambling activity such as the use of FanDuel or DraftKing. These activities, however, clearly would not involve an intermediated work relationship.*

who are obtaining financial capital via a platform, this could be to start companies or engage in creative projects that have no involvement with a digital platform or it could be for people to start their own digital platforms or digital companies. There also are no labor services intermediated by platforms that assist in the obtaining of financial capital. The return to a financial investment is obtained separate from the digital platform, even though the investment was arranged through a digital platform.

Where people make the demarcation along the labor capital spectrum when constructing their definition of digital platform workers depends on whether people want to include all income generating activities conducted using a digital platform or whether people want to focus more on employment and work activities conducted via a platform. A more comprehensive measure would provide a better picture of all activity conducted and income being generated using digital platforms. Consequently, this would provide a more complete picture of the digital marketplace and the influence of the digitalization of the economy. This measure also would be more closely tied to other measures of eCommerce and thus would appeal to those who are interested in this aspect of digitalization.[15] A more narrow definition would focus on the earnings people generate from work using a digital platform and the renumeration for labor service. Such a definition would appeal to those who are interested strictly in measuring employment and obtaining a count of digital platform workers.

Perhaps even more importantly for those constructing a definition of digital platform workers than whether one wants to focus on the entire digital marketplace or not, is that platform activities involving the intermediation of labor services are likely to be subjected to very different regulatory frameworks, incentives, and policy concerns than those that involve a great deal of capital and little or no labor services. Labor services provided via digital platforms—such as food delivery, transportation, translation, or freelance work—are increasingly the focus of policy debates on working conditions, income security, fair pay, predictability of work, discrimination and social protection. These issues typically are not applicable to rental activities or the sale of goods online. Platforms focused on the intermediation of goods or capital tend to exert less control over the organization and performance of the work than those intermediating labor services. Consequently, working conditions and work employer relationships are less of a concern for those addressing issues associated with the rental or

[15] *The. OECD defines eCommerce as "the sale or purchase of goods or services…conducted over computer mediated networks´."* (2011, Table 5.1). Given eCommerce encompasses all online sales, it is broader than digital platforms intermediation of sales. However, the portion of eCommerce facilitated by digital platforms is a key area of interest. This distinction is recognized in the forthcoming revised 2025 SNA which proposes a separate identification of transactions intermediated by digital platforms under the concept of Producers Dependent on Digital Intermediary Platforms, complemented with the value creation of digital intermediation platforms (UNSD, 2025). The more expansive the definition of digital platform employment is with regards to the inclusion of activities that are more capital intensive and less focused on labor services the more in line the definition would be with the OECD definition of eCommerce,

sale of goods through a digital platform. If the policy interest is in the conditions of work, the exclusion of people renting property or selling goods online may result in a more policy relevant definition.

The desire to focus on issues surrounding working conditions and worker-employer relationships is the reason the Draft ILO Convention concerning decent work in the platform economy (ILO 2025) and the EU Directive on Platform Work adopted in March 2024. defined digital platform work as only work that involved the intermediation of labor services[16] Similarly, both Eurofound's (Eurofound, 2018) and OECD's (OECD 2019) studies of platform workers restricted their scope to those providing labor services, although there was variation in precisely which services were included. Correspondingly, most of the legislation about and legal battles over platform workers within both the US and in Europe have only involved platforms that intermediate labor services.[17]

Nevertheless, despite wanting to focus on labor services, people studying digital platform employment also may be concerned about issues surrounding the rental of property and the selling of goods through platforms. The intermediation of the sale of goods through digital platforms can significantly alter economic structures and the market for goods by creating access to new markets, influencing price-setting through "seller algorithms,[18]" and affecting the visibility of specific vendors. All these factors can generate economic impacts and raise policy concerns for those selling goods online. People concerned about issues surrounding the sale of goods through a digital platform also may be interested in policies and issues associated with consumer protection, product liability and vendors receipt of pay.

The rental of property and assets through a digital platform raises policy and regulatory concerns around property regulation, consumer protection, taxation of capital income, noise ordnances,

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[16] The proposed ILO Draft Convention on decent work in the platform economy states

the "term 'digital platform worker' means a person employed or engaged to work:

(i) for the provision of service organized and/or facilitated by a digital labour platform;
(ii) for remuneration or payment;
(iii) regardless of their classification of status in employment

The EU Directive on Platform Work states that the "Directive lays down minimum rights that apply to every person performing platform work in the Union who has or who, on the basis of an assessment of the facts, is deemed to have an employment contract or employment relationship as defined by the law, collective agreements or practice in force in the Member States with consideration to the case-law of the Court of Justice" The Directive further points out that its definition of digital labor platforms does not include providers of a service whose primary purpose is to exploit or share assets or by means of which individuals who are not professionals can resell goods.

[17] For a summary of some applicable legal cases see Freedman, et al (2025).

[18] Price setting through a seller algorithm, also known as algorithmic pricing or dynamic pricing refers to an automated process where a seller uses a predefined set of rules combined with data analysis to determine the optimal price for a product or service in real time Le Chen et al. (2016), In addition, platforms may use seller algorithms to provide suggested prices.

and zoning laws. Many of these concerns can be part of a larger discussion about local development and regulation, but often they are specific to digital platform activities.

As a result of these different implications and policy focuses, people may want to restrict their definition of digital platform workers to a specific type of activity or set of activities. Some may be interested in a measure that just involves labor services. Others may want to include labor services combined with worker owned capital. Still others may want to include the sale of goods using a digital platform or the rental of property. At a minimum, people constructing a definition of digital platform workers may want to identify subgroups within their definition and possibly develop a series of alternative measures along the labor services capital spectrum including and excluding certain types of activities depending on the reason for their definition and measurement.

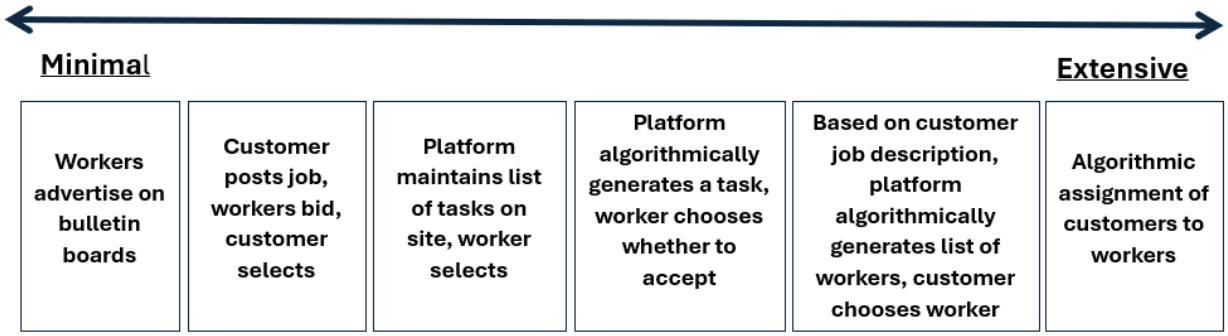
Question 3. How much control does the platform need to exert over worker-customer matching?

The next several factors people need to consider when constructing a definition of digital platform employment all center around the amount of control the digital platform has over workers. Much of the discussion surrounding these factors will again focus on how much of the digital marketplace the definition should cover versus having a definition more focused on employment and the type of worker-employer relationship within employment.

The first dimension of platform control that needs to be considered is the platforms' control over worker-customer matching. Specifically, the question is how much control over the matching does the platform need to have for a worker to be considered a digital platform worker.

The amount of control platforms have over worker-customer matching and workers' input on whom they work for varies considerably from none or minimal to very extensive. Examining it from the perspective of the platform's control over whom workers work for, this spectrum and what it entails can be presented pictorially using the diagram below (With the right side representing extensive control by the platform over whom a worker works for and the left side representing minimal or no control.)

Platform Control Over Whom Workers Work For



On the minimal side of the spectrum are job bulletin boards (platforms) where workers advertise their skills and availability. Other than agreeing to the platform's terms of service, the platform has no control over the worker-customer match and for whom a worker works. Customers go to the platform, read workers' postings, contact a selected worker on their own and make a direct agreement with the worker. In turn workers can decide whether to accept a customer or not. In a non-electronic form this is equivalent to a person placing an ad in a newspaper, where the newspaper would be the platform. Examples of digital platforms with this kind of limited control in the U.S. are Angi's and Craig's lists.

On the other end of the spectrum are platforms that use computer programs to algorithmically match workers to customers. On platforms where algorithmic matching has the most extensive control, workers and customers have little or no control over the match. Workers are algorithmically matched to a customer when they have the platform's app on and customers have no control over the worker they are assigned. Both workers and customers, with only minimal exceptions, must accept who they are assigned. Examples of platforms with this extensive algorithmically matching control are ride-share companies such as Uber and Lyft.

Slightly, further down the spectrum of platforms and workers control over workers' assignments are platforms where customers first provide a description of their job or task to the platform. The platform then algorithmically generates a list of potential workers (along with their profiles) and presents it to the customers. Customers then select a worker from the list. Under this form of matching, workers still have no control over whether they are on the list and thus who they potentially will work for, but customers have at least some control over who completes their tasks. In this scenario platforms maintain a large amount, but not complete, control over who workers work for, with customers being the ones mitigating platforms' control. Examples of platforms with this kind of algorithmic matching and control of worker assignment include personal care and health service platforms such as Care.com and pet sitting platforms such as Rover.com.

In the middle of the spectrum are platforms that do not algorithmically match workers, but the platforms still exercise at least some control over the matching process. Within this realm, the next level of control viewed from the perspective of the platform's control are platforms where when the worker has the platform app on, the platform provides an algorithmically generated task (customer) or short list of tasks (customers) that the worker can accept or refuse without penalty. In this scenario, the platform completely controls what is presented to workers, but workers are able to select a task or no tasks to complete. Consequently, workers have more control over whom they work for.

The algorithm that generates tasks in these models can be based on workers' geographic proximity to the site of the task and customer, the volume of work in a geographic area, whether workers have indicated they can work a continuous block of time, whether several tasks can be bundled together and past performance of the workers (such as customers' ratings, the workers' acceptance and completion rate of assignments, and the timeliness of the worker's completion of tasks). Examples of these kinds of platforms in the U.S. are food and grocery delivery platforms such as Grubhub, Doordash and Instacart.

Situations where workers similarly can choose a task to complete, but platforms have less control and workers have more control over whom they work for, are platforms where customers post tasks they would like completed on the platform and workers then go online to select tasks they are interested in. The list of tasks on these platforms typically are more numerous and diversified than the tasks associated with platforms described above where the tasks assigned or shown workers are algorithmically generated. Customers can require workers to have limited qualifications in order for their posting to be shown to workers. such as having completed a set number of previous tasks with a minimum rating. Given whether workers are qualified is based on platforms automatic monitoring of workers and metrics based on this monitoring, platforms do maintain some control over the worker-customer matching process. However, the control is much less than platforms that algorithmically generate the tasks shown workers. Well known platforms that function via customers posting tasks and workers selecting the ones they are interested in are Amazon's MTurk and Clickworker.

A more collaborative worker-customer match experience exists on platforms where workers can bid on jobs. On these platforms customers post jobs that they would like completed, workers bid on jobs of interest (often including their price and qualifications) and customers then award a winning bid to a worker. Other than facilitating the interchange between customers and workers, the platform has no control over the matching process. Well known platforms that function in this manner include Upwork, Fivver and Taskrabbit. A variant of this model are platforms where workers are shown a list of potential customers who have specified a price they are willing to pay. Workers are then free to select a specific customer, not accept any customers, or counteroffer with a higher price. A large rideshare platform that uses this negotiation-based model is InDrive.

Content creators and content marketers often have two types of customers. Therefore, they are in a unique situation in terms of the spectrum of platform control over their matching to customers.

All content creators and marketers have as customers targeted audiences/followers they are trying to attract, engage and build a relationship with through the online viewing of their content. In addition, many content creators and marketers have brands, companies or individuals who pay them or provide them with free products to reach followers through sponsored posts, partnerships (brand content), product positioning or affiliated marketing. The intermediation and control by platforms of the matching of workers to customers differ for these two types of customers.

For the viewers/followers of content creators or marketers the digital platform on which the content is posted has relatively little direct control over the matching of viewing customers to the online content of the marketers and creators. Further, although platforms may know the viewing habits of these customers, the platform may not really know who these customers are. Platforms, however, can undertake measures to promote the visibility of certain creators and marketers to followers. Platforms also can algorithmically manipulate what viewers see. Similarly, some platforms can implement revenue sharing models that reward creators for generating content that aligns with platform goals and advertising interests.

Consequently, there are some means by which the platform can indirectly control the connection between content creators and marketers and their viewing customers. This control puts platform control over the matching process of workers (content creators and marketers) to viewing customers in between the minimal control platforms have over workers who posted their availability on job bulletin boards and the somewhat more extensive control platforms that maintain list of tasks workers can select have. [19] But again, the platform itself exerts minimal direct control over whom content creators and marketers connect with in terms of their followers (viewing customers).

With regards to companies, brands or individuals that approach content creators and marketers to be sponsors, while these contacts may be made online, the digital platform on which the content is posted typically is not facilitating these matches. Consequently, for those who have company brand or individual sponsorships, the matching of contract creators or marketers to customers who are sponsors should not play a role in the definition of digital platform workers.

[19] Platforms also can implement algorithmic control to affect what platform viewers (users) are shown including analysis of users viewing behavior to algorithmically prioritize what they see. This in turn can cause content creators and marketers to generate popular, engaging material that remains visible. Creators and content marketers also can learn about individual platforms specific algorithms and adapt their content accordingly. However, as long as the rules and guidelines of a platform are followed, platforms do not directly control what viewers/followers content creators and marketers connect with

Again, decisions about where to make the demarcation along the spectrum of platform control over matching when constructing a definition of digital platform workers is a decision about whether people want a definition of platform workers that centers on the platform being a marketplace or whether people want a definition that concentrates on an intermediated employment relationship (between the worker, platform and the customer). Even if one wants to concentrate on intermediated employment relationships, where one's definition lands along the control spectrum may depend on the purpose of the measure. People concerned about whether algorithms are being discriminatory or are preferentially providing high value customers or tasks to certain workers illegally may want to concentrate on only two types of platforms—those that algorithmically match workers to customers and those that provide customers with an algorithmically generated list of workers who can be selected. People concerned about whether platforms are artificially restricting demand for workers may want to make similar restrictions when defining digital platform workers.

People who are concerned about the classification of workers as employees of the platform, also may want to restrict their definition of platform workers to situations where platforms have algorithmic control over the match. However, some people also may want to add in workers where platforms' involvement in which workers a customer can select is more minimal, but still present. Their argument being even minimal control by the platform over who a person can work for might be a consideration in establishing whether a person is an employee of the platform as opposed to being classified as a self-employed, independent contractor.

A worker's classification as an employee of the platform versus a self-employed, independent contractor is important because it affects who pays unemployment insurance taxes, the payment of income tax obligations, minimum wage and overtime rules, enforcement of safety standards and the applicability of a myriad of other regulations affecting conditions of work and employee-employer relationships. People's classification as a self-employed, independent contractor as opposed to an employee also can raise concerns about tax evasion and the correct accounting of business expenses in tax filings.

The presences or absence of platform control over who people work for and it is implication for the classification of people as employees (as opposed to self-employed, independent contractors) is one of the main reasons the 2025 ILO Draft Convention concerning decent work in the platform economy restricted its definition of a digital platform to those "using automated decision-making systems". Their underlying assumption is that employers should only be responsible for providing decent work when they have control over workers or workers are subordinate to them. In contrast, self-employed, independent contractors are presumed to be completely responsible for finding decent work and responsible for their own working conditions. For similar reasons, the EU's Platform Work Directive focused on platform workers where platforms had automated monitoring and decision-making systems.

Even without the strict classification of someone as an employee of the platform, the exercising of even moderate control over workers by platforms could make platforms responsible for some

conditions of work. Therefore, those concerned with this aspect of digital platform employment may want a definition that is broader than situations where platforms algorithmically match workers to customers but still is restricted to situations where platforms have some control over worker customer matching.

Another concern related to platforms control over worker customer matching is the amount of data the platform must maintain to facilitate matches. The more control a platform has over the matching, the more data about a worker the platform collects, maintains and uses. This includes information about workers' availability, performance ratings and other performance attributes. While the storing and use of this data may lower transaction costs, increase the efficiency of transactions, and facilitate matching, it also may influence the extent to which people performing platform work can shape or manage the conditions under which they work and transactions take place.

The mere existence and retention of this data can raise issues surrounding data privacy and concerns about controls over the data. For example, there can be questions about how the data is protected, the addressing of consequences of a data breach, whether the data and implications based on it can be challenged by a worker, and whether a worker can transport a rating from one platform to another. Workers' ability or lack thereof to challenge information about themselves or transport information across platforms can raise concerns about whether platforms are engaging in monopsonistic practices.

Policy makers and analysts interested in issues surrounding platforms use and control of data thus also may want to restrict their definition of platform workers to those where platforms exert a great deal of control over work-customer matches. Indeed, concern over control and protection of personal data is another reason that the 2025 ILO Draft Convention concerning decent work in the platform economy restricted its definition of a digital platform to those "using automated decision-making systems" and excludes "those that merely offer a matching function".

In contrast, those interested in all those engaged in some form of digitally facilitated employment or the digital marketplace in general may want a very broad measure. Their definition could include any workers interacting with a platform where the platform's intermediary role in the ongoing matching of potential buyers and sellers is core to its business model. This would include many types of activities where the platform is organizing access and interactions between customers and workers. Perhaps people with these broad interests may want to exclude workers who just advertised their availability on job bulletin boards (or advertise goods for sale if the selling of goods is included in the definition), but they would want to include every other type of digital platform worker in terms of platform control over worker-customer matching in their definition of platform workers.

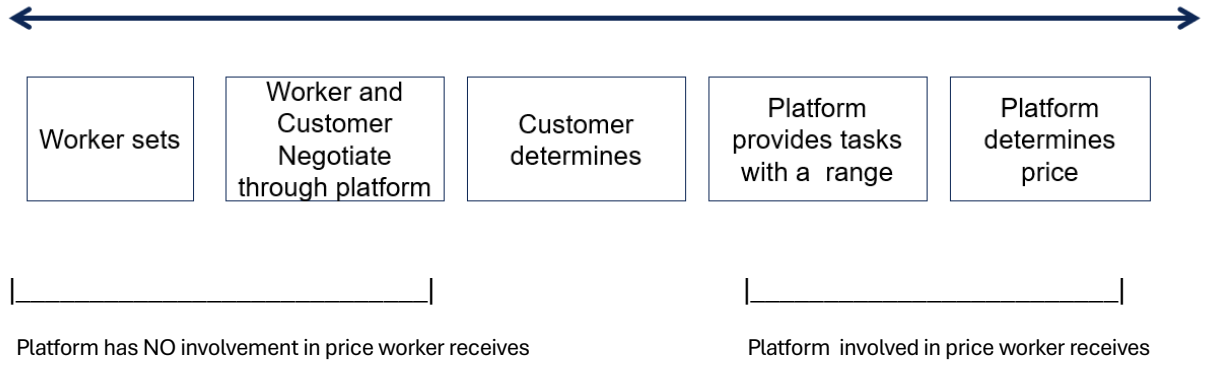
As can be seen from the above discussion, people with very specific interests may want a more restricted definition of platform workers- those where the platform has some algorithmic control over for whom workers work-, while others may want a broad definition. To meet these competing needs and concerns, those constructing a definition of platform workers for multiple

users may want to develop a series of definitions and measurements along the dimension of platform control over whom workers work for. Those with specific concerns who are not trying to serve multiple interests of course may decide to have only one definition with regards to platforms control over worker-customer matching.

Question 4. How much control does the platform need to exhibit over the price workers can charge?

A second dimension of platform control that needs to be considered when constructing a definition of platform employment is how much control the platform has over the price a worker can charge. Because digital platform workers typically are paid by the tasks, this amounts to a discussion of how much control the platform has over a worker's wage. The amount of control a platform has over the price workers receive for their services often is related to how much control the platform has over the worker customer matching process, but this is not always the case. However, similar to the discussion of control of the worker customer matching process, how much control a platform has over the price a worker can charge also occurs along a spectrum. This spectrum is presented diagrammatically below.

Platform Control Over Price/Wage Worker Receives



At the right end of the spectrum, where platforms exhibit the most control, the platform completely sets the price customers pay, and platform workers receive. In these instances, the value of the good or service a person provides is under the complete control of the platform.

Slightly less rigidly, platforms can provide a range of prices that a worker can be paid, or a range of tasks workers can select for which they will receive a fixed price. In the middle of the spectrum customers set a price on tasks workers can select. More towards the left-side of the spectrum, where workers have complete control over the price charged, are platforms where workers bid on tasks and the customer and the worker negotiate a price. The far-left end of the spectrum, where workers have complete control over the price they charge, are electronic platforms where workers advertise their services. On these types of platforms either the posting (ad) lists the price workers will charge, or potential customers reach out to the worker to determine the price being

charged. This is most often associated with platforms that serve as job posting and advertising boards, but it also includes platforms where workers bid on jobs posted online. Platforms where workers sell goods or rent properties also would typically fall in this realm.

The fee or price content creators and marketers receive can fit into the part of the pricing spectrum where workers and customers have some control over the pricing. Although a combination of models can be in play, typically, content creators pay is set using one of three models: a model where creators set their own price, a model where the price is set through negotiations with a brand, or a model where platform rules set the price. In the first two types of price setting models, platforms have no direct control over the price workers receive. Creators selling their own content or products (such as digital downloads or goods) or offering services (such as online coaching or tutoring) set their own prices. Creators with an association with a brand – where the brand essentially is the customer -negotiate with the brand for sponsored content at a fixed fee. In situations where platform rules set the price, platforms do have some control over the price workers receive.[20]

If the interest when defining platform workers is in studying work that is digitally enabled and the digital marketplace, one would want to define digital platform workers over the entire spectrum of pricing control presented above. If instead one wanted to restrict one's definition of platform workers to those where workers could be considered an employee of the platform, one would only include in the definition of digital platform workers those where the platform had strict or fairly strict control over the price workers received. Indeed, whether platforms have control over the price workers charge can be and has been used in determining whether a worker is an employee of the platform as opposed to being self-employed in court cases. [21]

Those concerned about the conditions of work, minimum wage enforcement and workers receiving fair pay would also similarly want to restrict their definition of digital platform workers to those situations where platforms have significant or sole control over the price workers charge for their goods or services. This more restricted definition would also be applicable for people concerned about issues surrounding whether workers are only paid for hours they are actively carrying out tasks or whether workers are also paid for when they are logged into an app waiting for assignments and hours traveling from an assignment (the latter is sometimes referred to as passive work hours). .

Finally, those concerned about issues surrounding the setting of workers' pay based on prices such as incentive pricing for workers, the influence of workers' experience ratings on prices, and tier structured pricing for either customers or workers would only be interested in defining digital

[20] Situations where platform rules influence workers' pay include: revenue sharing models where the platform takes a proportion of ad revenues and provides the creator with the rest, performance based funds where the platform pays creators based on the popularity and performance of their content, and platform subscription fees where the creator encourages customers to subscribe to their content using a platform's subscription services with the platform determining the subscription fee and the percentage of the revenue the creator will receive.

[21] For a summary of some applicable legal cases see Freedman, et al (2025).

platform workers as those where the platform completely determines the price customers are charged. People concerned about pricing structures that depend on algorithmic management that takes into account real-time worker supply and customer demand information when setting a price would want a similarly restricted definition of digital platform workers

Question 5. *How much control does a platform need to exhibit over workers' use of the platform and how they conduct their work?*

The final dimension of control one may want to consider in constructing a definition of platform employment is platforms control over workers' use of the platform and their behavior while using the platform. Platforms can have extensive control over workers, including controls of workers' receipt of work and over how work is conducted.

Platforms can control workers' access to and receipt of work through their collection, use, and retention of workers' ratings. For example, platforms can require workers to maintain a minimum customer rating to continue using the platform or give workers with particularly high ratings exclusive access to more desirable assignments. Ratings can also be used to control people's access to work, if ratings are not transportable between similar types of platforms. Limits on workers' ability to transfer ratings across platforms can restrict workers' ability to work for alternative or additional platforms.

Another type of control platforms can exercise that influences workers access to work is the requirement that workers must accept customers as long as they have the platform's app on, with only limited ability to turn down assignments. Workers who violate this requirement risk being denied the ability to use the platform in the future. Platforms can also restrict the times workers can access the platform, perhaps restricting access to when there is high demand for the platform service being offered.

With regards to a platform controlling how work is conducted, platforms can stipulate operational rules about how the work is conducted. This control can include providing procedures for how the work should be done, stipulating when the work should be done, specifying the maximum number of hours a worker can spend completing a project, or by providing and controlling the resources needed to carry out the work. Throughout the work process, digital platforms may monitor workers through online systems and provide incentives or impose sanctions based on this monitoring. Platform control over how work is done also may include prohibiting or severely restricting the use of third parties (including friends and relatives) or sub-contractors to assist in conducting the work.

In contrast, platforms can have almost non-existent control over workers and their use of the platform. For instance, some platforms only require workers to post legally permitted work. Similarly, platforms where people sell goods online or rent property typically have little control over what is posted for sale or rental.

Platform control over how work is conducted can help platforms ensure the quality of the product or services offered. At the same time platform control over how work is conducted can have significant impacts on how workers are able to organize and control their own work along with affecting the conditions of their work

Although platforms with more control over how work is conduct will have stronger control over the quality and consistency of their product, this control also has implications for what party would be responsible in product liability suits. The degree of platform control over the conditions of work in general also will have ramifications for whether a person is classified as an employee of the platform or is classified as self-employed, with the commensurate implications for workers legal protections, and applicable tax laws.

Controls over when workers can work may permit platforms to optimize their operations. However, restrictions on when people can access work on the platform also can have specific implications for the enforcement of minimum wage regulations. For example, when New York City passed legislation mandating digital platform workers earn a minimum wage, several platforms responded by restricting people's access to the platform to times when the platform deemed there was sufficient demand for workers to ensure workers could earn the minimum wage. While these restrictions may have ensured consistency of assignments for workers, it also could serve as a means of circumventing minimum wage regulations and restricting workers' flexibility with regards to working at their desired times. (Robison, *June 26, 2025**)***

Whether workers need to maintain a minimum rating to obtain work from a platform and whether workers can transport their rating between similar type platforms feeds into discussions about the market power of a specific platform and whether the platform is pursuing monopsonistic practices.

Overall, what people are interested in with regards to platforms control over workers access to work and how work is carried out will influence their decisions on how to define digital platform workers. People who are interested in issues surrounding the protection of workers' and customers' rights, enforcement of worker protections, and the market power of platforms may want to restrict their definition of platform workers to situations where platforms exhibit significant control over workers either by controlling workers access to work or by setting conditions for how the work should be conducted. People who are interested in the digitalization of the economy in general and facilitation of the digital marketplace may want to impose fewer or no restrictions with regards to platforms' control over workers access to work and how it is conducted.

Question 6. *Does the type of customer matter?*

Unrelated to the control of workers, another factor people may want to consider when constructing a definition of platform work is who is being linked via the platform. In other words,

who is the customer and who is the provider. Many of the early platforms in what was dubbed "the sharing economy" were designed to connect workers to personal customers. They are what are referred to as peer-to-peer platforms (P2P). For example, platforms for ridesharing or the rental of personal property directly to customers are considered peer-to-peer platforms.

As the types of platform employment expanded, so too did the types of customer and provider relationships. Within the realm of worker to customer connections, now in addition to peer-to-peer platforms, there are peer-to-business (P2B) platforms,[22] and platforms that connect customers to businesses, business to workers and then workers back to the original customer (C2B2W2C)[23] .

Platform employment also might be considered to include platforms facilitating business to business transactions, business to business platforms (B2B) However, given that the focus in this paper is on defining digital platform workers and there is general agreement that the measure of digital platform employment is a subset of and does not encompass all of the digital economy, most definitions probably would want to exclude B2B platform transactions and the workers associated with them.

It could be expected, however, that most definitions of platform workers would want to include all the other types of customer-to-worker relationships. People may want to make a distinction between the type of customer-to-worker relationships, however. Making these distinctions could be particularly important when trying to address issues about who is the employer and who can set the terms of employment and determine when they are violated. For example, with peer-to-peer relationships depending on how the platform operates, either the customer or the platform might determine the conditions of work. In contrast, in peer-to-business relationships the businesses to whom the worker ultimately provides the good or service might determine when the product or service provided meets their requirements and other conditions of work.

It also may be important to determine whether it matters if the final customer digitally obtained the good or service and construct the definition of digital platform workers accordingly. In other words, does digital platform employment only include instances where the customer is the final user of the digitally provided good or service or can it also include instances where the person or business using the digital platform was an intermediary and the final customer did not use the platform directly? For example, would an antique dealer who buys items through eBay to resell in the dealer's store be a digital platform worker?

[22] An example of a P2B is AmazonFlex for package delivery. Several Temporary Help Supply firms also are at least partially operating as P2B platforms

[23] Examples of C2B2W2C platforms are some of the food delivery platforms such as Grubhub and Doordash that customers use to order food from restaurants, and restaurants then use to arrange for a driver to deliver the ordered food.

A similar question is whether digital platform employment only includes workers who engage with the platform directly or can it also include third-party workers (including friends and relatives) or subcontractors that the person who was hired through a platform engaged to assist in carrying out the assignment. For example, would a friend that a person paid to help with package deliveries the worker arranged through an app also be a digital platform worker, or would only the worker who obtained the delivery assignments through the app be a digital platform worker?

Where people make the demarcation in terms of how direct customers' and workers' engagement with a platform needs to be for someone to be denoted as a platform worker again depends on whether people are more interested in employer worker relationships directly facilitated by a platform or want a broad measure of the digital economy and how much economic activity takes place through digital platforms

People who are interested in issues surrounding conditions of work and enforcement of tax regulations may be interested in a definition of digital platform workers restricted to situations where the connection to the digital platform is direct. People who are interested in questions about responsibility for the safety and quality of the good or service provided and legal responsibilities associated with the provision of the good or service may want a similar restriction. Those interested in digitalization of work and a broad measure of workers associated with platforms may want to use a broader definition.

Question 7. How much platform work does an individual need to engage in to be classified as a platform worker?

The inherent flexibility of platform employment allows individuals to engage in platform work whenever they want for however many hours they choose, raising the question: how much platform work does a person need to engage in to be defined as a platform worker. Prior to addressing this question, it is necessary to decide what the appropriate duration of time is for measurement.

Reference Time Frame

Developers and analysts could choose a very short time period of one day or one week. The use of a short time period ensures people are actively and currently engaged in platform work. It also would reduce recall basis and facilitate the measurement of associated variables such as earnings or hours worked. In addition, a shorter reference period offers several logistical advantages. A one-day reference period aligns with the reference period used in many time use surveys, and would permit measurement of digital platform workers to be embedded in these surveys. The measurement of platform workers in conjunction with a time use survey would enable researchers to analyze daily activity patterns – such as how platform work interacts with childcare or leisure. A one-week reference period matches the reference period used in many national labor force surveys. Embedding the measurement of

platform workers in a labor force survey would permit analysts to leverage existing data such as workers overall labor force status, whether platform work was done in conjunction with other work and the total number of hours people worked at all of their jobs. It also would permit the comparison of rates of platform work to other labor force measures such as the unemployment or labor force participation rates. However, given that workers can engage in platform work intermittently, a narrow window could potentially exclude people engaged in platform work who might be of interest.

To accommodate the intermittent nature *of platform work developers may want to use a longer reference period--- for example, one month, 6 months, or a year. People also may want to use a longer reference period to increase the sample size of those who are potentially digital platform workers.* Ultimately developers could use more than one reference period, particularly in surveys. Using more than one reference period would permit the more precise context of a short time frame to be combined with the more comprehensive measure of a longer time frame.

Once a reference period (or periods) has (have) been selected, those defining digital platform workers can then address the question of how much platform employment people have to engage in within that time period to be classified as a digital platform worker. There are two distinct ways to measure the amount of platform work – the amount of time people spend doing it or the amount of money people earn from it.

Amount of Time

If a time metric is used, there are two dimensions that should be considered –intensity (the number of hours worked at a point in time) and consistency (how often within a period of time work is undertaken). When considering the intensity and consistency of the platform work when defining platform workers, people may decide to use a minimum threshold. In constructing such a threshold people might want to incorporate the notion of repeated work, in a short-time period for a minimum number of hours. For example, analysts may decide to classify as platform workers only those who worked 10 hours every month during the last year. Such a threshold would incorporate both the notions of intensity and consistency.

Alternatively, because there are a myriad of intensity and consistency combinations, people may decide to formulate broad categories and base their definition on the exclusion or inclusion of specific categories. For example, four categories could be constructed, 1) low intensity, low consistency (infrequent work completed for a minimal amount of time), 2) low intensity, high consistency (a small amount of hours worked consistently every week or month), 3) high intensity, low consistency (a large number of hours worked only once in the reference period) and 4) high intensity, high consistency (a large number of hours worked consistently multiple days a week or month)

Using these categories analysts may decide to exclude those in the low intensity, low consistency group such as those who only engaged in platform work for an hour in the last year and people in the high intensity low consistency group such as those who engaged in platform work for 20 hours once in the last year. Alternatively, people may decide to only define as platform workers people in the high intensity, high consistency group, such as those who work 4 to 5 days a week for 8 to 10 hours throughout the year. The argument for excluding people in the low intensity low consistency group and the high intensity, low consistency group groups is that these people showed little commitment to platform work and did not engage in platform work on an ongoing basis. The argument for focusing on only high intensity, high consistency workers is that they were the only workers treating platform work as their primary jobs. Consequently, these are the workers for whom concerns about job benefits and continued access to platform work would be the most relevant

When quantifying the number of hours spent on platform work, two measurement challenges arise both related to what hours should be counted as platform work. The first issue concerns hours that while related to platform work do not directly involve the intermediation of the activity. For example, people who bid for online contracts may spend hours looking for projects and additional hours writing proposals once they have found projects on which to bid. People who work for platforms that algorithmically assign customers (such as ride share drivers) may spend time waiting for assignments even if they have their app on. They also may spend time going between assignments, particularly if assignments take them far away from where most customers are located. Measuring the hours of work for content creators and those selling goods may be particularly tricky because much of their time will be spent creating content or producing goods offline and the hours spent in the intermediation process or online interacting with viewers or customers is relatively small.

Some analysts and developers may decide to only include hours spent actively engaged in the intermediated work arguing that hours spent looking for work, waiting for an assignment, writing bids, or creating content is similar to activities involved in job search by those who are unemployed and is not time spent employed. Others may want a more encompassing measure including all hours spent in activities related to digital platform employment. Still others may want to adopt an intermediate approach, particularly for algorithmically matched workers, counting as work hours any time a person could receive work without any additional effort on the worker's part. This approach would include both hours actually spent in intermediated work and time with a digital app on but no work for a customer was actually done

The second issue that arises when defining people as platform workers based on hours involves people who perform the same activities digitally and non-digitally , For example, a doctor who sees patients physically in her office, but also treats patients via telemedicine or a potter who sells his wares both in his store and through an online intermediary such as Etsy. When deciding

about how to define platform workers in these situations, analysts may want to define people based on the mode of work where workers spent the majority of their time –work arranged through a digital platform or work that did not involve digital intermediation. When making this distinction, there also could be issues about how to count hours that support both the digital and the non-digital activity.

Decisions about what hours to include obviously will affect the measurement of both the intensity and consistency of the amount of time people devote to platform work, and correspondingly the definition of platform workers. *Designers and analysts also should be cognizant that there can be interplay between the length of the reference period selected and the intensity and consistency measures*.

Amount of Earnings

When defining people as platform workers based on earnings, analysts could either use an absolute value people must earn, or they could use the proportion of people's earnings derived from platform work and a corresponding threshold[24]. If a threshold is used in combination with a proportion, there are a variety of cut-offs analysts could use -a low minimum threshold such as people earning at least 10% of their earnings from platform work, a high minimum threshold such as people earning at least 75 or 80% of their earnings from platform work, or something in between. Restricting the definition of platform workers to those who earn a substantial proportion of their earnings from platform work would likely confine the definition of platform workers to those who engage in platform work as their main jobs -eliminating those who are platform workers only on their second or third jobs. Similarly, a high threshold likely would eliminate those who use platforms to obtain a few of their customers, but who obtain most of their customers through non-digital means. The use of any threshold would exclude those who have not earned any money from platform work such as those workers just starting platform work, people who have not sold any goods online, and freelancers who have not won any contracts. The exclusion of those who have not received any compensation could be particularly relevant for content creators and marketers. Given the high likelihood of many content creators and marketers never earning any compensation, even those who decide not to impose an earnings threshold may want to restrict their definition to those who have earned a positive amount of money from their platform activities or have a firm commitment to do so. On the other hand, for content creators there also could be issues for people who receive payment for content posted a significant time ago without any recent work having been done on the posting.

[24] Some designers and analysts may decide to use income instead of earnings. If income is used this would likely reduce the total number of platform workers and the number of people who engage in platform work as secondary employment. It also would move the measurement closer to an overall measure of social well being and away from a measure associated with employment.

A drawback of defining people based on the portion of their earnings derived from platform work is that it could skew the measurement of platform workers towards lower earnings workers. This skewness arises because a smaller amount of platform earnings could more easily constitute a larger proportion of peoples' earnings for low wage workers. Measurement also could be skewed by the one-time sale of a few high value items such as a used car or audio equipment, (if the definition of platform workers included the sale of used items). In general, the amount people earn from platform work does not necessarily ensure people worked consistently as platform workers. Therefore, if there is an interest in determining how akin platform work is to a person having a job, using the amount of time people engaged in platform work may be preferable to using an earnings metric.

Regardless of whether people use the amount of time, earnings or a combination of both, where people make the demarcation in terms of the amount of work necessary for a person to be classified as a platform worker may depend on why the measurement of platform workers is being undertaken. Those interested in studying people who are economically dependent on platform work, the job benefits associated with platform work or issues associated with access to platform work may want to restrict their definition to those who engage in a considerable amount of platform work. In contrast, those interested in a more complete picture of the digitalization of the labor market, an indication of whether workers are supplementing their income with platform work or a measure that is potentially reflective of workers' economic insecurity may want a more encompassing measure. People who want to highlight the intermittent or sporadic nature of some platform work, also may want a definition that imposed minimal restrictions on the amount of platform work. To satisfy the many competing needs, analysts may want to construct several definitions of platform workers based on the amount of platform work in which people engage in.

III. How Measures of Digital Platform Workers Have Been Implemented

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the questions concerning how to conceptually define platform workers are addressed by how information to measure digital platform workers is collected and compiled. This section will illustrate how several National Statistical offices have embedded answers to the conceptual questions presented in the previous section when implementing a measure of digital platform workers in their household surveys. There also will be a brief allusion to how non-governmental organizations (NGO's), private sector companies, and academics have used establishment data, administrative data or web scraped data to measure digital platform employment. Household surveys are the focus of the discussion, however, because the majority of the measurements of digital platform workers have been made using

household surveys, and because there will always be a place for household surveys in the measurement of platform workers[25].

A. Identifying digital platform workers - Conveying a common understanding of digital platform employment

One of the primary challenges in household surveys is conveying to respondents the concept that is being measured. While this is always true, it has proven to be particularly challenging, when attempting to identify and measure digital platform workers.

Broadly speaking 5 methods have been used to identify digital platform workers in household surveys. These methods are 1) using the term digital platform directly in the question, 2) asking about the use of specific platforms by name, 3) asking about specific tasks workers could have done on or through a digital platform, 4) asking whether a person's work entails specific attributes of platform work, and 5) combining methods such as asking about specific tasks and asking about specific attributes of platform work.

1. Using the term digital platform in the question

Early surveys such as the UK's Office of National Statistics (ONS) Pilot, the Swedish Labor Force Survey, Eurobarameter, and the Finish LFS Pilot simply used the term digital platform or the term in combination with a few examples of common platforms in the question. For example, the ONS Pilot Survey asked:

> In the last 12 months have you used a digital platform to find work on a short term, payment by task basis?

And the Swedish Labor Force Survey asked:

> Have you ever tried during the past year to get an assignment via digital platforms (e.g. Uber, Urb-it, Taskrunner, Offerta etc.)

Testing of these questions and examination of the collected data using them revealed that the term "digital platform" was poorly understood by respondents. Consequently, this approach to identifying platform workers has largely been abandoned. Although the term platform continues to be used in the introduction to questions using other methods of identifying digital platform workers.

2. *Asking About the Use of Specific Platforms*

Another approach to identify platform workers that has been used in household surveys is to ask whether people had done any work through specific, named platforms. Typically, in this

[25] Indeed, the OECD, ILO, Eurostat "Handbook on Measuring Digital Platform Employment and Work" recommends that "The LFS should be the tool of choice when it comes to measuring the number of people involved in digital platform employment. Other measurement tools should, to the extent possible, align their definition of digital platform employment to the one used by LFS."

approach each named platform represents a different kind of platform activity. This approach is what was used in the 2017 Finnish labor force survey, where people were asked:

> *Have you during the past 12 months worked or otherwise earned income through the following platforms:*
>
> *1. Airbnb, 2.Uber, 3. Tori.fi/Huuto.net, 4. Solved, 5. Some other, 6. None of the above*

As discussed, in a methodological note about the Finish survey, this approach was chosen to avoid including in the question a long definition of what was meant by platform work. (Sutela, 2018). It should be noted, that this approach may result in respondents just concentrating on the platforms listed. It also risks missing new platforms that arise, and platforms changing names or going out of business. [26]

3. Asking about specific tasks that workers do through platforms

Rather than asking about the use of specific platforms that cover a variety of tasks, another related approach is to ask about specific tasks that people can do through an app or website. In this approach, tasks are asked about in separate questions and sometimes the name of one or two platforms are provided as examples when asking about the task. This approach was used in some of the earliest attempts to measure digital platform work, and it continues to be one of the most common ways of identifying digital platform workers.

The number of activities asked about has evolved and expanded over time, however. For example, very early surveys only asked about two activities -providing ride services and offering private accommodation services. In contrast the Eurostat 2022 pilot module specifies 15 activities; where the 15 activities were taxi services: delivery of food or another good; renting out a room, house or any accommodation; selling or advertising to sell any good through the internet, platform, or phone; cleaning services; handiwork; child or elder care; medical or health care services; tutorials or teaching services; translation services; programming/coding; web or graphic design; online support or checks for online content; data or text entry; and creating content such as videos or texts.

In addition to expanding the number of tasks asked about, later surveys using this approach further try to focus respondents on the concept being asked about, by providing an introduction to the questions specifying that the work needs to be mediated through a platform, cannot include telework, and must be done for pay. For example, the introductory paragraphs and first question in the Eurostat 2022 survey as implemented by Finland in their web collection read

> *Intro*
> *The next questions refer to work that can be carried out or received through an internet*

[26] Asking about the use of specific platform names also makes the question less consistent or useable internationally because the names of platforms vary across countries or commonly used platforms in one country do not exist in others. The use of Tori.fi/Huuto in the Finish 2017 pilot illustrates this drawback.

Platform or App for phones or tablets.

We are referring to work for pay or profit provided through or mediated by online platforms, such as Uber, Foodora, Airbnb, Upwork or Tor.fi. This does not include remote work or the use of software to make phone or video calls

Q1 In the **last 12 months**, did you use an Internet platform or an app for phones or tablets to carry out any of the following services for pay or profit: **taxi services** using for example Uber or Yango

The advantage of asking about specific tasks is that it is very direct and clear. On the other hand, surveys using this approach have found that customers using the service being asked about sometimes reply yes to the question in addition to those providing the good or service. [27] *Survey designers and analysts have also found that it is important to collect the name of the platform being used in order to screen out workers who were not digital platform workers, as respondents sometimes failed to understand what was meant by the use of platforms and include digital tools that were not platforms. Further, as can be seen from the evolution of this approach; when asking about specific tasks, those interested in measuring platform workers need to be aware that the types of activities that might be considered digital platform work can change and expand over time. For example, when many of the early surveys were conducted using this approach the renting of one's car on a digital platform was generating a great deal of interest. However, the platforms that facilitate this activity have largely gone out of business. On the other hand, other forms of digital platform work such as telemedicine did not exist until the mid-2000's*

4. Asking whether work involved particular attributes of platform work

A completely different approach to identifying digital platform workers is to ask about the attributes of a person's work. This approach involves identifying several features of work that are associated with digital platform work and then asking questions whether a person's work has these features. This approach does not have to involve the use of specific platform names, although it could. It also is not restricted to a certain set of activities. Surveys that have used this approach include: BLS's 2017, 2023 and 2025 Contingent and Alternative Work Arrangement supplements to the Current Population Survey (the CWS), the California Work and Health Survey, the ad hoc module to the French Labor Force Survey. and the Collaborative Economy and Employment Survey conducted by the European Union's Joint Research Center (*COLLEEM)*

[27]For example, the Swiss module to their labor force survey found many people who were just using rental and ride-sharing platforms answered "yes" to the question asking if people had earned income through these types of platforms. The Canadians had a similar concern which is why the introductory paragraph to their 2024 Module includes the sentence, "*In addition, this **does not include** using the platforms as a customer.*"

Several attributes could be selected that are indicative of platform intermediation. The most common attributes that have been selected in previous surveys are whether an app or website connects workers to customers, and whether people are paid through the app. Other attributes that could be used to identify platform workers are whether a person can be rated through the website or app, whether the app or website controls the price a worker can charge, whether workers are free to reject work and questions about how much control the platform has in the matching process.

In the 2023 CWS, the attributes to identify people as a digital platform worker that were asked about in separate questions were: whether workers obtained short term tasks or projects through an app or website, whether customers paid workers through this app or website, the duration of the typical task, whether customers could rate workers through the app or website the worker used, and whether a worker had to set up a profile prior to accepting work on the app or website. In addition, to screen out potential false positives the name of the primary platform that workers used was collected. The 2025 CWS included questions about whether the platform controls the price a worker can charge and whether a person can only receive work when the worker is connected to an app or website. The 2025 CWS also included a question about how workers obtain work using the platform (the app assigns it, the worker selects task, jobs or projects, customers choose the worker, or something else)[28].

An advantage to the asking about attributes approach is it is relatively resilient to changes in and expansions in the types of digital platform employment. It also has a lower risk of customers who used a specific platform or service being identified as platform workers. However, the attribute approach is not completely immune to changes in how digital platforms function. For example, how workers have been paid by digital platforms has evolved over time.

5. Hybrid approaches

Finally, surveys trying to identifying platform workers can use a combination of approaches. For example, a survey could ask whether specific tasks were done using an app or website and then ask about attributes of the reported work. This is the approach that was taken in the December 2024 Module to the Canadian Labor Force Survey to define and identify platform workers.

In the 2024 Canadian Module, for 10 different activities, people were first asked, whether they used an app or website to provide the specified good or service for money. If people said "yes" to any of these activities, they were then asked questions about how the platform operated. These attributes included whether the platform assigned clients to the worker, determined how workers were paid, determined or influenced the price workers received, and whether the platform managed a rating system. Other household surveys such as the 2024 Eurostat survey also collected information on attributes of work (i.e. how platform work is assigned, workers' ability to reject work, how the price charged is set and the proportion of monthly net income earned from

[28] The digital platform questions in the CWS are part of a larger set of questions on contingent work and alternative work arrangements.

platform work.) However, designers of these surveys did not use this information in defining platform workers but rather consider them conditions of work.

The decision about what approach to take to identify digital platform workers is largely independent of, and does not directly address, any of the conceptual questions about defining digital platform workers presented in the previous section. The content of specific approaches taken does, however, embody answers to some of the conceptual questions. For example, when asking about specific tasks done on platforms the types of tasks included will reflect decisions about the amount of labor services necessary to define a worker as a digital platform worker. Asking about attributes of a person's work can incorporate decisions about the amount of control platforms need to have over workers in order for the worker to be classified as a platform worker.

For ease of explication the remainder of the discussion about the choices made to answer the 7 questions outlined above will be illustrated using 5 household surveys. These surveys are 1) the 2017 Collaborative Economy and Employment Survey conducted by the European Union's Joint Research Center (COLLEEM), 2) the 2023 Contingent Worker Supplement to the Current Population Survey- U.S's labor force survey (CWS), 3) the 2024 supplement to the Canadian Labor Force Survey, 4) the 2023/2024 Australian Multi-Purpose Household Survey (MPHS) and 5) the 2022 Eurostat Pilot Module attached to 16 EU countries' and one EFTA country's labor force survey coordinated by the EU statistical office Eurostat.[29] Reference also will be made to questions added to the 2023 CWS for the 2025 administration of the supplement and changes made to the Australian survey for its administration in 2023/2024. Table 1 provides a summary of how each of these household surveys answered the questions presented above when defining digital platform workers along with a description of specific techniques used to measure platform workers. [30]

The COLLEEM was chosen because it was a stand-alone survey specifically designed to measure digital platform workers. The other surveys were chosen because the measurement of digital platform workers has been evolving overtime, and these surveys represent relatively recent implementations of the measurement of digital platform workers.

[29] The 17 countries who voluntarily participated were sixteen EU countries: Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Finland, and one EFTA country, Norway.

[30] The selection of these 5 surveys is not meant to convey that they were the only household surveys conducted or sponsored by National Statistical Offices to implement a measure of digital platform employment. Indeed, an International Labor Organization (ILO) summary of country's practices and approaches to measuring digital platform employment indicates that 40 countries out of the 133 countries that responded to the ILO survey had made efforts to measure the prevalence of digital platform employment prior to 2025. Six of these countries were in the Americas, one was in Africa, 8 were in Asia or the Pacific and 25 were in Europe or Central Asia. Seventeen of the countries in Europe, however, participated in the Eurostat's 2022 pilot, so for these countries there was only one household survey questionnaire (ILO, 2025))

Amount of Labor Services

As was shown above, a key decision that needs to be made when operationalizing a definition of digital platform workers is how much labor services needs to be embodied in the platform employment for a worker to be counted as digital platform worker.

The 5 highlighted surveys are fairly evenly split on where they made the demarcation along the labor services, capital spectrum. Three-the 2023 CWS, the 2023/ 2024 Australian MPHS and the COLLEEM- restricted their definition to people whose platform work involved labor services or labor services with assets.[31] Two -the 2024 Canadian labor force module and the 2022 Eurostat Pilot Survey --included the selling of goods and the rental of accommodations. The Eurostat pilot explicitly tried to measure whether any labor services were involved in these activities. While the Canadian survey instructed respondents to exclude the selling of secondhand goods that are no longer needed. However, for defining who is a digital platform worker the amount of labor services could be minimal in both these surveys as no restrictions on the amount of labor services involved are imposed in their definition of digital platform workers. The 2022 Eurostat Pilot and the 2024 Canadian Survey also collected information about content creators and appear to have included them in their definition of platform workers.

The COLLEEM survey in addition to asking about in person and website on-line platform work also asked if people had ever earned any income from selling goods, renting property, or leasing assets online, Crowdfunding, or lending money on peer-to-peer platforms. Therefore, the COLLEEM survey could have had the most expansive definition of digital platform workers because it could include the provision of financial services. However, the follow up questions in the COLLEEM survey only asked about online and web-based work and these are the only two income sources included in their definition of platform workers.

Platform Control Over Workers

Another set of decisions that have been made is what questions to include about the control platforms have over workers and whether to use answers to these questions in defining digital

[31] Both the CWS and the 2023/2024 Australia survey begin their questions by asking whether people's work involved short-term tasks or projects. This inherently will focus respondents on work involving labor services. The Australian survey also does not include the renting of accommodations or selling of goods in the set of tasks inquired about, although an "other category" is included. The CWS, after identifying platform workers using attributes of the work, has follow up questions explicitly asking whether the previously reported work involved the selling of goods or the rental of property to screen out people involved in these activities. These follow-up questions in the CWS should not be used to obtain a measure of those renting accommodations or selling goods, however, because the structure of the CWS of first asking if a person's work involves short-term tasks or projects likely excludes a large number of these people.

platform workers. In the 5 household surveys being discussed, some of these decisions have been explicit, while others have been implicit.

The 2023 CWS asked whether customers paid through the app or website the worker used to obtain customers (which implies workers are paid by the platform) and whether workers were rated by customers through the same app or website. The answers to these questions were then used in the defining of digital platform workers. These two questions could be indicative of platforms having some control over workers, but it is not necessarily so. Being paid by the platform is not indicative of whether the platform has control over the price a worker is paid, how workers are matched to customers or whether the platform controls workers' behavior in other ways. Also, while customers may rate workers, this is not indicative of the platform using those ratings to control whether and what work people receive. Both the questions about whether customers pay through the app or website and the *existence of a rating system were included in the CWS to identify platform workers based on the intermediary function of platforms, not to measure whether platforms have some control over workers. One could conclude, however, workers where platforms have minimum control, such as workers posting their availability on a website and being paid offline, would be excluded from the CWS definition of platform workers. The 2025 CWS explicitly asked whether the digital platform controls the price or payment workers receive and includes a question about how workers obtain work using the platform (the app assigns it, the worker selects task, jobs or projects, customers choose the worker, or something else). Answers to these questions would provide insight into how much control platforms have over these aspects of digital platform work and could be used to define digital platform workers accordingly.*

In contrast to the 2023 CWS, the COLLEEM survey identified platform workers as only those who had been digitally matched to customers. This could be interpreted as workers being algorithmically matched. If this assumption is true, the COLLEEM measure would be one where platforms have a great deal of control over the worker. In a set of questions about the conditions of work the COLLEEM survey also asked whether the platform constantly monitors a worker and how important the rating system is for a worker obtaining work on the platform that digitally matches them to customers. However, answers to these questions were not used in defining platform workers. If they were, this also would result in a definition of platform workers, where platforms have a large amount of control over workers.

The other 3 surveys highlighted contained *explicit questions about platform controls over workers. However, only researchers at Statistics Canada have used answers to these questions to try to define platform workers (Hardy 2024). The other surveys included the questions to obtain a sense of how platforms operated and as a measure of conditions of work. In addition, what controls platforms have over workers that have been asked about in these 3 surveys has varied.*

The 2022 Eurostat pilot asked how work was assigned, whether a worker was free to reject offers without repercussions, how working hours were set, how the price was set, and whether a

customer rating system influenced the number of assignments workers received.[32] The 2023/2024 Australian MPHS asked a subset of these questions, excluding the question about whether workers are free to reject offers and the questions about a rating system.

If answers to these questions had been used in defining platform workers, the resulting definition of platform workers would have been one where platforms exhibited a large amount of control over workers. However, because they were not, the implicit definition of digital platform workers underlying the 2022 Eurostat pilot, and the 2023/2024 MPHS is quite broad. It is a definition where the platform exhibits no control over workers. A digital platform worker is anyone engaging in work to earn money using an app or Internet platform in at least one of the various tasks asked about.

The December 2024 Canadian labor force module included very explicit questions about the amount of control platforms have over workers. In addition to asking about how workers were paid, the survey included questions centered around *whether the platform determines or influences the price workers receive, manages a rating system, assigns clients to the worker or imposes rules on how a worker can do the work or what the worker can say. Using this information Statistics Canada developed 3 definitions of digital platform workers which they argued varied with the level of control exercised by the app or website (Hardy,2024). Canada's narrowest definition of digital platform workers which they feel embodies platforms having the most control was one where platforms paid workers directly. Their intermediate definition was one where platforms exercised some control over the work process, and their broadest definition was one where platforms did not exercise any control beyond offering a tool for workers and customers to connect.*[33]

Amount of Platform Work (Reference Period),

As noted above, when constructing a survey to measure digital platform workers, survey designers need to make decisions about what reference period to use and whether questions about the amount of digital platform work people engaged in will be included.

The most common reference period used in the 5 surveys highlighted, that also is very prevalent in other household surveys, is the last 12 months. The exceptions are the 2023, and 2025 CWSs which used the last week as the reference period and the 2022/2023 Australian MPHS that used the last 4 weeks. The 2023/2024 Australian MPHS did, however, switch to the past 12 months as

[32] The inclusion of the customer rating system is based on examination of the Finish implementation of the pilot.
[33] It should be noted that platforms directly paying workers does not necessarily imply that the platform has a great deal of control over the worker. Platforms could just be the payment intermediary and not exhibit much control over workers and how they obtain customers. For example, in the U.S. people using Thumbtack obtain customers by setting up a detailed professional profile and paying for a list of tasks to select that match their skills, location and other preferences. At the same time, customers pay workers using Thumbtack and Thumbtack then pays the workers, primarily through Thumbtack Pay, a built in payment system. Payment of workers using Angi is similar, although the process by which workers obtain customers differs some.

its reference period. The COLLEEM also is somewhat of an exception as it initially asked if people had **ever** engaged in digital platform work prior to asking about the last 12 months.

Several of the surveys that used a 12-month reference period also used a second reference period of the last month to ask additional questions. The questions using a monthly time frame included inquiries about hours of work, earnings and conditions of work. The Australian MPHS also used a third reference period of last week – asking if any digital platform work had been done in this week.[34] The exception to the use of an additional reference period for the surveys that used a 12 month reference period is the Canadian Labor Force Survey module which retained a 12 month reference period throughout the survey.

Amount of Platform Work (Consistency and Intensity),

Two of the 5 surveys being highlighted explicitly asked about the consistency and intensity of platform work- the Australian 2023/2024 MPHS and the COLLEEM. Both of these surveys based on the 12-month reference period asked whether people had completed digital platform work: once a week, once a month, at least once every 3 months, at least once every 6 months, or at least once in the last year. They both also asked how many hours per week people usually spent doing platform work, although the COLLEEM survey asked for the last year while the Australian 2023/2024 survey asked for typical weekly hours in the last 4 weeks. The 2022 Eurostat pilot tried to capture the intensity of platform work by asking the number of days platform work was done in the last month for at least 1 hour.

Although additional information was collected in most of the surveys that used 12 months as the reference period, none of these surveys, except the COLLEEM, used this additional information in defining platform workers. Rather, the questions associated with these shorter reference periods were included to measure conditions of work for those identified as digital platform workers using the 12 month reference period. This means in all of these surveys that used a 12 month reference period, except the COLLEEM, the definition of digital platform workers that was chosen was one where the intensity and consistency of platform work was quite low. People who only engaged in platform work for 1 hour in the last year were counted as digital platform workers.

In contrast, i*n a summary report written using data from the COLLEEM one definition that was constructed defined platform workers as those who engage in platform work for at least 10 hours a week in the last year. This definition of digital platform workers is one where consistently engaged in digital platform employment with a fair amount of intensity.*

The 2023 CWS, which used a 1-week reference period, did not collect any information about the consistency or intensity with which workers did platform work. The platform work would have to

[34] The Australian 2022/2023 supplement that used the last 4 weeks reference period to define digital platform workers used last week as the reference period to ask about hours of work, earnings and conditions of work. The 2026 CWS will have two reference periods – last week and last month.

have been engaged in very recently, however, as it needed to be done in the reference *week for at least an hour. Given this structure, the definition of digital platform workers with regards to the intensity used by the CWS is comparatively high -one hour within a short-time period. However, the implicit definition embedded in the CWS imposes no constraints on the consistency of the platform work and thus the definition is quite broad with regards to this factor.*

Amount of Platform Work (Proportion of Earnings)

Whether information about the proportion of earnings a worker derives from platform work was collected in the 5 surveys being highlighted is quite dichotomous. In the 2023 CWS and the Canadian labor force surveys this information was not collected. These surveys are however, able to identify whether digital platform work is a person's main job. Platform work being a person's main job would seem to be indicative of a person earning a sizeable proportion of their earnings from platform work. In addition, if digital platform employment is a worker's main job, the CWS collects earnings on that job. Earnings are also collected for a quarter of the workers whose main jobs do not involve digital platform employment. This allows comparison between the earnings of workers whose main job were platform work and other workers whose main job were not platform work.

The modules to the Australian MPHS, the 2022 Eurostat pilot, and the COLLEEM survey collected the proportion of a person's monthly income that came from platform work. In the analysis of the COLLEEM survey data, the proportion of monthly income derived from platform work is used in the definition of platform workers. Specifically, the COLLEEM's main definition of platform workers is people who earn 50% or more of their monthly income via platforms and/or work via platforms more than 10 hours a week. *For the other surveys that collected this information, the proportion is not used to define platform workers. Rather the information was collected to determine how dependent workers are on their platform work*

Mode of Work/Location and Type of Customer

The decisions about the type of customer and location of work were fairly uniformly across the 5 surveys highlighted. All the surveys collected information for both modes/location of work - in-person platform-mediated work and online platform-mediated work. All the surveys also excluded business-to-business transactions from the measurement of digital platform workers. They also have implicitly assumed that customers are the end users of the goods and services digitally mediated and only workers whose sale of goods or services are directly intermediated by the platform were counted as digital platform workers.

The COLLEEM identified separately those who engaged in in-person work and those who engaged in online work. For the 2022 Eurostat Pilot, the 2023/2024 Australian MPHS, and the Canadian supplement some of the specified tasks have to be done in person (i.e. providing transportation),

but this is not true for all of the specified tasks. Some of the tasks could be provided either in person or online (i.e. tutoring). Consequently, it is not possible to completely determine the location of work for those identified as platform workers in these surveys. The 2023 CWS did not distinguish between in-person or online platform work.

None of the five surveys explicitly set out to determine if a person's platform work was combined with other platform work or non-platform work. In the 2022 Eurostat Pilot, the 2023/2024 Australian MPHS, and the Canadian supplement what was measured was whether someone engaged in one of the tasks specified as platform work. Consequently, it could not be determined in these surveys whether someone was combining platform work with non-platform work involving either the same or different type of activities. For example, physicians who see most of their patients at their offices, but also video consult with a few patients through medical platforms would be classified as digital platform workers. Similarly, people who stocked grocery store shelves as their main jobs, but also delivered food for a digital platform a few hours a week would be classified as digital platform workers in these surveys. The 2023 CWS measured separately platform work on people's main jobs and their second jobs if they are multiple job holders. One thus could determine if people were platform workers on their main job, but not their second job, non-platform workers on their main job and platform workers on their second or platform workers on both jobs. However, if someone on their main job combined both platform, and non-platform work this could not be determined. The main COLLEEM definition of platform workers as people who earn 50% or more of their income via platforms and/or work via platforms for more than 10 hours a week suggests that the COLLEEM captured at least some workers who combine platform work with non-platform work. But the COLLEEM did not measure how or even if workers were combining various types of work.

The Use of Non-survey data

*Another approach to measuring digital platform workers that does not involve household surveys has been undertaken by several Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's), private sector organizations, and academics. Examples of the use of non-survey data to measure platform workers includes analysis of personal credit card transactions (Farrell et al 2016, Farrell et Al, 2018), examination of administrative U.S. tax records (Garin et al 2022, 2024), review of online job postings (*Kassi and Lehdonvirta, 2018*), and analysis of people's online professional profiles (such as LinkedIn) combined with "freelance" marketplace data (Abelwahed, 2025)* .

Regardless, of the source of the non-survey data decisions have to be made about what constitutes digital platform employment and who should be counted as a digital platform worker. In making these decisions, answers to the questions outlined in the conceptual section will be reflected.

When using administrative and private sector data there also can be challenges with regards to changes in tax laws affecting information about platform workers, disentangling and eliminating

duplication when making inferences about the number of workers, and issues related to incomplete coverage of geographic areas and types of workers. [35] Some users of private sector and web scraped data have conceded that while the data is very useful for capturing and assessing trends, the data typically does not provide an estimate of the absolute number of digital platform workers. (Kassi and Lehdonvirta, 2018) Those using non-survey data also can face issues of transparency as the platforms included in their analysis often are treated as proprietary as well as the criterion used to generate the list of platforms included in their analysis.

Overall Definition and responses to conceptual questions

As can be seen from the description of the decisions various household surveys have made with regards to measuring digital platform workers, none of the surveys have implemented the most restrictive definition on all of the factors outlined by the questions presented in the conceptual section. Further, what factors surveys have been strict on has differed. For example, the 2024 Canadian labor force survey emphasized incorporating a measure of platform control in their measure of digital platform workers, while the COLLEEM emphasized incorporating a measure of consistency and intensity of the work. The COLLEEM also seems to restrict their definition of platform workers to those who were algorithmically matched to customers. Those constructing measurements using administrative records, web scraped information or private sector data also do not appear to have imposed a restrictive measure with regards to all of the factors outlined in the questions presented above. Most of these non-survey-based measures, however, do appear to be less restrictive with regards to the intensity and frequency with which workers need to engage in platform employment to be counted as platform workers.

Overall, when explicitly making decisions, many designers have constructed measures that best meet their needs, were constrained by available data or both. Others seem to have implicitly made a decision with regard to some conceptual factors without necessarily considering the desirability or the implications of these decisions for their measure of platform workers.

IV. The Pursuit of a Common Definition of Digital Platform Workers

As can be seen by the above examples, countries, private organizations and academics have adopted a wide range of definitions of digital platform workers and have used a variety of methods

[35] For example, Garin et al, had to deal with a change in U.S. tax laws with regards to the filing of 1099 tax forms. The Oxford Online Labour Index has difficulty determining the number of unique workers in their data as one person could have undertaken many tasks (Kassi and Lehdonvirta, 2018*)*. Coverage issues arose in Europe as many workers who are intermittent digital platform workers fell below the Value Added (VA) tax threshold and thus were not included in the tax data, Coverage issues also arose for the credit card transaction analysis based on Chase-Morgan credit card data as it only included those who had and consistently used a Chase Credit card and live in areas where Chase Banks were present.

for measuring them. These differences lead to the question of whether a common definition or at least a minimal definition of digital platform workers should be developed and promoted.

A common definition does increase comparability of estimates across countries and various studies. It also ensures researchers and policy makers are discussing the same concept. However, a common definition and measurement can restrict exploration of various aspects of platform work, hinder study of underlying labor market dynamics, and preclude analysis of working conditions associated with different types of platform work. A common definition also may fail to recognize cultural, political or legal differences between countries, and could preclude adoption of a concept that best meets the needs of policy makers and researchers residing within a country or a given community.

The conceptualization and definition of many labor force concepts including digital platform employment also can be controversial both domestically and internationally. For example, even the relatively straight forward conceptualization and definition of unemployment has proven to be contentious. For years whether those on temporary layoff or furlough should be considered unemployed or employed has been discussed both within the U.S and internationally.

Although it has not always been the case, currently, in the U.S. those on temporary layoff are classified as unemployed. The justification for this is that by classifying those on temporary layoffs as unemployed the unemployment rate would more precisely measure excess capacity in the labor market, and the measurement of unemployment would more accurately reflect cyclical movements in the economy.[36]

In contrast, countries that follow the ILO recommendations for the measurement of employment and unemployment classify individuals on temporary layoff as employed. This classification is justified based on the notion that these workers remain attached to their employers, and in at least some European countries continue to be treated as employees in terms of rights and benefits.

There also has been a desire by some researchers and policy makers to classify as unemployed workers whose time and skills are not utilized as much as these workers would desire or to construct an unemployment measure that reflects economic or psychological hardship. For example, some want to classify people who are working part time but want to work full time as unemployed. Others with this perspective want to classify people who earn below a threshold amount amongst the unemployed[37]*. While still others consider people who do not hold jobs*

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[36] For example during the COVID pandemic, if those on layoff had not been classified as unemployed, the US unemployment rate would have declined rather than increased; making the unemployment rate less reflective of actual changes in the demand for labor and the economic impacts of the pandemic Differences in the classification of those on layoff, did cause confusion when comparing pandemic effects on unemployment across countries, however.

[37] Measuring Better: Development of 'True Rate of Unemployment Data as the Basis for Social and Economic Policy" Ludwig Institute for Shared Economic Prosperity (LISEP); November 19, 2020

commensurate with their level of education as unemployed.[38] *As the former BLS Commissioner Julius Shiskin noted "…(N)o single way of measuring unemployment can satisfied all analytical or ideological interests" (Shiskin, 1976).*

Given the complexity and rapidly evolving nature of Digital Platform work, developing a common definition could be significantly more fraught with disagreement than the construction of a common definition of unemployment and the unemployment rate. Even the development of a minimum definition of what counts as platform work could be controversial.

For example, because of concerns over the matching process workers who were algorithmically matched to customers were the only type of platform workers considered in the draft ILO Convention on Decent Work that was part of the 114th Session of the ILO Conference on Decent work. For others, this, as even a minimum definition, would be too restrictive (ILO, 2024)

As has been noted throughout this paper, what and how countries and researchers want to define and measure digital platform workers will depend on what questions are trying to be answered and the needs and regulations within a country. Perhaps the best that can be hoped for is that countries and analysts clearly present and document well their definitions of Digital Platform workers and are transparent about what is being measured. Clearly established and well documented definitions and methods for measuring digital platform workers will go far in facilitating the understanding and comparison across countries and studies of the phenomena of digital platform workers.

III. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to lay out some conceptual questions people may want to consider when defining and measuring digital platform workers. These questions include 1) whether the mode/location of work matters, 2) how much labor services needs to be embodied in the work, 3) how much control platforms need to exhibit over the worker customer matching, 4) how much control platforms need to have over the price workers can charge, 5) how much control platforms have over workers use of their platforms to obtain work and how work is conducted, 6) whether the types of customers matter, and 7) how much platform work an individual needs to engage in to be classified as a platform worker *As was illustrated through the examination of the measurement of digital platform workers in five household surveys sponsored by National Statistical Offices, how these questions have been answered has varied considerably. No matter where people land when defining digital platform workers, it is hoped that this paper has brought to the forefront what concepts people are explicitly or implicitly embody in their definition and*

[38] "Talent Disrupted" Strada Education and the Burning Glass Institute; February 2024

measurement of digital platform workers and brought clarity to the discussion of the many complex and varied issues surrounding digital platform workers.

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Table 1 Measurement and Definition of Platform Workers in 5 Household Surveys

		Factors collected for determining Digital Platform Work					Digital Platform Worker Definition	
Survey	**Reference Period**	**Technique Used to Identify**	**Platform Control**	**Activities**	**Location of Work**	**Type of Customer**	**Intensity of Digital Platform Work**	**Proportion of Income from Digital Platform Work**
EU Collaborative Economy and Employment Survey (2017 COLLEEM)	Last 12 months	Asks about attributes	If platform has digital matching If platform monitors performance*, influence of rating on obtaining work*	Labor Services	In-person or online	All types, except for business to business	10 hours per week***	50% of monthly income***
Contingent Worker Supplement to US Labor Force Survey (2023 CWS)	Last week	Asks about attributes	Customers pay through platform, Customers rate workers using platform	Labor Services	In-person or online	All types, except for business to business	1 hour last week	
Australian Multi-Purpose Household Survey (2023/2024)	Last 12 months	Asks about tasks	How work is assigned*, how paid and how price is set*, how hours set*	Labor Services	In-person or online	All types, except for business to business	1 hour last year	
Canadian Labor Force Survey Supplement (2024)	Last 12 months	Asks about tasks then attributes	If paid directly by platform, platform influences price, platform assigns work, platform maintains rating system, platform imposes rules	Labor Services, Rental of Property, Sale of Goods, Content Creators	In-person or online	All types, except for business to business	1 hour last year	
Eurostat Pilot Module (2022)	Last 12 months	Asks about Tasks	How work is assigned*, how working hours are set*, how price set*, consequences of rejecting offers* and if a rating system exists*	Labor Services, Rental of Property, Sale of Goods, Content Creators	In-person or online	All types, except for business to business	1 hour last year	

* This factor does not directly determine digital platform work and is not used to define platform workers. Collected as a condition of work.

** The Canadian Labor Force Survey Supplement (2024) uses three definitions that use platform controls.

Definition 1: Paid directly by platform

Definition 2: Platform controls work process

Definition 3: No control

*** In the 2017 COLLEEM survey a person must do 10 hours per week of digital platform work OR earn 50% of monthly income doing digital platform work