International Labour Organization

Building an understanding of access to grievance-handling and labour dispute resolution mechanisms for platform workers in India



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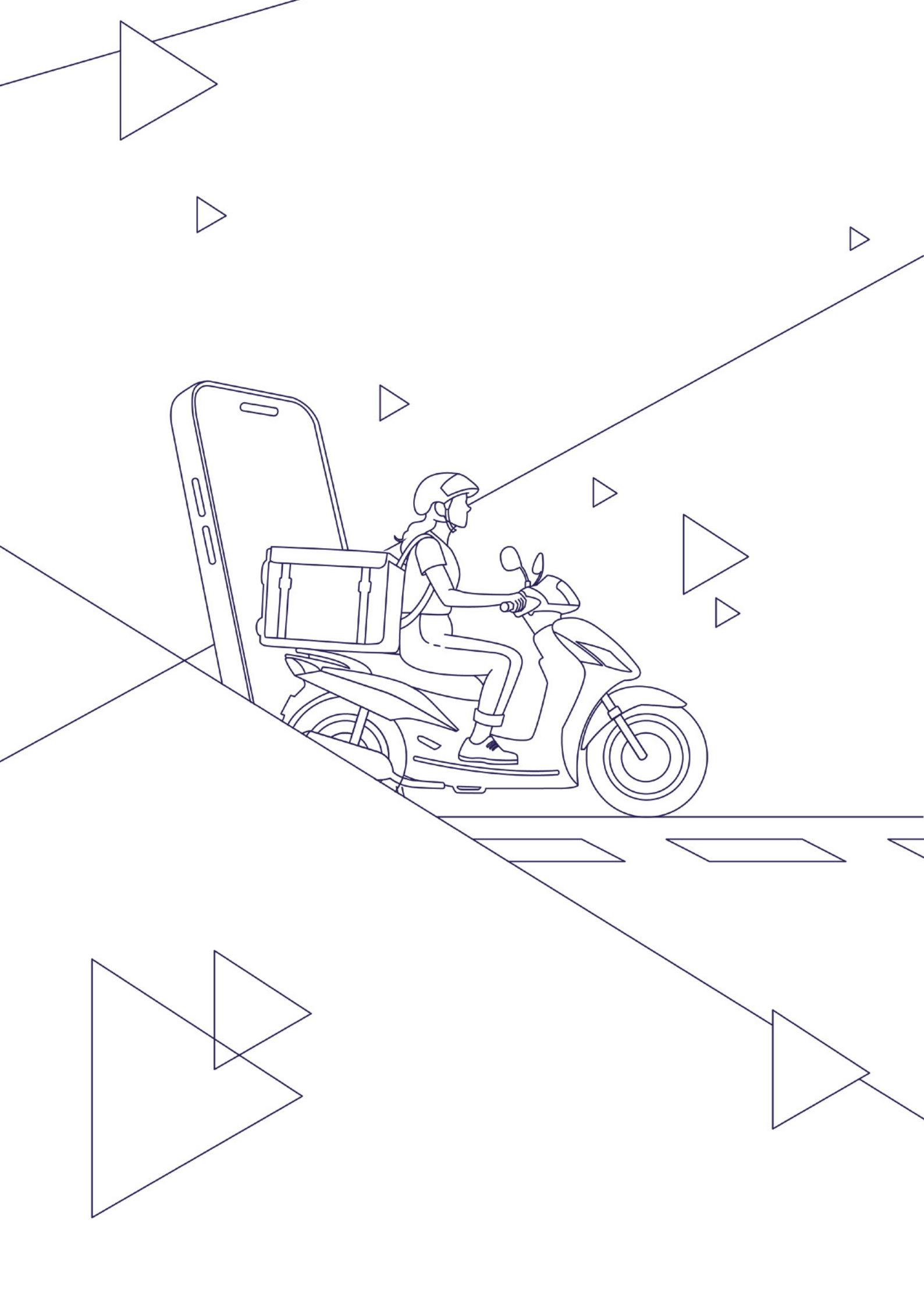


Table of Contents

▶ Introduction

Introduction 01

Rise of platform work in India: scale and significance 02

Why grievance redressal matters: Beyond income and flexibility 03

▶ Objectives

Objectives 07

▶ Methodology

Methodology 09

Methodological challenges and study limitations 10

▶ Key Findings

Types of grievances 13

Financial losses and earnings security 14

Algorithmic and platform management 17

Physical and psychological well-being 21

Basic amenities and social security 24

Platform Support Systems 28

Chat bots 30

Helplines 34

SOS/ Emergency Services 38

Team Leaders/ Fleet Managers/Supervisors 43

Physical Offices 48

Emerging practices and lessons from worker experiences 51

Lessons from earlier platform models and worker experiences 51

Peer networks and collectives as recourse and strategy for workers 55

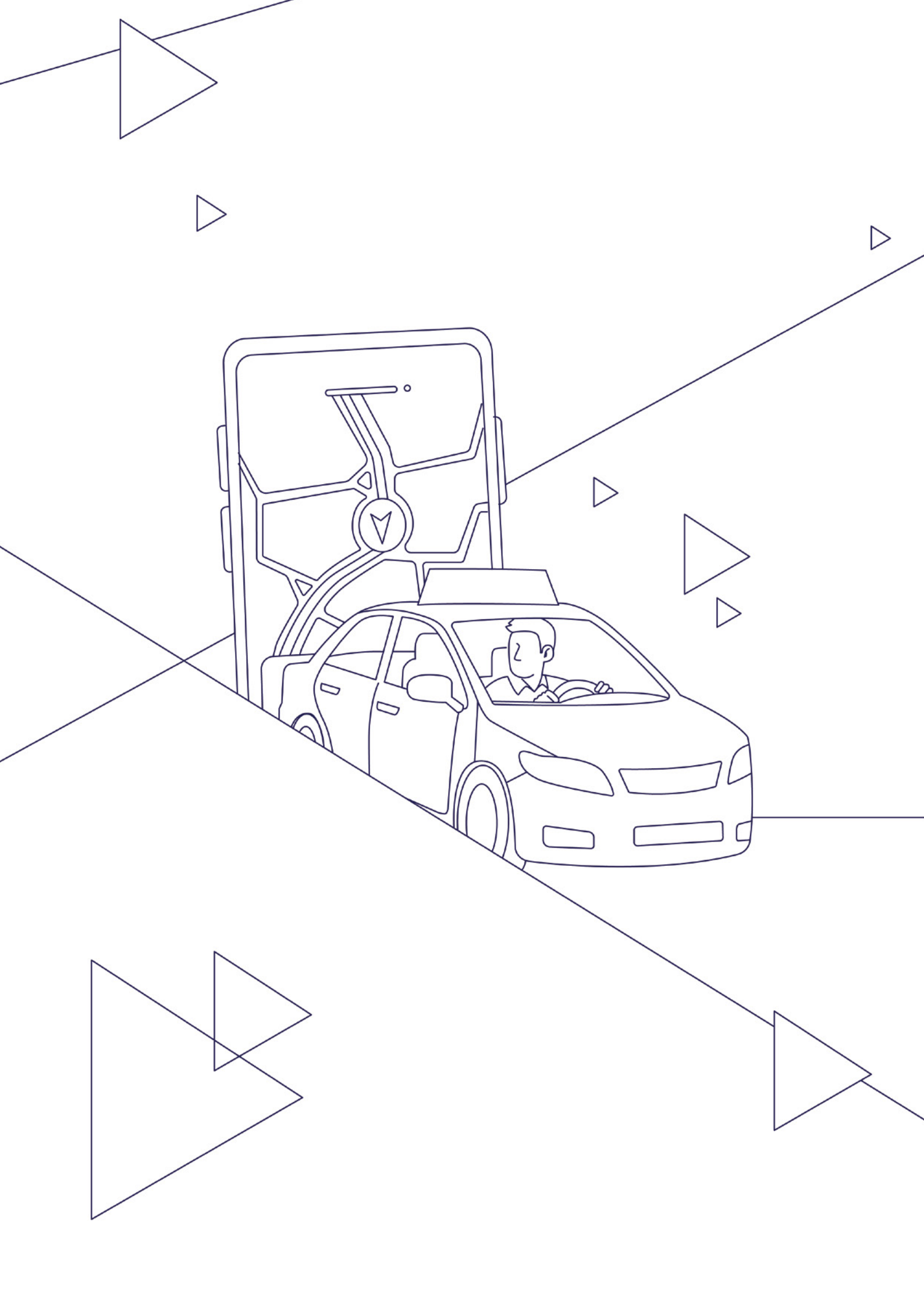


Table of Contents (contd.)

Discussion

Procedural gaps in platform GRM design 61

Allocation of risks between platforms, customers and workers 62

Shift from human-centred GRMs to automated systems 64

Fragmented and fatiguing grievance pathways 65

Gendered dimensions of grievances, safety, and redress 66

Legal and institutional gaps affecting platform-led redress mechanisms 67

Recommendations

Recommendations for Platforms 71

Short Term 71

Medium Term 74

Long Term 74

Recommendations for the Workers' Union 75

Recommendations for the State and Central Government 76

Annexure

Annexure 77

Glossary

Base pay	The fixed or minimum amount paid for completing a task or trip, excluding incentives, bonuses, or surge payments.
Delivery service	A platform-mediated service involving the transport of goods such as food, groceries, or parcels from vendors to customers.
Gig work	A broad category of work characterized by short-term, task-based engagements, often mediated by platforms or intermediaries.
Home personnel service	Platform-mediated services delivered at customers' homes, including maintenance, beauty, care, and domestic work.
Hub	Physical locations where platform workers frequently congregate for work-related activities, including service hotspots and, in some cases, dark stores used for grocery storage and order packaging.
IVR (Interactive Voice Response)	An automated telephonic system that interacts with callers through voice prompts or keypad inputs to route or record requests.
KYC (Know Your Customer)	A verification process through which platforms collect and authenticate identity and documentation details of workers.
Platform worker	An individual who performs tasks mediated by a digital platform and is commonly referred to by platforms using terms such as "partner".
Platform-based work	Work that is organized, assigned, and managed through digital platforms or mobile applications.
QR Code	A two-dimensional barcode that can be scanned to instantly access digital information such as web links, forms, or payment interfaces.
Ride-hailing service	A platform-mediated service that connects drivers with passengers for on-demand transportation.

Acronyms/Abbreviations

CNR	Customer Not Responding
EMI	Equated Monthly Instalments
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GRM	Grievance Redressal Mechanism
GST	Goods and Services Tax
IDI	In-depth Interviews
ILO	International Labour Organization
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
IWWAGE	Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality
KII	Key Informant Interviews
KYC	Know-Your-Customer
PGRC	Partner Grievance Redressal Centres
POC	Point of Contact
QR Code	Quick Response Code
TL	Team Leader

List of Tables

Table 1	Qualitative Sample of the Study	12
Table 2	KIIs with Relevant Representatives from Platforms	13
Table 3	Grievances Handled Via Chatbots	32
Table 4	Integration of Chatbots and Workers' Experience	35
Table 5	Grievance Types Typically Routed Through Helpline Mechanisms	38
Table 6	Integration of Helpline and Workers' Exeprience	42
Table 7	Grievances and Incidents Routed Through SOS Mechanisms	44
Table 8	Integration of SOS Mechanisms and Workers' Experience	47
Table 9	Grievances Typically Routed Through Team Leaders / Supervisors	50
Table 10	Role of Immediate Supervisors and Workers' Experience	53
Table 11	Grievances Typically Raised at Physical Offices / In-Person Support Centres	55
Table 12	Integration of Physical Offices and Workers' Experiences	57

List of Figures

Figure 1	Sector-Wise Grievance Redressal Mechanisms Reported by Platforms	31
Figure 2	Chatbot Mechanisms Reported via Platforms	33
Figure 3	Helpline Mechanisms Reported by Platforms	38
Figure 4	SOS/ Emergency Mechanisms Reported by Platforms	44

List of Case Study Boxes

Box 1	Inefficiencies in Platform Grievance Redressal for Beauty-Service Workers	39
Box 2	Women Drivers on ride-hailing Platforms	45
Box 3	Experiences of Two Women Delivery Workers	51
Box 4	A Model for Worker-Centric Platform Design	61
Box 5	Need for Customer Verification	81


Looking for
rides nearby

Introduction

Work, whether organized or informal, traditional or digital, is rarely devoid of grievances. The ability of workers to raise and resolve such concerns is an important aspect of fair and effective workplaces. In the context of platform work, where work is mediated through digital technologies and algorithmic management, workers may face a range of individual, operational and systemic grievances. Accessible and effective grievance-handling and dispute resolution mechanisms are therefore important for ensuring fairness and transparency and for promoting decent work in the platform economy.

To set the context for this report, it is first useful to offer a working definition of what we mean by a "grievance." Drawing on contemporary scholarship, a grievance in platform work can be defined broadly as a worker's complaint regarding terms of engagement, ranging from pay and safety to discrimination. It specifically encompasses conflicts arising from algorithmic management, such as opaque ratings or deactivation, and social isolation (Wood et al., 2019)[1]. The absence of effective channels for redress has also been identified as a key systematic deficiency (Berg et al., 2018)[2]. This includes complaints related to delayed payment, unfair dismissals, excessive algorithmic control and the absence of safety measures, as well as more subtle experiences, including chronic precarity, lack of transparency, informal or inconsistent communication, or an inability to redress issues due to power asymmetries. What makes a grievance normatively significant is not merely that someone feels aggrieved, but that the grievance reflects, or potentially reflects, a systematic imbalance, institutional oversight or structural deficiency and presents an opportunity to address it.

In this sense, grievances do not simply point to isolated incidents; they are signals of underlying patterns. And when these signals are systematically collected, documented, and responded to, they present the potential for enhanced rectification, regulation and redressal. In the context of platform work, robust and structurally supported processes for identifying and effectively addressing grievances can contribute significantly to creating more productive, equitable, transparent and dignified working conditions.

> In this sense, grievances do not simply point to isolated incidents; they are signals of underlying patterns.

1 Wood, Alex & Graham, Mark & Lehdonvirta, Vili & Hjorth, Isis. (2018). Good Gig, Bad Big: Autonomy and Algorithmic Control in the Global Gig Economy. Work, Employment and Society. 33.

2 Rani, U., Berg, J. & Furrer, M. (2018). Digital labour platforms and the future of work: Towards decent work in the online world. ILO.

▶ Rise of platform work in India: Scale and significance

In recent years, platform work in India has emerged from the fringes to occupy a central place in the national employment landscape. The 2020 report by NITI Aayog titled "India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy"[1] underscores the growing importance of gig and platform work in India's labour market. According to this report, in 2020–21, approximately 7.7 million workers were engaged in the gig economy, representing roughly 1.5 per cent of the total workforce and 2.6 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce. The report further projects that by 2029–30, the number of gig workers could rise to 23.5 million, making up about 4.1 per cent of total livelihood and 6.7 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce. This rapid expansion reflects not only the increasing demand for flexible, on-demand services but also broader shifts in the organization of work, consumption patterns and technology-enabled delivery of services. The proliferation of digital platforms, whether for ride-hailing, food or grocery delivery, home services, logistics or retail, has dramatically expanded the range of services accessible via these platforms.

It is important to note that "platform-based work", which is work mediated through digital platforms and apps, is a subset of the broader phenomenon of "gig work." The latter can include offline arrangements, traditional contract labour, freelance engagements, and other non-conventional labour formats. Platform-based work, however, has distinct features (including algorithmic management, digital interfaces, real-time coordination and the promise of high flexibility) that amplify both the opportunities and the risks associated with it. As platformization deepens, it brings to the fore a range of structural and governance challenges that conventional labour frameworks were not designed to address.

As more types of services are offered, consumer demand for these services grows, and the number and geographical reach of platforms increase, there has also been a commensurate growth in the number of gig workers affiliated with these platforms. As platform-based work scales up, it is vital to examine the working conditions under which these workers operate, the vulnerabilities they face, and the adequacy or inadequacy of mechanisms available to them for redressal of grievances.

Fortunately, scholarly and policy interest in the working conditions of platform workers has increased in parallel with the growth of the sector. Globally, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has taken concrete steps to respond to the challenges posed by the platform economy. In March 2023, the ILO Governing Body decided to place an item on decent work in the platform economy on the agenda of the 113th and 114th Sessions of the International Labour Conference (2025 and 2026) for a standard-setting discussion[3]. This process reflects the growing attention within the ILO to decent work challenges and opportunities in the platform economy. Decent work, as defined by the ILO, does not merely refer to employment per se, but to employment that guarantees fair income, security, health and safety, the possibility of social protection, freedom from exploitation and discrimination, and opportunities for social dialogue and collective bargaining. In this context, the present study is timely, as national and international standards are actively being shaped. Mapping these gaps and practices can contribute evidence to ongoing policy discussions on decent work in the platform economy.In India, too, the legal and policy architecture is gradually adapting. The implementation of the four Labour Codes has established a national statutory framework that recognizes gig and platform workers as distinct categories. The Code on Social Security, 2020, explicitly recognizes gig and platform workers and provides a framework for extending appropriate social security measures to them. Momentum is also building in states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala and

3 Since the completion of this research, the International Labour Conference, at its 114th Session, adopted the Decent Work in the Platform Economy Convention, 2026 (No. 193) on 12 June 2026, the first international labour standard specifically addressing decent work in the platform economy.

Telangana, which have also taken steps towards developing regulatory and policy frameworks for gig and platform workers, although their scope and legal status vary. The current alignment of state-level and national policy, laws, international normative commitment, and growing scholarly focus provides a pivotal moment for a systematic assessment of the real-world grievances of platform workers, the extent to which these grievances are being addressed, and the redressal mechanisms most likely to advance decent work in the platform economy. Several of the recent state-level laws have introduced provisions that explicitly address grievance redressal, including the establishment of grievance appellate bodies where the state assumes a mediating role and workers can formally raise complaints. These steps are significant, yet the scope of what constitutes a "grievance" within many of these laws remains narrowly defined, and it is still unclear whether industrial disputes will be addressed within the same framework. At the national level, the labour codes currently do not have any detailed guidelines on grievance redressal mechanisms for platform workers. As discussed later in this report, gaps in the recognition and protection of freedom of association constrain workers' ability to engage in collective action and bargaining, raising important questions about the effectiveness of these emerging frameworks.

▸ Why grievance redressal matters: Beyond income and flexibility

It may be tempting to view gig and platform work primarily as a labour model offering flexibility, supplementary income, or part-time employment options. These features can indeed offer value. However, platform work also comes with a range of associated risks such as unpredictable income, excessive algorithmic control, lack of transparency, absence of social protection, absence of collective bargaining power, opaque disciplinary mechanisms, including deactivations or suspensions and limited recourse for workers.[4]

Effective grievance-handling mechanisms would help address worker concerns, thereby contributing to more constructive and sustainable working environments. If grievances are taken seriously, documented and acted upon, they can provide feedback loops for systemic reform, policy correction and restructuring of platform work practices, which, in turn, would contribute to enhanced productivity and stability. Moreover, the manner in which grievances are redressed reflects the willingness of all stakeholders, including platforms, governments, workers' collectives, consumers availing themselves of services from the platforms, civil society and researchers, to recognize and respond to ground-level realities and experiences. This joint commitment is essential to strengthening decent work practices in the platform economy.

This study highlights the extent to which everyday grievances shape not only the livelihoods but also the dignity, security and aspirations of platform workers. Accordingly, this report does not treat grievances as abstract anomalies but as lived experiences, and grievance redressal processes as important institutional mechanisms that need to be assessed and strengthened. A core focus is the critical evaluation of existing grievance redressal mechanisms. This involves assessing their inclusivity, accessibility, and ultimate effectiveness. It traces potential enablers and barriers to reporting grievances, such as language, educational disparities, digital skills, disability and technological familiarity, which may create unequal opportunities for workers to seek redress. It also scrutinizes the role of algorithmic management in these processes to assess whether the design acknowledges the full spectrum of grievances or filters and prioritizes only a select subset. The mechanisms themselves invite

4 Mondal, B., Sharma, P., Chowdhury, A. & S, A. (2025) Changing World of Women's Work: Navigating the Possibilities and Precarities Within Platform Work. IWWAGE.

inquiry, and we therefore consider grievances that may arise from the redressal processes themselves, including concerns regarding their opacity, consistency or perceived bias. The analysis also extends to the appropriate locus and scope of redress. We examine grievances that necessitate platform-level resolution, as well as those that point to broader systemic issues requiring policy intervention, regulatory change or other measures to address their underlying cause. This leads to an examination of the roles and responsibilities of different actors, particularly the State. The study also considers the respective roles of platforms, government and other stakeholders in supporting effective grievance-handling and dispute resolution.It analyses both worker perspectives and platform responses on this critical issue. Given women's position and the sectoral and occupational segregation replicated in platform work, the study also attempts to evaluate the need for targeted or differentiated redressal approaches for women. The study also interrogates the very definition of a grievance within these systems: what constitutes a valid complaint or an "emergency," and whether the design of redressal mechanisms accommodates nuanced, non-quantifiable harms or is limited to measurable issues. Ultimately, the study seeks to determine whether recurring grievance patterns point to broader systematic issues that may require responses beyond improvements to grievance mechanisms In seeking to address these interconnected issues, the study is guided by the following objectives.



Objectives

The study seeks to generate nuanced, evidence-based insights into the grievance redressal ecosystem available to platform workers in India. Focusing on six major cities – Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Trivandrum and spanning key platform sectors (ride-hailing services, delivery services and home personnel services), the study aims to understand both the institutional design of existing mechanisms and lived realities of workers who rely on them. The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- **Develop** a comprehensive profile of existing grievance handling and labour dispute resolution mechanisms available to platform workers across selected sectors and cities in India, including those operated by both platform companies and relevant government bodies.
- **Examine** the design, operational realities, accessibility and scope of these mechanisms to understand how they function in practice, particularly from the perspective of diverse stakeholders. The assessment drew on principles reflected in relevant ILO guidance on dispute prevention and resolution, including dialogue, fairness, objectivity, transparency, clarity and accessibility of the mechanism, as well as timely and effective redress.
- **Capture and analyse** worker experiences in navigating existing grievance redressal systems, identifying perceived effectiveness, limitations and key barriers to access, paying specific attention to gender and intersecting factors such as socio-economic status, region and migrant identity.
- **Explore** how algorithmic management practices affect the nature of grievances raised and the pathways for resolution, highlighting areas of opacity, accountability and vulnerability.
- **Highlight** critical challenges within the current ecosystem and identify any emerging good practices that offer potential for strengthening redress mechanisms.
- **Provide** actionable, evidence-based recommendations to improve the fairness, transparency, accessibility, effective implementation and functionality of grievance handling systems for India's growing platform workforce.



Methodology

To fulfil the aforementioned objectives, the study adopted a qualitative research design to capture nuanced and in-depth perspectives from platform workers, aggregators, union representatives, academics and legal experts. A comprehensive desk review was undertaken to contextualize the study and inform the development of primary data collection tools. This review synthesized existing literature, relevant legislation, policy documents and ILO guidelines related to grievance redressal and dispute resolution in platform work.

Given that platform operations and regulatory environments vary substantially across geographies, the first step involved mapping and distinguishing the platform ecosystems across the selected cities. The major platforms across all sample cities were categorized into three sectors: (a) delivery services, (b) home personnel services, and (c) ride-hailing services. These sectors were chosen because of their significant scale of operation, distinct service models and the diverse range of worker grievances that naturally emerge from their differing operational logics. Worker participants were identified primarily through national and state-level unions, allowing us to reach both unionized and non-unionized workers, while deliberate efforts were made to ensure the representation of women workers.

FGDs served as the core method for capturing the diverse realities and experiences of platform workers across sectors and cities. Semi-structured discussion guides were developed and tailored to reflect variations across sectors (ride-hailing, delivery, and home personnel services), gender, union affiliation, and other relevant demographic or experiential markers. Approximately 40 per cent of participants in the study were neither members nor affiliates of any union. Furthermore, the participation of women in each city and sector was ensured during the FGDs. Each FGD explored:

- Common types of grievances
- Pathways workers use to seek redress
- Perceived fairness, accessibility, timeliness, and clarity of existing mechanisms
- Gender-specific experiences, especially safety and harassment
- The influence of algorithmic management on the nature and outcomes of grievances

To understand organizational intent, operational design and internal perspectives on grievance handling, KIIs were conducted with representatives from major platforms. These included individuals from public policy teams, grievance or support operations, and communications roles. Additional KIIs with union leaders, legal experts, academics and civil society members helped triangulate findings and provide broader structural insights.

> This study highlights the extent to which everyday grievances shape not only the livelihoods but also the dignity, security, and aspirations of platform workers.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the qualitative sample, including FGDs, IDIs and KIIs across all cities.

Table 1: Qualitative sample of the study

Cities	Ride-hailing workers (FGD/IDIs)	Delivery workers (FGD/IDIs)	Home personnel workers (FGD/IDIs)	KIIs with unions, academicians, legal expert
Ahmedabad	1 FGD	1 FGD	3 IDIs	-
Bangalore	2 FGDs	2 FGDs	1 IDI	-
Delhi	1 FGD	1 FGD	1 IDI & 1 FGD	1 KII
Hyderabad	5 FGDs	2 FGDs	1 IDI	1 KII
Mumbai	3 FGDs	1 FGD	1 FGD & 1 IDI	3 KIIs
Trivandrum	4 FGDs	3 FGDs	(No operation)	-
Total	**16 FGD**	**10 FGDs**	**2 FGDs & 7 IDIs**	**5 KIIs**

Table 2: KIIs with relevant representatives from platforms

Ride-hailing	1 KII
Parcel Delivery	1 KII
Food Delivery	1 KII
Home Personnel	1 KII

> While deliberate efforts were made to incorporate women's perspectives, including through targeted IDIs to supplement women's participation, representation of women remains uneven across sectors and cities.

▶ Methodological challenges and study limitations

While the study adopts a rigorous qualitative approach, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged:

1. Workers in the home personnel services sector often operated as isolated individuals dispersed across households, making it difficult to bring them together for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Due to the nature of their work—highly individualized, geographically scattered and time-bound—coordinated group participation was not feasible in most cities. As a result, In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted instead. While these interviews provided rich and detailed insights, they limited opportunities for shared reflection and collective comparison within this segment.
2. Non-unionized workers were more difficult to reach systematically and were therefore contacted indirectly through union referrals. The limited representation of workers operating entirely outside collective structures may have introduced selection bias.



3. Certain sectors, particularly ride-hailing and delivery, remain highly male-dominated, leading to gender imbalance in FGDs. While deliberate efforts were made to incorporate women's perspectives, including through targeted IDIs to supplement women's participation, representation of women remains uneven across sectors and cities.

4. The study was unable to engage with relevant government departments involved in labour regulation or grievance oversight due to the limited time period of the study and unavailability of the relevant government officials during that period. This restricted the ability to triangulate worker and platform perspectives with regulatory viewpoints.

5. The scale of fieldwork varied across cities because of differences in the presence of platforms across sectors and variations in worker availability (for example, greater access in Hyderabad and Mumbai and lower access in Ahmedabad). Although this variation still allowed for thematic saturation, it may have influenced the comparative depth of insights across locations. The findings should be seen as qualitative insights into the experiences and practices reported by study participants and should not be interpreted as representative of all platform workers or platforms in India.


LATE!

Key findings

The section is structured to first categorise the primary types of grievances encountered by platform workers to establish the challenges workers face, then examine how platforms address these through their support mechanisms. This grievance-to-response mapping aids in revealing worker experiences and gaps in current systems, paving the way for discussion of evolving best practices in grievance redressal, and concludes with the critical role of peer networks and collectives as complementary recourse strategies for workers.

▸ Types of grievances

Understanding the nature and scope of grievances experienced by platform workers is a critical precursor to examining the effectiveness of existing grievance redressal mechanisms. Platform workers face unique challenges that stem not only from traditional labour issues but also from the complexities introduced by algorithmic management and the platform business model. Based on the experiences reported by workers participating in the study, grievances were grouped into four broad categories:

1. **Financial losses and earnings security:** This includes concerns reported by workers relating to loss or instability of earnings, commission structures, cancellation-related penalties and losses, uncompensated additional work, costs incurred in carrying out assignments, deductions, changes in the availability of work, and declining per-service earnings.

2. **Algorithmic and platform management:** This category includes concerns relating to the allocation of tasks, account/ ID suspension or deactivation, working-time requirements and consequences for declining gigs, changes in platform policies without prior information, customer cancellations, and the implications of ratings and reviews for workers' access to work and earnings.

3. **Physical and psychological well-being:** The concerns relating to physical demands of platform work and work related stress, including carrying heavy equipment, exposure to medical emergencies or accidents, health and safety risks, customer misbehaviour or harassment, time and performance pressures, rating requirements, and penalties or accusations perceived as unfair, is being covered in this category.

4. **Basic amenities and social security:** This category addresses broader structural challenges. Chief among these is the limited access to social security, even as policy frameworks and welfare initiatives are being developed and gradually implemented for gig and platform workers in India. In addition, operational and environmental hurdles such as adverse weather conditions, technical glitches on digital platforms and job cancellations caused by personal emergencies compound these vulnerabilities.

A comprehensive understanding of these grievance categories not only underscores the multi-dimensional challenges faced by platform workers but also lays the groundwork for assessing how adequately current redressal systems respond to these issues.

1. Financial losses and earnings security

The primary motivation for many workers to join platforms stems from their prior experience in the same service industry, especially visible in ride-hailing and home personnel services. Workers expressed the notion of increasing their earning levels and/or getting access to more work through platforms as key driving factors for the shift. Workers, particularly from the delivery sector, also informed that the mere absence of any alternative income source led them to join platform work.

According to participants, grievances related to earnings and financial security were among the most prominent concerns raised during focus group discussions and interviews.These grievances encompass a range of issues that vary in intensity and manifestation across different service sectors. Common concerns include low and unstable earnings, disproportionate platform commissions and additional out-of-pocket expenses that reduce net earnings. The study has distilled these experiences into key grievance themes while also highlighting sector-specific differences, illustrating the complex and heterogeneous nature of financial challenges faced by platform workers.

Whether in delivery, ride-hailing, or home personnel services, workers describe a growing mismatch between the effort and expenses required at work and the income they ultimately receive.

Delivery services: Delivery workers consistently describe a sharp erosion in their earnings structure over the past few years. Many point to a steady decline in per-order rates, where payments for trips spanning several kilometres have fallen to nominal amounts that do not reflect the effort, time or rising operational costs involved. Two key factors are reported to drive this: the algorithm (discussed in detail in the next section) that determines how work orders are assigned, and the increasing number of workers joining the sector. This squeeze becomes even more pronounced during peak hours, periods once associated with higher incentives but now often yielding little additional income. When combined with escalating fuel prices and overall increases in living costs, workers reported that the gap between what they spend to stay productive and what they take home has widened markedly. Workers also point out that mandatory purchase of platform-branded materials, such as uniforms, delivery bags or other required accessories, further reduces their effective take-home pay, intensifying the mismatch between earnings and rising costs. This was expressed by a Delivery worker in Trivandrum,

> **"Platforms charge for everything including t-shirts, bags, helmets and raincoats. They are asking us to pay prices higher than the market rates. It is for their branding. In case our t-shirt is torn, we have to compulsorily pay to get it renewed"**

Further, delivery workers can face financial instability due to policies around customer cancellations. A long trip can result in only partial compensation for their time and travel, and in some cases, no payment at all if a customer is unresponsive or cancels at the last minute. Workers note that after travelling significant distances, receiving zero payment is a disheartening outcome. This is especially punitive in "Customer Not Responding" (CNR) scenarios.

Workers described the protocol for establishing a customer's unavailability as elaborate and time-consuming, sometimes taking up to an hour. According to participants, following this protocol and, in some cases, making a return trip can result in no compensation for the time and travel involved. They perceived this as leaving them to bear the costs of time and travel associated with an order that was ultimately cancelled.



Another delivery worker from Hyderabad shared,

> **"Sometimes, when the customer falls asleep, they won't pick up our phone. Then, we have to raise a ticket 'Customer Not Responding', then we wait for 10-15 minutes to get connected to a customer service executive. Then, the customer executive calls the customer repeatedly. Eventually, when there is no response, that is when the order gets cancelled and we have to return the same to either the hub or restaurant. Sometimes, all of this back and forth takes up 45-60 minutes for just one order. What happens to my time that has been wasted?"**

Further, workers reported that the reduction in base pay, which they often cited as having nearly halved compared to earlier rates, has affected their daily income security. As a result, workers feel compelled to extend their working hours, frequently working 12–14 hour days simply to meet minimum household expenses.

Delivery workers for grocery services often navigate demanding expectations from customers, ranging from requests to bring groceries directly into kitchens, to facing abrupt or hostile reactions over minor misunderstandings. These pressures are intensified by the time-sensitive nature of their work: missed calls, sudden changes in customer availability and long detours frequently result in return trips to the hub, for which no fuel compensation is provided. Workers note that such situations leave them absorbing not only the emotional toll but also the direct financial cost of wasted travel and uncompensated work.

Ride-hailing services: Compared with sectors like delivery, where earnings are predominantly dependent on per-order rates, ride-share work appears relatively more stable due to fewer hyper-short tasks. However, drivers still operate within what they described as an increasingly strained economic model. Many entered the sector when fuel costs were lower and fare structures and availability of gigs were more predictable, but rising petrol prices have not translated into proportional adjustments in driver payouts. Instead, workers note that drivers' share per trip has not kept pace with the rising cost of living and the increasing expenses of operating a vehicle. This mismatch creates persistent financial pressure, particularly for those managing large vehicle loans. Many have invested in high-value vehicles, often through substantial loans, on the expectation of stable earnings, yet the returns from each trip have not kept pace with these financial commitments. Additionally, the number of available gigs has declined gradually as more workers have joined the sector. Moreover, a considerable share of their fares is absorbed by GST, platform commissions and a range of service fees, leaving drivers with only a fraction of the nominal trip value. As a result, workers find themselves navigating a system in which their costs increase steadily, while the mechanisms determining their pay remain opaque and largely unresponsive to their economic realities. This was also echoed by a worker in the ride hailing sector from Hyderabad,

> **"The current pricing system should be removed. There needs to be standard rates. Earlier, there were fixed rates per kilometres, we were happy with that. Even so, the return fare was the same. Now, there is no stability. We only get Rs. 200 from the airport to the city. From that amount, parking charges, GST, service tax, fuel cost are deducted further. We get very little money in hand."**

Home personnel services: Home-based service workers describe a deep sense of disillusionment with how platform policies have evolved over time. Many entered the sector when platforms actively promoted images of high and reliable earnings. Over the years, however, these earnings have quietly eroded, with workers reporting that they feel misled and unprotected. Workers emphasize that a major component of the reduction in their earnings are the costs they are required to bear personally: travel to clients' homes, purchasing and replenishing kits, and navigating long, often exhausting commutes between bookings. After accounting for these expenses, many report being left with only a small fraction of what customers pay.

A beauty and salon worker from Hyderabad shared,

> **"If there is a booking for Rs 1000, the commission is almost up to 35%. If one deducts the cost of the product and travel, then there is nothing left for me. I have to take a very long detour to my booking address and travel. I feel that there should be some kind of fixed income for my travel expenditure."**



This financial burden is intensified as many of these platform workers have invested in service-specific kits and products, often through loans encouraged by platforms, with the expectation of regular, profitable bookings. But when health issues or low demand arise, workers find themselves unable to use these products and are left with outstanding Equated Monthly Instalments (EMIs) and interest payments. Workers also reported that attempts to return unused products or seek refunds are often unsuccessful, leaving them responsible for items they cannot practically use. This mirrors the experience of delivery personnel as well, who also face mandatory deductions for platform-branded materials. This was also expressed by a worker in the home personnel sector based out of Ahmedabad,

> **"In any case, if a new person joins the company, then they have to purchase up to 40000 worth of products and tools. When I joined, I had to do the same. However, two months later, the platform informed me that I needed to purchase a new product as the previous one had been discontinued. I informed them that I still have a lot of remaining product and I haven't earned much from it. What should I do? Should I throw that product away?"**

Focus group discussions reveal that the burdens experienced by women in this sector are often compounded by their household responsibilities. Many of these workers were single mothers or the sole earners in their families, which heightened the impact of income instability and unexpected costs. For them, every unpaid detour, rejected refund, or compulsory deduction directly affected household essentials such as rent, school fees, or medical expenses.

1.1 Cancellation-related losses and customer non-responsivenes

Workers described an asymmetry in the consequences of cancellation. While customers can cancel a service by paying a cancellation charge, workers may still bear the costs of travel and lost time. Beauty workers explained that customers can cancel a service at their doorstep by paying a cancellation charge, leaving the professional without compensation for the journey. Conversely, workers who need to cancel because of a genuine emergency, safety concern or logistical problem, such as a vehicle puncture, may face financial penalties or account restrictions. A delivery worker from Hyderabad shared,

> **"When I tried to take a longer route, I spoke to the customer, but they canceled the order. I lost two hours because of that. The restaurant got their food back, the customer got their refund, but my time, the effort I spent, wasn't counted."**

Another delivery worker from Trivandrum shared,

> **"Another issue is when customers don't respond. When such instances happen, we have to raise a ticket. This can result in connecting us with the customer care executive. We will have to then wait for them to connect with the customer. Sometimes in between all of this the said customer cancels. Then we have to return the order but we don't get any incentive. Be it 8 km or 10 km, I have even covered 16 km to give a return order but I didn't receive anything."**

Workers highlighted a perceived imbalance in how the costs associated with cancellations and customer non-responsiveness are distributed. In the cases described by workers, a substantial share of the time and travel costs associated with cancellations was borne by the worker, raising questions about how such risks are equitably allocated.

2. Algorithmic and platform management

Workers across platforms described algorithmic systems as having a significant influence on how work is allocated and managed, with implications for predictability and autonomy. These challenges are interconnected and unfold along several dimensions.

2.1 Random allocation of work and opaque algorithms

Workers across sectors repeatedly emphasize that they have little clarity on why some workers receive a steady stream of tasks while others wait idly for hours. Delivery workers often watch colleagues receive back-to-back orders while they remain without work, despite being logged in at the same time and place. Workers perceived inconsistencies in the allocation of work, particularly where incentive structures were tied to high volumes of completed tasks. Many workers reported that only a small fraction qualify for such bonuses, while the majority were unable to reach the incentive threshold. This was expressed by Delivery workers in Hyderabad who stated,

> **"There is no transparency on rides/ pickups. There are riders who have been sitting idly for more than an hour and some who get back to back work. The rider who is able to complete more rides gets the incentives. Only 1 percent of riders actually get incentives. Riders drive up to 48 hours continuously especially during festivals, sacrificing their time to get those incentives. But there is no transparency in how these rides are offered."**

System failures and data glitches further exacerbate this opacity. Workers recount multi-day high-intensity shifts during festival seasons being rendered meaningless when the app failed to record rides correctly. In moments of heavy rain or peak congestion, workers often find themselves stranded at multiple pick-up points with no support or orders, but still bearing the cost of time and fuel.

For home-service personnel, the algorithmic mismatch takes the form of long-distance assignments. Workers are sometimes allocated bookings far from both their homes and designated hubs, drastically increasing unpaid travel time. In some cases, the platforms have also encouraged signing up for auto-assigned bookings. However, workers reported that this model of automation could limit their ability to choose or decline individual jobs, feeling they should accept the tasks assigned by the system.. Workers felt that such practices create a sense of being controlled by the system rather than working autonomously, thereby limiting flexibility. A home-personnel worker from Hyderabad shared,

> **"My hub has been changed to Manikonda which is 12 kms from my house and they (platform) have started giving me work in places that are 10 km away from my house. This has increased my travelling time and distance a lot. Sometimes, the booking is allotted further away from the hub increasing my daily distance immensely."**

2.2 Time pressure and operational expectations

Workers across the study locations described time pressure as a significant feature of platform work, although its effects vary across sectors. Delivery workers report that they face strict delivery-time expectations that undermine real-world travel conditions. Even when the app estimates a longer travel time, workers may still be penalized for failing to meet shorter platform-determined targets. Workers reported that such time pressures could push them to speed through traffic, potentially increasing the risk of accidents. This was shared by a delivery worker from Hyderabad who stated,

> **"The platform decides the time taken to deliver an item in a time ranging from 5 to 10 minutes. Sometimes, even google maps shows that the actual travel time is 10 minutes and yet they expect us to complete the delivery in 7 or 8 minutes, We lose points in case the order gets delayed. When we reach the customer's location, it's not necessary that the customer is available or picks our call instantly. In those cases, the order gets delayed."**

Home-service workers experience time pressure in a more physical and logistical form, carrying heavy equipment across long distances, climbing multiple floors with multiple bags, and managing customer frustration when delays occur due to traffic or previous appointments. For instance, a beauty worker from Hyderabad shares,



"Sometimes I get late because of traffic. However, the customers want the beautician to come at the right time because they have other things to do and they tend to lose their temper. I have to really increase my speed but I am also carrying so many bags. I have a bag in each of my hands and one on my back. Sometimes, I have to carry them for 3 floors carefully so that they don't fall."

In both sectors, workers repeatedly highlight that variations in customer responsiveness, delayed answering of calls, unavailability at the address or last-minute cancellations were sometimes treated as the worker's responsibility, even when the delay was outside their control. Workers perceived this as affecting their trust and morale.

2.3 Limited flexibility for workers

While flexibility is often emphasized as a primary advantage that platforms promise to offer, the day-to-day reality for many workers can be more constrained. Home-service personnel, for instance, report that the system offers little accommodation for personal emergencies, illness or family caregiving needs. The standard procedure often requires them to be at the job location before they can formally cancel, with account suspension being a potential consequence after exceeding a low threshold of cancellations. This creates a particular strain for workers managing family responsibilities, who may feel compelled to work even when unwell to protect their livelihoods. A home-personnel worker from Ahmedabad shared,

> **"We can only call the customers one hour before the job. In case the customer doesn't pick up the call, we cannot cancel the booking. We have to reach the customer's address and keep calling the customer three times at an interval of 10 minutes each. If the customer still doesn't pick up, we can finally cancel the booking. We can only cancel up to 3 times**

in a month. If we cancel our bookings more than three times, our account gets blocked."

A home-personnel worker from Hyderabad shared,

"In case I fall sick or someone in my family is unwell or has passed away, I will have to cancel the booking. But with a limited number of cancellations, I am expected to work even in emergencies. How can anyone continue to provide service and how can anyone make it compulsory to work. The option of flexibility has been removed from the platform now."

For delivery workers, the situation is similarly restrictive, though it manifests differently. Because missed peak hour slots, cancelled orders or breaks can result in loss of pay, workers reported having little choice but to work longer hours to make up for income gaps. As a result, the much-touted flexibility becomes inextricably linked to extended and often exhausting workdays, not out of preference, but out of necessity. In practice, the freedom to choose one's hours is overshadowed by the constant pressure to stay online to secure enough orders to meet basic expenses. Delivery workers from Hyderabad shared,

"The platform is misleading as it claims daily earnings of Rs. 3,600 but doesn't specify the number of hours that one has to work in order to achieve the same."

2.4 Platform's policy changes without notice

A recurrent theme across focus groups is that platform policy changes are often communicated with limited transparency and inconsistent application. Workers report being surprised by the sudden introduction of new penalties, adjustments to incentive structures or new requirements, such as providing video evidence for disputes. These updates frequently place additional responsibilities on workers without corresponding support in the form of training, dedicated tools or safeguards against potential disputes. This creates a sense of uncertainty, where workers feel the rules governing their livelihoods can change with little advance notice, making it difficult to plan and adapt effectively.

2.5 The weight of rating systems

Ratings play a critical role in shaping workers' income and opportunities across sectors. However, the systems behind these scores are often unclear, with workers having limited insight into how ratings are calculated, weighted or can be formally addressed. In home-service platforms, workers reported that even one negative review can lead to a noticeable decline in future bookings, including in situations where the issue stemmed from factors outside the worker's control, such as customer misunderstandings or technical errors. Workers observed that high-performing colleagues often received little support when facing negative feedback that they considered unwarranted, which can lead to discouragement and decisions to leave the platform. A beauty worker from Hyderabad shared,

"We go to so many customers and not all of them misbehave. But there are some who do, in such instances the platform should listen to our appeal. I get so many five-star ratings for my work and it is only when fifty people give such a rating that my overall performance improves. But one poor rating can simply take away my five-star rating and affect my performance so far."

Workers hailing from the ride-hailing sector in Hyderabad shared how ratings affect their work allocation and are highly influenced by customer temperament. They said,

"After completing around 1,100 rides, I've received two single-star ratings and one four-star, while the rest are five-star. Still, my overall rating drops. Because of that, I get fewer bookings now. Earlier, I used to get four rides quickly after going online, now I barely get one."

"My recent low ratings are for very minor reasons. One customer forgot his shoes in my car and gave me a one-star rating. Another customer wanted me to go to the airport and kept insisting, "Drive faster!" But that road had speed cameras and ₹1,000 fines. Still, he only paid ₹400 for the ride and rated me low because I didn't overspeed."

Within delivery platforms, metrics like the "perfect order", which prioritizes speed and minimal customer contact, can set a challenging standard. Workers note that their ratings can be negatively affected by delays at restaurants, traffic conditions, adverse weather or prioritizing safe driving practices. Many express concerns that important benefits, incentives, and their continued access to work are tied to these performance metrics, which often involve variables they cannot directly influence. Workers reported that the rating system significantly influences their daily decisions and strategies.

2.6 Perceived subjective behaviour of supervisors and frontline staff

Gendered dynamics present distinct challenges within the delivery sector. Women workers report that their concerns are sometimes not adequately addressed by team leaders, and they have experienced instances of dismissive communication. In certain situations, women described needing to appeal directly to male supervisors to have their accounts reinstated, a dynamic that highlights the potential for gendered gatekeeping (see Box 3).

Across sectors, a common perception among workers is that frontline support systems tend to prioritize customer perspectives and policy adherence, sometimes at the expense of considering worker safety, fairness or dignity. When complaints remain unresolved or interactions at service hubs are perceived as dismissive, the lack of a reciprocal feedback channel can leave workers feeling exposed and without reliable recourse. For instance, delivery workers from Delhi shared a mixed review of the support received from their Team Leaders (TLs),

"Team Leader (TLs) help in the sense of creating rider IDs. Creating more IDs helps them get recognition or promotion. The more riders stay active under their store or zone, the better their performance looks. If the store performance drops, their promotion gets cancelled. So they try to maintain a good rider count."

"I had an order from Dilshad Garden to Gokulpuri village. The delivery time was late in the night and the area was unsafe. I was waiting for the customer and finally contacted the support staff requesting them to cancel the order. The order got cancelled but a cancellation fee of Rs. 400 was levied on me. On top of this, I didn't receive any incentive. I spoke to my performance manager who got the cancellation fee removed and the offer restored. It really depends on their personal attitude. The Team Leaders have authority to fix a few things but it depends on their mood. Sometimes they don't support any riders."

2.7 ID blocking and concerns regarding procedural fairness

The possibility of account deactivation is a significant concern for workers across all platform sectors. In home-services, for instance, workers operate within strict performance rating bands[5], where changes in ratings could affect their account status, including potential deactivation. This creates considerable emotional and financial strain, as workers describe the distress of losing their primary income without clear justification and the difficulty of appealing such decisions once access is revoked. A home-personnel worker from Ahmedabad shared,

> **"The product rating needs to be 100. This includes all the products offered by the platform for which customers rate them. Additionally, service rating needs to be high. If this rating drops below 4.8 (out of 5), an individual gets blocked."**

Workers reported that performance issues or delays were frequently met with measures they perceived as disproportionate rather than supportive guidance. For long-term workers, particularly women with over five years of service, workers perceived this practice as abrupt and dismissive of their contributions.

Within the delivery sector, account deactivation can occur following minor customer disputes, including the refusal of assignments perceived as unsafe or economically unviable, or misunderstandings at partner restaurants. Some workers shared experiences where confrontations with restaurant staff led to complaints that were acted upon by the platform without a full review of their perspectives. Workers reported that such experiences contributed to a sense of reduced agency and persistent anxiety about their account status. This was echoed by delivery workers from Hyderabad who shared,

> **"The platform has informed us to record a video of hostile situations especially in cases we feel threatened by the restaurant or customer. However, when someone attempts to do the same, restaurants complain against that rider. This happened to me. Despite having the evidence, my ID got blocked."**

3. Physical and psychological well-being

3.1 High physical and mental effort

Across home personnel, ride-hailing and delivery platforms, workers reported high levels of both physical and mental strain. The structure of platform work - customer-dependent, time-bound and tightly linked to ratings - intensifies their burden. Workers across sectors describe a constant state of strain, arising from physical exhaustion, emotional vigilance, and anxiety about blame, performance and income loss.

Workers in home-based personnel services reported some of the most intense overlaps of physical burden and psychological pressure. Traffic delays, stringent appointment timings, and



5 Workers described tiered performance systems, for example gold, silver and bronze categories, although the criteria and thresholds varied across platforms.

customer temperaments create additional anxiety on an everyday basis. Many workers describe rushing through tasks, managing simultaneous physical strain and emotional pressure to satisfy customers. In the beauty and salon segment, beauticians and massage therapists communicated difficulties with carrying multiple heavy bags containing waxing kits, pedicure tools, heaters, and folding tables/stools, often amounting to 6–7 kg per service. They climb multiple floors, work in cramped spaces, or even stand throughout sessions when clients cannot provide seating. Alongside the physical load, they remain hyper-alert inside customers' homes to avoid accidental damage or accusations of theft, particularly of valuables like jewellery. One worker associated these health problems with the physical demands and stress of her work and shared,

> **"We have to do so much running around and so much hard work. There is so much stress. After joining the platform, I have developed Spondylitis and Migraine because of this kind of work and tension that comes with it."**

> **"I have become extra careful during my service and I make sure that the customer doesn't leave anything valuable around me as they tend to blame me in case they lose it. Even after the service, I make sure that they check everything before I leave so that they don't blame me later. This way I am tension free."**

Delivery workers consistently reported performing high-intensity physical labour, compounded by long shifts and heavy workloads. They recounted delivering ration bags weighing up to 20 kg per household, often carrying multiple bags per delivery, travelling distances of up to 14 km, and climbing to upper floors without elevators. Despite the physically demanding nature of this work, any damage to goods, often caused by packaging, handling or transport, was frequently attributed directly to workers, creating a constant fear of penalties or verbal abuse from customers or supervisors. A delivery worker from Hyderabad shared,

> **"Practically speaking, even if the order is for Rs. 10. The customer expects us to climb as many floors as possible. We have to deliver the order to their doorstep."**

Beyond the inherent pressure of time-bound service and customer ratings, workers also contend with the cognitive and emotional strain of constantly monitoring multiple platforms to secure work. For delivery and ride-hailing sectors, where tasks are not auto-assigned, missing a booking by even a few seconds can mean losing the job altogether, intensifying competition, uncertainty and everyday stress. Along these lines, a woman driver from Hyderabad shared,

> **"The three apps are like biscuits; everyone jumps the moment a ride appears. All apps are similar in those ways. If I miss a ride by even one second, the app displays a message that the customer is picked by another person. I am always on my mobile phone and I need to act fast. In that short moment, I also need to quickly calculate whether the ride will pay enough or not."**

Workers also face anxiety about being late due to traffic or delays in previous jobs, as customer frustration can directly affect their ratings, incentives and, consequently, their earning potential. The combination of intense manual work and customer-facing risk leaves workers operating in a climate of persistent fatigue and psychological pressure.

3.2 Customer misbehaviour and perceived unreasonable expectations

Customer misbehaviour and perceived unreasonable expectations emerged as a major source of grievance across home personnel, ride-hailing and delivery sectors. Workers frequently reported stress, humiliation and even economic loss resulting from customer actions that they perceived as placing them at a disadvantage in platform work.

In-home personnel services workers described intrusive surveillance, suspicion and disrespect during in-home visits. Customers often

demanded explanations for every product or step, questioned the authenticity of tools, or refused to let workers leave until they were fully satisfied. Workers also reported situations where customers imposed unrealistic expectations or blamed workers for circumstances outside their control. Such encounters left workers emotionally drained, eroding their sense of dignity and security. A home-personnel worker from Mumbai shared,

> **"Even when customers appear polite, they closely monitor every step of the service. One client repeatedly interrupted the session to inspect products, questioned their authenticity after checking online reviews, and refused to relax, making it difficult to complete the service smoothly."**

Among ride-hailing workers, customer aggression and unfair complaints were recurring issues. Drivers reported being verbally or physically abused and receiving penalties from platforms when customers raised grievances, including cases where they felt they were not at fault. Technical glitches or inaccuracy in pickup locations often triggered disputes, with drivers losing income through fines, rating drops or fare deductions. Drivers also reported constant fighting with customers over fares, sometimes over as little as Rs 10. When a customer refuses to pay the increase in fare due to a traffic-related route change, drivers end up personally absorbing such losses. For instance, a driver from Hyderabad shared,

> **"Even after dropping a customer at the correct pin location, they may insist on being taken further. If I refuse, they can complain that I behaved badly. But when drivers rate customers, the process is long and rarely leads to action, while customer complaints are acted on immediately. That's the difference."**

In delivery services, the central grievance is the forced doorstep delivery mandate. Customers frequently demand that workers climb multiple flights of stairs, even when elevators are available. Compounding this strain, housing societies often prohibit delivery workers from using the lift, creating a contradiction between customer demands and building rules that wastes the workers' time. Workers reported complying because of concerns about negative ratings or order cancellation. A rider from Mumbai shared,

> **"We also deliver large water bottles, sometimes up to 20 litres, and are expected to carry them to customers' doorsteps even when there is no lift and the address is on the fifth floor. In some housing areas, despite having the lift they strictly mention that delivery boys are not allowed"**

Another rider from Trivandrum shared an experience of facing a customer's wrath for reasons beyond their control,

> **"Once, when I was delivering food, I got stuck in traffic which delayed the order. Eventually when I delivered, the customer opened the order in front of me and threw it at my face because of the delay."**

3.3 Safety and dignity

Workers across platforms raised concerns about safety and dignity about how worker safety is balanced with customer-service and delivery requirements. For instance, delivery workers are of the view that platforms prioritize the order above all else, exemplified by their concern over whether the "order was damaged" even after the worker has been in an accident. Workers also reported feeling reduced to their association with the company brand rather than being addressed by their names by both the platforms and customers. A delivery worker from Mumbai shared,

> **"The platform doesn't care. No matter if it's raining heavily or the area is flooded, once you pick up the order, you have to deliver it. Even if we're drowning, we still have to deliver. The customer comes first.**

Even if you meet with an accident or get hurt on the road, they only care about the customer's order. Even if we say we've met with an accident or are in the hospital, they'll still ask, "Was the order damaged?"

Home personnel workers face heightened vulnerability as their work occurs inside the customer's private residence. Workers reported instances of harassment, including being held against their will. A recurring dignity concern was being denied basic facilities, especially access to washrooms. Workers described completing long, demanding services without being permitted to use the restroom, leaving them distressed and often forcing them to refrain from drinking water. There have been cases of mismatch of gender in service bookings. For instance, male customers booking services under a female name, creating unsafe situations for women workers who arrive expecting a female client. Workers from the beauty and salon sector in Delhi shared,

"I think it is a huge risk for the customer and for the beautician. If I have a booking and something happens to me on the way or at the location, who will take responsibility for my safety?"

Similar safety concerns arise in ride-hailing. Drivers are often subjected to verbal abuse, threats and physical violence. Several reported being beaten or even sued by customers simply for not allowing pets into the vehicle, even when such restrictions are permitted by platform policy. The threat of sudden deactivation forces workers to tolerate unsafe and disrespectful behaviour, reinforcing a system where customer preference overrides worker dignity.

4. Basic amenities and social security

Platform workers, particularly those who spend most of their working hours on the road or move continuously between households, depend heavily on public infrastructure for their daily functioning. However, across cities, workers repeatedly report the limited availability of even the most basic amenities. Access to clean and safe public restrooms, charging points for electric vehicles, reliable internet connection, sheltered waiting areas, affordable parking spaces and designated spots to eat meals remains inadequate. These concerns reflect long-standing issues associated with working conditions in the informal economy. Yet they gain a renewed urgency in the context of platform work, where time spent navigating public spaces directly shapes earnings, safety and dignity.

4.1 Infrastructure challenges for platform workers

Both state institutions and digital platforms share responsibility for supporting workers who keep essential urban services functioning. Yet, workers describe a persistent gap between expectations and reality. Many express that while platforms set performance standards and maintain detailed data on worker mobility, they do not invest sufficiently in improving day-to-day working conditions. The lack of safe and accessible restrooms is a significant concern, especially for women. Women in cab-sharing and delivery sectors, for instance, speak about challenges encountered during their menstrual cycles when adequate sanitation facilities are unavailable. Such constraints create discomfort and raise safety concerns, often limiting women's mobility and shaping where, when and for how long they can work. A female cab driver from Delhi shared,

"Using a washroom is a big problem, especially during periods. I usually go to a petrol pump, but it's not clean and smells very bad. Many times, I just avoid going and keep driving till the evening. I also stop drinking water so that I don't have to use the toilet. Sometimes petrol pumps or multiplexes allow us to use the restroom, but often they don't give the keys unless we call the helpline number the government has provided."

Similar challenges arise for workers relying on electric vehicles, who must identify and pay for charging points scattered unevenly across the city. Workers also noted the absence of safe spaces to rest or eat, leading many to take breaks on pavements, fuel stations or other informal locations that lack basic safety and comfort. Workers' accounts point to gaps in access to basic amenities in the urban environments in which they work. Overall, workers reported that limited access to public infrastructure affected their dignity and contributed to the challenges they faced while working.

4.2 Absence of social security and health-related vulnerabilities

Despite several platforms reporting that they offer social security schemes or operational benefits, such as internet access and charging facilities required for work, workers considered these provisions inadequate in relation to the physical demands of their jobs. Across different types of platform work, workers reported experiencing health-related vulnerabilities that they associated with the nature of their tasks, the expectations set by platforms and the longer hours required to secure adequate earnings.

In the home-personnel services sector, women workers describe a range of recurring health issues, including cervical pain, spondylitis, tennis elbow and frequent migraines, which they associated with carrying heavy equipment, performing repetitive movements and travelling to distant neighbourhoods for appointments. Similarly, ride-hailing partners report long hours of driving, which resulted in back pain, eye strain and fatigue. Delivery workers, meanwhile, reported more immediate physical risks, with many recalling accidents linked to time-bound deliveries, traffic congestion or weather-related challenges. Platforms' incentive structures and route-optimization systems can unintentionally reinforce the need for speed, creating added pressure on workers who are already navigating unpredictable urban traffic.

The environmental conditions in which delivery workers operate further heighten occupational risks. In cities with extreme climates, workers spoke of difficulties working during heatwaves, heavy rainfall, harsh winters, and, in certain locations such as Delhi, severe pollution levels. These conditions may pose immediate risks, such as dehydration, respiratory challenges and reduced visibility, and may also have cumulative health effects over time. Many workers emphasized that the necessity to remain active for long hours each day, often for six or seven days a week, leaves little room for rest or recovery. As a result, the physical toll of platform work remains a central concern, with workers feeling that existing social security provisions do not adequately address the nature or scale of these vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are further compounded by the conditional and performance-linked nature of platform-provided social security. A home-personnel worker from Hyderabad shared,

> **"Our insurance depends on ratings. If your rating is 4.8, you're in the silver category; above 4.9, you're gold. Only workers in the gold category get health insurance for their family. If your rating drops even because you're unwell, you lose that benefit. When I fell sick with a high fever and needed hospitalisation, they told me I would only get the insurance if I kept working. But if I am not well, how can I work? I needed the support they had promised, but I got nothing."**

Similarly, in the delivery sector, workers from Delhi highlighted how platform benefit systems seem heavily gamified, with access to social security tied to performance scores that many felt were difficult to achieve.

> **"They've made three categories - Bronze, Silver, and Gold. In Bronze, you only get basic insurance; in Gold, even your family is covered. Your category depends on delivery speed, efficiency, and other points they track. Earlier, 75 percent was enough for Gold, but now it's 85, which feels almost impossible to reach."**

4.3 Barriers to accessing insurance and emergency support

While some platforms have introduced insurance schemes covering accidental injuries, health emergencies, and, in severe cases, loss of life, workers consistently highlighted challenges in accessing these benefits when needed. Many workers reported that while the existence of insurance is often mentioned during onboarding, the practical details of filing claims, the documentation required and the conditions covered are not clearly communicated. As a result, workers depend heavily on peers for information, creating uncertainty and increasing the risk of misinformation.

The process of claiming insurance or reimbursement is often described as time-consuming and opaque. For workers whose earnings are structured on a daily basis, delays in accessing financial support following private medical treatment can become a major burden. Out-of-pocket expenses, particularly following accidents, pose significant challenges and workers state that platforms rarely provide immediate assistance during emergencies. Some workers also shared experiences in which accidents were not acknowledged promptly or follow-up support was inconsistent. For serious accidents, workers described instances in which they struggled to receive compensation or where data related to the incident was reportedly unavailable or inaccessible. Additionally, workers highlighted that the reimbursement-based design of platform-provided insurance requires substantial upfront payments and effectively excludes many low- and middle-income workers from accessing care. For instance, a delivery worker from Mumbai shared,

> **"If you go to a private hospital, they say the treatment will be reimbursed, but only up to a fixed amount. Anything extra has to be paid by the driver. A surgery that costs three lakh rupees means we have to arrange one lakh ourselves. Most drivers are from middle- or lower-middle-class families and cannot arrange that kind of money suddenly. That is why many go to government hospitals, but for that, no reimbursement is given."**

Government-led schemes such as e-Shram are frequently mentioned by platforms as mechanisms intended to expand social protection. However, workers expressed confusion about what e-Shram offers in practice, how benefits are structured and whether the scheme addresses the specific risks associated with platform-based occupations. The lack of clear, streamlined and accessible information reinforces feelings of exclusion, leaving workers uncertain about the reliability of the support available during moments of crisis.

4.4 Limited understanding of social security and unaddressed long-term needs

Across sectors, workers felt that the prevailing approach to social security remains limited in scope and does not address the broader needs of a workforce that is increasingly dependent on platform work as a primary livelihood. Women, in particular, highlighted the need for paid leave, maternity benefits and forms of support linked to care responsibilities. Many noted that while the flexibility associated with platform work is often emphasized, it does not translate into entitlements that would allow them to manage periods of illness, caregiving duties, or childbirth without losing income. Workers' accounts highlight how insurance coverage is narrowly defined, inconsistently implemented, and often inaccessible especially when workers fall ill or require care. For instance, a delivery worker from Bangalore shared,

> **"Whether an accident is accidental or not, it should be covered under insurance. I faced this myself when I went for an eye check-up. I submitted all my bills, but the managers ignored them. We spend 10 hours a day on the road, so falling sick or developing health problems is natural. But they simply tell us, 'No, leave it."**

Workers engaged in ride-hailing and home-personnel services also emphasized that platform work is not transitory for many. A significant proportion of workers, including those in middle

age, have been associated with major platforms for close to a decade or more. Despite this long-term engagement, they reported the absence of any provision for pensions, provident funds, or retirement support. For individuals who have invested years of their working lives in building platform-based services, the lack of avenues for long-term financial security signals a substantial gap in current policy frameworks. Even in cases of severe injury, workers reported that work-related accidents were met with limited coverage, forcing them to rely on collective action to secure support. A delivery worker from Trivandrum highlighted,

> **"We had to go on strike for a fellow woman rider who met with a serious accident while on duty. A truck ran over her legs and she needed multiple surgeries costing about eight lakh rupees. The platform was only providing two lakhs. Because she was injured during work, we had to protest to get support."**

Overall, workers' experiences indicate that social security is often understood as limited in scope, with workers identifying gaps in coverage for health, income security, long-term financial security and gender-specific needs. These accounts point to the need for social security arrangements that take greater account of the diverse and evolving needs of platform workers.

Workers engaged in ride-hailing and home-personnel services also emphasized that platform work is not transitory for many.

▶ Platform support systems

As platforms have expanded in scale and geographical reach, grievance redressal has increasingly been embedded within digital infrastructures. From the platforms' perspective, automated systems such as in-app chatbots enable standardization of grievance intake, help manage large volumes of complaints and allow uniform documentation and routing across locations. Compared to decentralized, human-led models, these systems were described as reducing variability in responses, limiting discretionary decision-making, and facilitating quicker triage of routine or time-sensitive issues.

Within this rationale, the assessment of grievance redressal mechanisms in the platforms examined is not limited to their formal presence in platform policies, but is grounded in workers' lived ability to access, navigate, and receive responses from these systems in practice. Access is shaped by the visibility of the mechanism during or after a work episode, the ease with which it can be reached through in-app interfaces as opposed to physical offices, and whether its use requires additional resources such as travel, stable internet connectivity, or prolonged waiting periods.

However, equally significant are the time, effort, and risks associated with raising grievances through automated systems. Workers reported having to contend with multiple procedural steps, documentation requirements and delayed responses, which may require them to step away from income-generating work. Their willingness to engage with these mechanisms is also influenced by perceived downstream consequences, such as rating impacts, account restrictions or changes in work allocation, as well as by their expectations of whether a grievance will ultimately be acknowledged or resolved, expectations shaped more by past experiences and peer knowledge than by formal platform assurances.

Platforms across service categories have developed different grievance redressal mechanisms (GRMs), each shaped by the nature of work and the operational model of the sector. While all platforms have gradually incorporated chat-based systems within their apps, the



availability of human support, through helplines, supervisors, or physical centres, varies widely. Some services rely primarily on digital pathways, while others offer layered options that combine automated and human-assisted resolution. Mapping these mechanisms helps illustrate not only the formal design of support structures but also the diversity of access points available to workers across ride-hailing, parcel delivery, food/grocery delivery and home personnel services. The following section describes these existing mechanisms across various platforms and highlights worker experiences around them. Identifying these aspects in tandem helps highlight how the mechanism works and the current functional gaps.

Among the platforms examined,grievance-redress mechanisms were designed as parallel channels, with chatbots, helplines, SOS features, team leads and in-person offices formally presented as distinct modes of support. However, it is also informed that chat-based systems and indirect helplines are closely intertwined and often function as linked components of a single escalation pathway.

While all platforms have gradually incorporated chat-based systems within their apps, the availability of human support, through helplines, supervisors, or physical centres, varies widely.



1. Chatbots

Across all three service types, platforms have increasingly integrated chat-based grievance systems within worker-facing applications. These systems are typically embedded within the "Help Centre" or "Support" section of the app and operate through rule-based or AI-assisted chatbots. Workers initiate a grievance by selecting from a predefined menu of issue categories, which structures the complaint into standardized inputs. Once a category, such as payment discrepancies, order cancellations, or account-related queries, is selected, the chatbot triggers an automated, step-by-step workflow designed to collect relevant information and documentation. These chatbots are usually available in major regional languages pertaining to each state.

These workflows often prompt workers to provide short textual inputs, select sub-categories, or upload screenshots or photographs, with the stated objective of streamlining backend processing and reducing the need for manual triage. In a few cases, the system generates a unique reference or "ticket number," enabling the platform to log, track and route the grievance to the appropriate internal team or automated resolution pathway. Updates on the status of the grievance are communicated through automated notifications within the application, and tickets are typically closed once the system registers the issue as resolved, either through predefined rules or backend confirmation.

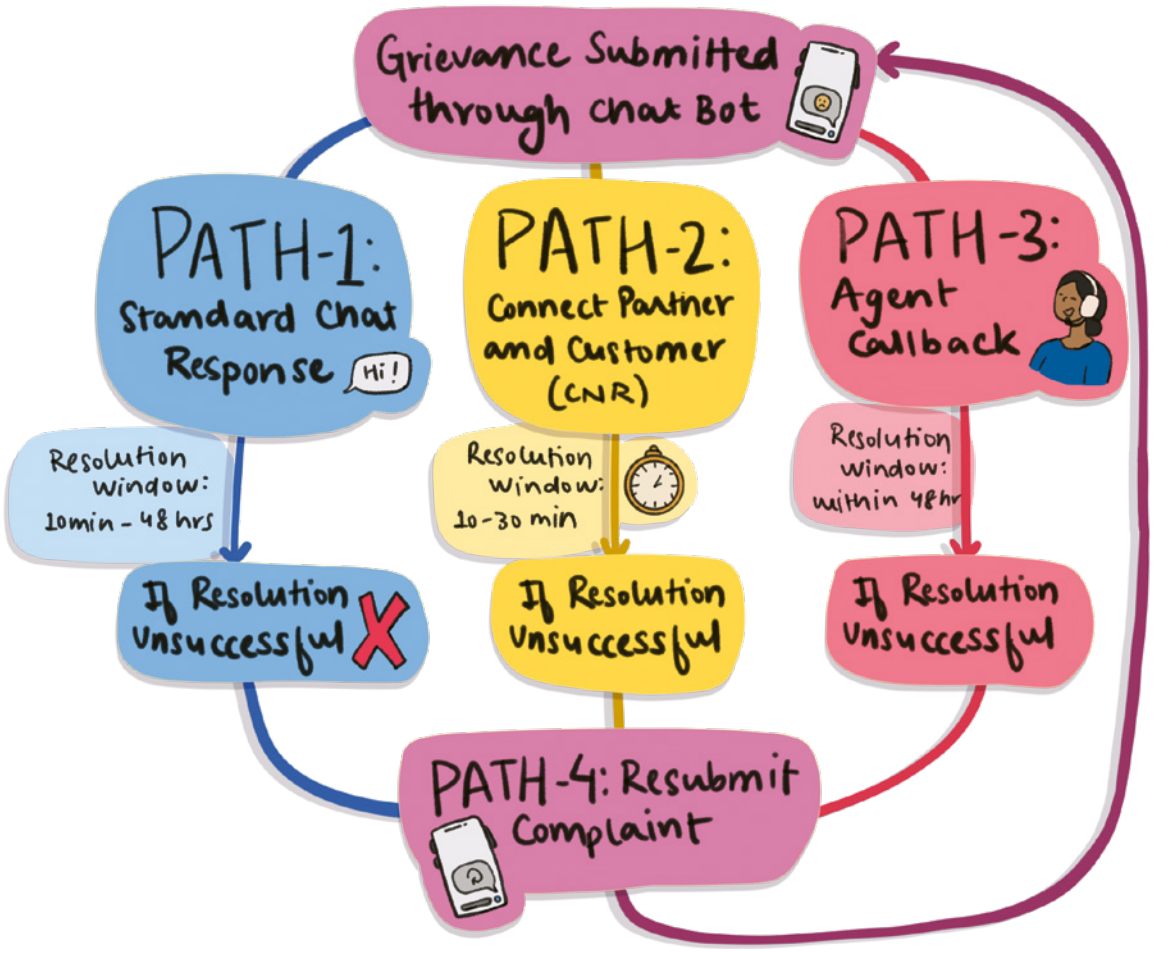
Chatbot-based grievance systems are widely positioned as the primary channel for routine grievance resolution across platform types. However, their functional role within the overall grievance architecture varies by sector. In food and grocery delivery platforms, chatbots are often integrated alongside other support channels and may operate as one of several entry points into the grievance system. In contrast, for home-based service platforms, chatbots frequently function as the central interface for grievance initiation across both pre-service and post-service stages. While additional human-assisted mechanisms such as helplines or escalation teams may exist, these are typically layered above the chatbot system and accessed only under specific conditions or escalation thresholds, positioning chat-based systems as the foundational layer of platform grievance management.

Among the platforms examined, workers were presented with the following list of categories under which they could raise grievances:

Table 3: Grievances Handled Via Chatbots

Grievance Category	Illustrative Issues Handled Through Chatbots
Payment and earnings	Incorrect payouts, missing incentives, delayed payments, fare or fee disputes
Order or task-related issues	Customer cancellations, order reassignment, incorrect job details, task completion disputes
Account and access issues	Account suspension, login problems, profile verification, document updates
Ratings and feedback	Low ratings, negative customer feedback, rating corrections
Incentives and bonuses	Eligibility disputes, incentive calculation errors, campaign-related queries
Scheduling and availability	Slot allocation issues, forced log-outs, availability restrictions
App or technical issues	App crashes, GPS errors, order visibility problems
Policy and compliance queries	Platform rule clarifications, warnings, deactivation notices
Customer-related concerns	Misconduct reports, payment refusal, order disputes
Insurance and incident reporting	Accident reporting, damage claims, insurance eligibility queries

Chatbots often serve as the initial interface through which grievances are recorded, while indirect helplines (discussed in the next section), which typically function through callback mechanisms, are activated following the generation of a ticket or the fulfilment of certain system-defined criteria. In these configurations, helplines tend to operate not as standalone points of entry, but as subsequent stages within a broader, connected grievance pathway. This linkage reflects an integrated design in which automated and human-assisted channels are intended to complement one another, with chat-based systems facilitating the routing and prioritization of grievances before human intervention occurs. As a result, although platforms maintain multiple grievance channels in parallel, movement between automated and voice-based support is frequently structured through chat-based interactions, shaping how and when workers are able to engage with human support.



1.1 Functionality and worker experiences

As chat-based grievance systems have expanded across platform services, a number of recurring design patterns in their functioning have become evident. These patterns shape how grievances are raised, processed, and resolved, and influence the extent to which different types of issues can be effectively addressed through automated interfaces. According to participating platform representatives, such systems are designed to enable speed, consistency and scalability. Workers, however reported that their structure can also introduce constraints, particularly for grievances that are complex, system-generated or context-specific.

1.1.1 Digital and textual literacy requirements

The effective use of chatbot-based grievance systems presupposes a certain level of digital and textual literacy. Workers are required to navigate app interfaces, identify appropriate grievance categories, follow multi-step prompts and articulate concerns through short textual inputs. In delivery services, where platforms often rely heavily on app-based support, this requirement is especially pronounced. Some platforms have introduced limited accessibility features, such as a function that reads out menu options or prompts aloud, but beyond this, few alternative modes of support are available. As a result, workers with lower literacy levels or limited familiarity with digital interfaces may face greater difficulty in engaging with the system, particularly when grievances require nuanced explanation. This was highlighted by ride-hailing workers in Hyderabad,

> **"Everything happens through the app's automated system. Around 90% of drivers can't even use that properly. The app only allows us to choose from preset options; we can't explain our issues in detail. So, communication between drivers and the company is almost zero, especially in Telangana. Very few can actually reach them."**

1.1.2 Layered menus and platform-defined urgency

In the platform examined, chatbot interfaces typically operate through multiple layers of options nested within broader categories, requiring workers to make a series of selections before a grievance is formally registered. Within this structure, platforms often predefine certain issue types as more "urgent" or time-sensitive than others. Grievances falling within these prioritized categories, such as active order issues or on-duty incidents, may trigger faster responses, automated resolutions or callbacks from support teams. Issues that do not align with these urgency markers, however, are routed through standard workflows, which may involve longer response times or automated closures. Workers reported that this structure could influence which concerns receive direct human follow-up. This was reiterated by delivery workers from Delhi, who shared that tickets raised for non-prioritized issues rarely lead to a solution,

> **"Yes, we have to raise a ticket. But nothing happens with the ticket. There is no proper solution. They only pretend to respond, but actually nothing is resolved. Sometimes the ticket is even closed without any resolution."**

1.1.3 Handling of system-triggered deductions

The grievances routed exclusively through the chatbot, related to deductions or penalties (such as those arising from cancellations, incentive mismatches, behavioural flags or location discrepancies), are often processed through predefined rules. In many instances, such tickets are closed using standardized messages indicating that the action was system-determined. Subsequent points of contact, including call centre staff or category managers, typically have limited scope to alter or override these outcomes, as they operate within the same backend decision framework. This can restrict the ability to contest deductions that are flagged as system-generated.

1.1.4 Dependence on predefined grievance categories

In the platforms examined, chatbot interfaces relied on predefined grievance categories. While this enables standardization and efficient routing, workers reported it also limits flexibility. Grievances that do not neatly align with existing categories, such as concerns related to perceived unfair penalties or cumulative issues may lack a clear entry point within the system. In such cases, workers are required to select the closest available option, which may not accurately reflect the nature of the grievance and can affect how it is processed. For instance, workers in the ride-hailing sector emphasize this aspect,

> **"You can file a complaint only after selecting a specific ride, but we can't type our own explanation. The app gives only**

preset options, and none of them match the real reason we want to report. There are options like 'less amount received,' 'route issue,' or 'customer behavior.' Once we select one, it just says, 'Okay, your complaint is raised.' After that, there is no message or follow-up."

1.1.5 Limited space for contextual explanation

Chatbot workflows generally allow only brief textual inputs, which constrains the extent to which workers can provide contextual or narrative explanations. Issues such as incorrect incentive calculations, misreported customer behaviour or app-related errors often require additional detail to be fully understood. The absence of space for elaboration can result in grievances being routed back into automated loops or remaining unresolved when the provided information does not align with system expectations.

These patterns suggest that chatbot-based grievance systems prioritize uniformity and operational efficiency, but their structured design can shape the kinds of grievances that are most easily accommodated. The findings suggest that predefined categories can make routine grievances easier to process, while making more complex or context-specific grievances harder to capture.

The following table summarises key information on chatbots, how they are implemented across sectors and the operational gaps reported by workers:

Table 4: Integration of Chatbots and Workers' Experience

Service Type	How Chatbots Are Integrated	Worker-Reported
Ride Hailing	▶ Chatbots embedded in the Help Centre for routine issues such as fare adjustments, customer behaviour, trip cancellations, documentation, or account status. ▶ Used to raise "tickets" and receive automated updates. ▶ Often paired with helplines for urgent safety-related concerns.	▶ Bots sometimes close tickets prematurely without full resolution. ▶ Limited space to explain complex situations (e.g., harassment, wrong customer reports). ▶ Routing to a human agent requires repeated prompting.
Parcel Delivery	▶ Chatbots used for scanning delivery-related issues such as address mismatch, package status, payment disputes, or customer unavailability. ▶ Usually paired with warehouse (hub) or field support staff for escalation.	▶ Automated prompts may not match real on-ground situations (e.g., package tampering, forced cancellations). ▶ Photo-upload requirements can be time-consuming.
Food/Grocery Delivery	▶ Integrated chatbots guide workers through predefined categories: order delays, customer cancellations, payment settlements, or customer not responding. ▶ Not always the first resort, workers may access helplines when order-related issues are time-sensitive.	▶ Bots sometimes default to generic solutions (e.g., "order cancelled: no compensation") without space for context. ▶ Difficulty contesting unfair customer complaints. ▶ Limited ability to appeal penalties via bot interface.
Home Personnel Services	▶ Chatbots are the primary and often the only mode of raising grievances before and after service completion. ▶ Used for issues like delayed payments, customer misbehaviour, unclear job instructions, or disputes after service delivery.	▶ Lack of immediate support after customer interactions (no live person to intervene). ▶ Bots may not capture nuanced service-related grievances (e.g., additional tasks demanded by clients). ▶ Resolution timelines can be long, affecting worker ratings and earnings.

2. Helplines

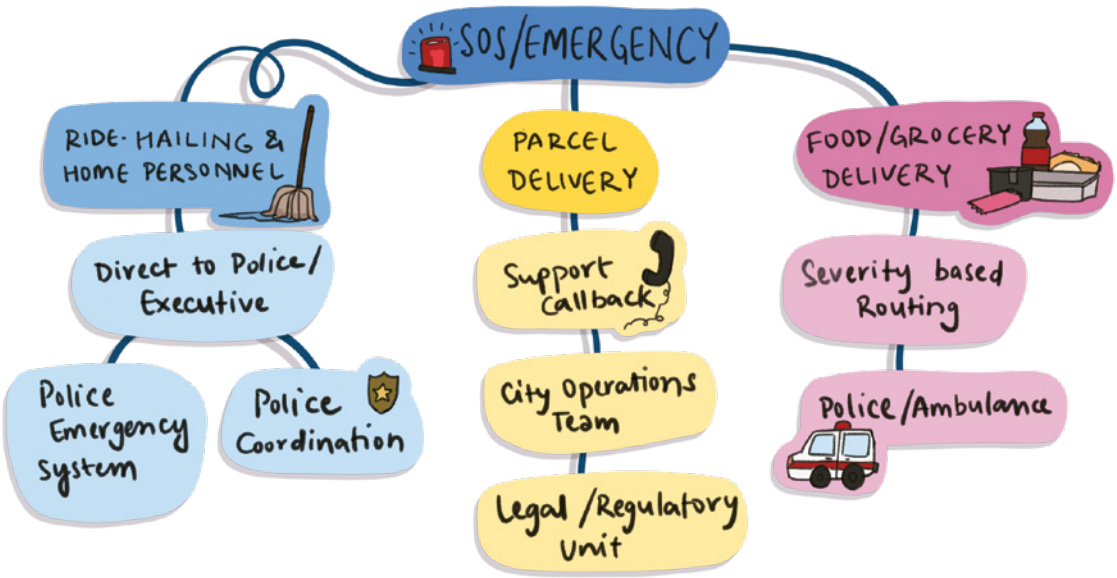
Among the platforms examined, helpline mechanisms are incorporated across ride-hailing, parcel delivery,- and home-personnel service platforms, though their design, accessibility, and role within the overall grievance architecture differ substantially by sector.

In ride-hailing platforms, helplines are generally available as direct channels of support, particularly for issues categorized as urgent or safety-related. These helplines may be accessible through a dedicated call button within the application or through platform-issued phone numbers. While chatbots may still be used for logging routine issues, helplines in this sector are structurally designed to allow workers to initiate voice-based contact without necessarily completing a chatbot workflow, especially in cases involving accidents, customer misconduct or vehicle-related emergencies.

Parcel-delivery platforms generally position helplines as escalation mechanisms rather than primary grievance channels. Chatbot systems play a gatekeeping role by classifying grievances and determining which cases qualify for escalation. Only grievances categorized by the system as critical or severe trigger a call-back request to support staff. Direct outbound calling is typically not permitted, and helpline interaction occurs only when initiated by the platform, reinforcing the subordinate position of voice-based support within the grievance hierarchy.

Among the food and grocery delivery platforms covered by the study, workers and platform representatives did not report the availability of a helpline-based grievance mechanism. These platforms rely entirely on in-app chatbots, ticketing systems, and, in some cases, supervisor or team-lead interfaces for grievance submission and resolution. Workers reported that voice-based support was not generally available, even for time-sensitive or high-stress situations, making automated systems the sole point of entry into the grievance architecture.

For home-personnel service platforms, helpline access is often temporally bound to the service lifecycle. Voice-based support is made available primarily during the active service window, when a job is marked as "in progress" within the app. Outside this window, either before service initiation or after service completion, helpline options are generally disabled, and grievance reporting is routed back to chatbot-based systems. Where call-backs are enabled, they are frequently mediated through automated IVR (Interactive Voice Response)[6] systems, with live agent interaction occurring only under limited or predefined conditions.



6 An automated phone system that enables callers' to navigate menus, get info, or make transactions using voice or keypad inputs.

Taken together, these design features suggest that, across several of the mechanisms examined, helplines did not always function as independent or freely accessible grievance channels. Instead, their activation often depended on platform-defined categories, thresholds and temporal parameters. In these cases, helplines appeared to operate as extensions of chatbot systems rather than as independent routes for raising grievances.

Table 5: Grievance Types Typically Routed Through Helpline Mechanisms

Platform Sector	Grievance Types Commonly Handled via Helplines
Ride-Hailing	Safety incidents, accidents, customer misconduct, vehicle breakdowns, route-related emergencies, harassment complaints
Food & Grocery Delivery	No helpline-based grievances; all issues routed through chatbots or supervisors
Parcel Delivery	High-value parcel loss, theft allegations, accidents during delivery, severe route or location discrepancies (via call-back only)
Home-Personnel Services	On-site safety concerns, customer misconduct during service, access or entry disputes, emergency support during active tasks

2.1 Functionality and worker experiences

Across service types where helplines exist, their operation follows a broadly similar institutional logic, shaped by platform reliance on digital workflows, backend categorisation and limited decentralized authority.

2.1.1 Indirect and mediated access

Helpline access is increasingly mediated through app-based systems rather than being available as a direct point of contact. With the exception of some ride-hailing platforms that provide visible helpline numbers for urgent issues, most services require users to initiate contact through the app's help centre. Call-backs are often triggered only after a ticket is raised or an issue is categorized as critical by the system. This indirect access model introduces additional layers between the grievance and human support, making helplines function as downstream extensions of digital interfaces rather than standalone mechanisms. The box below presents a detailed account of how a worker faced difficulties in reporting her grievance while navigating the chatbot-driven system and, after attempting to connect with a helpline, still did not reach a human point of contact to discuss a sensitive matter that affected her ability to continue working with the platform.

Box 1: Inefficiencies in platform grievance redressal for beauty-service workers

▶ CASE STUDY: No Human in the loop: Inefficiencies in platform grievance redressal for beauty-service workers

This case study examines the experience of a beauty-sector worker, highlighting how platform policies, governance mechanisms, and limited alternatives in the labour market shape workers' vulnerabilities. The respondent, a beautician with extensive professional experience and family responsibilities, joined the platform after COVID-19 in an attempt to rebuild financial stability. Her case illustrates how rigid algorithmic systems and customer-driven evaluations can erode workers' dignity and undermine their rights, even when they possess substantial skill and experience.

Shortly after joining the platform, she experienced a bereavement and was unable to work for several days. When attempting to resume bookings, she met with a severe weather-related accident. While

travelling with heavy equipment during heavy rainfall, her scooter skidded, causing a significant injury. She reported that she could not reach the scheduled appointment, and the platform subsequently blocked her ID. This blockage occurred despite her attempts to communicate her situation to the platform through every channel available. She approached the chatbot multiple times, visited the physical office, and contacted the staff member designated as the customer-care intermediary. Following instructions, she submitted supporting documentation, including proof of the bereavement and photographs of the injury. However, despite repeated submissions and raised tickets, her profile remained suspended.

During the interview, she explained that interacting with a chatbot stripped the grievance of the sensitivity it required. Together, the research team and the worker attempted to file another ticket. The chatbot acknowledged the request for a verbal explanation and informed her that she would receive a call. Ten minutes later, she was contacted, only for the research team to realise mid-conversation that the call was automated. The AI-driven voice allowed only limited time before disconnecting, preventing her from narrating the full context of her injury and loss. She reported that this interaction heightened her frustration and reinforced her concerns about the absence of a human-centred grievance redressal mechanism.

She then described the financial burdens created by the platform's onboarding requirements, showing the products she had purchased for her work. She reported that these investments could be difficult to recover if her account remained blocked. Her experience with rating-based performance assessments further illustrates the concerns raised by workers about platform rating systems. She reported being repeatedly instructed to improve her rating and said that, despite subsequently improving her score, she was informed that her ID would remain blocked because she had not reached the required threshold. She explained that this constant monitoring deeply affected her confidence, noting that customers' expectations and rating practices are unpredictable and often subjective. The fear of receiving anything less than a perfect score once led her to consider declining all bookings, as one dissatisfied customer could jeopardise her livelihood.

The broader implications of such systems became clear in her reflections:

> **"The person who is the Mitra... says very easily that we don't do this, we can't change it, it is beyond our control - the system does it. But who made the system? Humans made it. If humans made it, humans can change it. Everything changes - so why not this? We are not machines."**

Her experience illustrates the difficulty workers may face in seeking review of automated decisions and the importance of accessible human oversight. She also linked these experiences to her reliance on platform income and the limited availability of stable alternatives, describing feelings of helplessness. She noted that workers can feel insignificant, while customers may have considerable influence over workers' access to income.

This case highlights the importance of grievance systems grounded in procedural fairness, transparency, and human oversight. It also underscores the importance of recalibrating platform governance to ensure that skilled workers are treated with dignity and supported through periods of crisis rather than excluded by rigid thresholds and automated decisions.

2.1.2 Issue intake and conditional escalation

When a helpline interaction does occur, the process typically begins with a brief issue description provided to the agent. Based on internal protocols and predefined escalation criteria, the agent may either resolve the issue directly or forward it to another team. Certain categories, most notably payment-related grievances such as deductions, delayed earnings, or incentive mismatches, are more likely to be addressed or clarified at this stage. However, for many other issues, particularly those involving on-ground disputes or behavioural flags, agents primarily function as intermediaries rather than decision-makers.

2.1.3 Limited scope of agent authority

Helpline agents generally operate within narrow mandates, with restricted ability to override system-generated decisions or intervene directly in field-level incidents. Their role is often confined to logging complaints, issuing advisories or initiating backend reviews. In cases involving customer behaviour, safety incidents, or location-based disputes, the response is typically limited to warnings, nudges, or documentation for internal records, rather than immediate corrective action. A worker in the ride-hailing sector from Ahmedabad shared how helpline agents might acknowledge the issue but explicitly stated their inability to act, even in clear cases of non-payment by a customer or customer misconduct.

"As soon as I reached the location, the customer asked me to wait, said he would pay by mobile, and scanned my QR (code), but the payment never came. I contacted the platform's customer care and told them I didn't receive the payment. They just said, 'We can't do anything about it.' Then I asked, 'What's the point of driving for this company when you don't help us?' People sitting in offices don't understand our problems."

2.1.4 Absence of stable or persistent contact channels

Platforms typically do not provide a single, persistent assigned support contact for follow-up. Each interaction is treated as a discrete event, routed to whichever agent is available at the time. While this model supports operational efficiency, it limits continuity across interactions, particularly for grievances that require multiple follow-ups or contextual understanding over time. Workers described support interactions as prolonged, repetitive and fragmented, involving long waiting times, language barriers and repeated transfers that undermine effective resolution. For instance, a delivery worker from Hyderabad shared,

"When we go to deliver an order, we make one to four calls to the customer. Even if the customer doesn't answer, we have to raise a ticket and wait for ten minutes. Then the system asks us to press 1 or 2, and if we press 2, we wait again while they say, 'Your call is important to us.' When the agent comes on, they often speak in Telugu. If we ask for Hindi or English, the call gets transferred, which takes another five to ten minutes or sometimes it just disconnects. When we finally reach someone, they only repeat the issue and call the customer themselves. Even after explaining everything, they don't trust us and transfer the call again to another person in the same place."

2.1.5 Fragmented information architecture

Information about helpline availability, eligibility for call-backs or alternate support routes is not always centrally or consistently displayed within platform interfaces. As a result, access pathways vary depending on the issue category selected, the service type and the stage of task completion. This fragmented architecture means that knowledge of support options is unevenly distributed and highly dependent on navigating the correct in-app sequence. In the home-personnel sector, access to live support is restricted based on the status of a task, effectively closing support channels once a job is marked complete. A worker from Bangalore shared,

"You cannot call the helpline once the job ends. Even if you have an issue, there is no option to call after the job is completed. Only if you have another booking can you call. After the job ends, you have to raise a ticket."

The following table summarises the sector-specific functionality and worker experiences with helplines:

Table 6: Integration of Helpline and Workers' Experience

Service Type	How Helplines Are Integrated	Implementation Gaps Reported by Workers
Ride Hailing	▶ Helpline available on select platforms. ▶ Usually accessed after multiple chatbot prompts. ▶ Some apps provide separate numbers for "urgent" cases (e.g., customer misbehaviour).	▶ Long waiting times (20–30 minutes). ▶ Not consistently available across apps. ▶ A new representative each time, requiring repetition of the issue.
Parcel Delivery	▶ No direct call options. ▶ Workers must navigate chatbot flows; the platform decides if a case qualifies for a call-back. ▶ Call-back is usually from the platform, not worker-initiated.	▶ Workers cannot call proactively; must wait for the platform to call. ▶ Repetition of details each time due to different representatives. ▶ Workers unsure which cases qualify for human support. ▶ Delays in receiving callbacks extend grievance timelines.
Food/Grocery Delivery	▶ No dedicated helpline for workers. ▶ All grievances are processed through supervisors and in-app chatbots only.	▶ Workers have to reach their supervisor (discussed later) for serious concerns. ▶ Reliance on chatbots leads to limited explanations and difficulty with complex issues.
Home Personnel Services	▶ Helpline available only during an active service (e.g., while at the client's home). ▶ Before or after the service, workers must go through the chatbot and may receive an automated IVR call-back.	▶ Support unavailable before bookings or after completion, leaving workers unsure where to report issues. ▶ Call-backs through chatbots are primarily automated IVR, not human agents. ▶ Workers not provided with a steady helpline number for repeated issues. ▶ Re-explaining grievances becomes common since each call reaches a different representative.

3. SOS/emergency services

Across platform types, SOS mechanisms are institutionally designed to address situations involving safety risks, emergencies or serious incidents during service delivery. While the core intent of the SOS feature is broadly similar, enabling rapid escalation in cases of immediate risk, the operational pathways and institutional linkages differ across sectors.

In ride-hailing and home-personnel service platforms, the SOS function is typically embedded directly within the worker application and is configured to connect either to external emergency services (most commonly the police) or to a platform-appointed executive who assesses the situation and initiates escalation. This executive-led pathway may involve advising immediate safety steps, documenting the incident and coordinating with law enforcement where necessary.

In parcel-delivery platforms, SOS concerns are generally initiated through the chatbot interface rather than a standalone button. Once flagged, the system triggers a call-back from support staff, who then determine whether the case warrants escalation to city-level operational teams. These teams may liaise with local police authorities or legal support units, particularly in cases involving vehicle seizure, disputes at delivery points, or regulatory intervention.

In food and grocery delivery platforms, SOS mechanisms vary more widely: some platforms enable direct contact with emergency services such as police or ambulance providers, while others require preliminary information, such as photo uploads or injury indicators, to assess severity before routing the case.

Across ride-hailing platforms, integration with police emergency systems is the most common configuration, reflecting the sector's emphasis on road safety and passenger-related risks. Overall, SOS mechanisms function as a specialized escalation layer within platform governance structures, distinct from routine grievance channels and primarily oriented towards risk management, safety assurance and legal compliance.

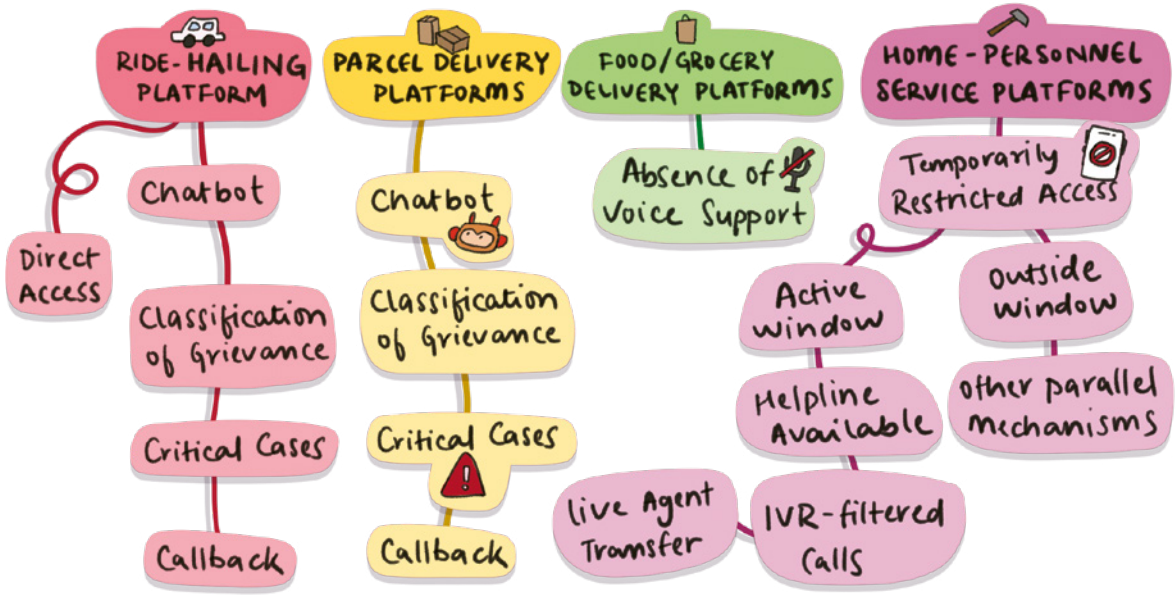


Table 7: Grievances and Incidents Routed Through SOS Mechanisms

Category	Illustrative Grievances / Incidents handled via SOS
Customer misbehaviour	Threats, harassment, physical aggression, refusal to allow exit
Accidents and injuries	Road accidents, falls, on-duty injuries requiring medical attention
Immediate safety threats	Unsafe locations, violent situations, coercion or intimidation
Vehicle-related incidents	Vehicle seizure, damage, police stoppage during service
Medical emergencies	Sudden illness, injury requiring ambulance assistance
Legal or regulatory intervention	Police questioning, detention, or disputes requiring legal coordination
Property damage	Damage to worker or client property during service
Critical disputes during service	Escalated confrontations that cannot be resolved through routine channels

3.1 Functionality and worker experiences

3.1.1 Response times and delayed emergency support

Several delivery workers shared that SOS or emergency numbers sometimes take 30–45 minutes to respond. For incidents on the road, such as accidents, vehicle damage, or hostile customer interactions, workers felt that this timeline may not always match the immediacy of the situation. Workers questioned the very purpose of emergency support when responses are delayed and fail to provide real-time assistance during on-ground incidents. For instance, a worker in home-personnel sector from Ahmedabad shared,

"The platform has informed us of the emergency support helpline, but when we go to someone's house and face an issue, even if we press the SOS button, there is no response. The call comes only after 30 to 45 minutes, then what is the meaning of an emergency number? These problems have to be faced immediately, but there is no system that gives an instant solution."

3.1.2 Preference for external channels

Because platform responses can be variable, workers often rely on 112 helplines, neighbourhood contacts, colleagues or family members in parallel. They emphasized that platform SOS systems are "present on the app," but may not consistently be the quickest route to help in real-time scenarios.

3.1.3 Home personnel services - Immediate guidance

In home-based services, workers explained that if they face inappropriate behaviour, the first instruction is usually to leave the premises safely. While this guidance helps with immediate withdrawal, workers felt that post-incident follow-up or redress was not always clear or consistent.

3.1.4 Limited closure after reporting

Some workers shared that after reporting distressing incidents, they were unsure about the next steps or outcomes. A few felt that the absence of visible follow-up left them without clarity on whether action had been taken.

3.1.5 Gendered safety concerns

Women delivery workers mentioned that although the SOS feature is helpful to have on the app, they sometimes found the response uncertain or not sufficiently differentiated for situations where gender-based vulnerability was more pronounced.

Before summarizing workers' experiences in emergencies, we also capture gendered safety concerns, not only in relation to SOS situations but also in workers' experiences of reporting grievances, seeking redress, and navigating broader grievances with platforms. Box 2 elaborates on the interaction with ride-hailing women workers in Delhi.

Box 2: Women drivers on ride-sharing platforms

▶ CASE STUDY: Women drivers on ride-sharing platforms: From recognition to increasing precarity

Early recognition and opportunity: Women as a symbol of platform progress

Women interviewed for the study recalled that, when they first entered the ride-hailing sector in Delhi, often through extensive training by organizations such as the Azad Foundation, their participation was associated with a new, socially progressive phase of platform labour. Many of these women entered driving long before major apps became dominant, some becoming trainers themselves, including in heavy vehicles such as trucks. Their participation was widely celebrated in public narratives of safety, empowerment and gender inclusion. During the initial years of platform expansion, women reported meaningful gains, including higher and more predictable incomes relative to informal jobs, genuine flexibility in scheduling and the presence of human contact points within platforms that offered clear modes of communication and assistance. These early support systems created an environment where women felt both recognized and visible. Some described themselves as "the face of the app" during promotional campaigns and onboarding initiatives, and recalled platforms showcasing their presence. Participants associated this period with flexible earnings, human-led grievance support and social recognition. They also described a subsequent decline in these forms of support as platforms expanded and automated their systems.

Gendered entry and barriers: How women navigate a sector already marked by precarity

While drivers across genders face uncertainties linked to fuel costs, fluctuating fares, algorithmic opacity and customer-driven pressures, women interviewed for the study described an additional set of challenges. Many spoke of coming from households where support is limited, navigating stigma associated with driving in a male-dominated sector. Women described balancing early morning and late-night shifts with care obligations at home, often working long hours after cooking, caregiving, and managing domestic responsibilities. Some reported sleeping only a few hours because household and financial pressures overlapped. They also face heightened safety anxieties, both from public spaces and from customers, making each trip a calculation of risk. Participants considered that existing policies and infrastructure did not sufficiently account for these gender-specific constraints. They perceived that platforms often treated drivers as an undifferentiated workforce, despite the difference in their lived realities. In this context, the absence of gender-sensitive policies places an additional burden on women simply to sustain themselves in the sector.

Public infrastructure, care infrastructure and the double burden

Women repeatedly stressed that their challenges cannot be addressed solely by platform-level interventions because many of their constraints arise from systemic infrastructural gaps. They recalled that clean, accessible public washrooms are scarce across Delhi, especially in areas where they are likely to wait between rides. This absence becomes particularly difficult during menstruation, long shifts, or when women have health conditions that require frequent rest stops. Pregnancy, postpartum care needs and childcare pose further obstacles that neither public systems nor platforms adequately address. Several women who were interviewed pointed out that even in government-operated transportation roles, maternity leave and rest facilities remain inaccessible. As a result, women said they navigate a double burden in the form of paid platform work layered upon unpaid domestic labour. They emphasized that without public investment in inclusive sanitation, care support, and rest infrastructure, women will continue to experience burnout and health risks regardless of any platform reforms. Moreover, while NGOs and unions have historically shouldered the task of training and supporting women, such a burden cannot remain solely in the hands of civil society. Participants emphasized that a sustainable ecosystem requires structural interventions, state-led and platform-supported, to reduce the volume of grievances that women inevitably encounter.

Pregnancy, postpartum care needs and childcare pose further obstacles that neither public systems nor platforms adequately address.

Declining support and the weakening of grievance redressal systems

Women spoken to for the study described a deterioration in the accessibility and quality of grievance redressal as platforms expanded and grievance processes became more automated. They recalled that human intermediaries and local offices that once provided timely guidance and conflict resolution were replaced by chatbots, rigid drop-down menus and automated responses. Women explained that these systems only recognize predefined categories of complaints, leaving no room for the kinds of gender-specific or context-specific grievances they frequently experience. Their sense of invisibility deepened, where they were once featured as symbols of platform inclusivity, they are now often unable to speak to a human representative even in situations of distress. Many recounted instances where safety concerns were met with delayed responses or no response at all. They described calling helplines that redirected them to automated messages, or being told that because they had a passenger in the vehicle, safety teams would not intervene. The erosion of accountability was felt especially sharply, given their early experiences of being heard and supported. The participants explained that the shift from a human-led to an automated grievance ecosystem left them feeling that the platforms no longer recognized their dignity, context or practical challenges.

Emergency response, eroded dignity, and the need to prevent grievances at source

Women's accounts of emergency situations reveal troubling inconsistencies in platform safety protocols. Several described pressing panic buttons only to receive no immediate assistance or to be questioned after the fact about why they triggered the alert. Several participants reported delays or gaps in emergency response, which they considered inadequate for situations requiring immediate assistance. Women reported that this lack of timely responsiveness could undermine their sense of safety, particularly in situations involving road incidents or unpredictable customer behaviour. Many women entered driving because the training, earnings, and early support systems allowed them to reclaim dignity, autonomy, and leisure, experiences often denied to them in other forms of work. Yet the recent shift in platform governance, combined with declining earnings and greater precarity, has forced many to work longer hours simply to break even. Women expressed that what they now require is not only a strengthened grievance redressal mechanism but also a transformation that reduces the need for grievances in the first place. This includes regulated fares, recognition of inflation and fuel costs, gender-sensitive policies, and coordinated support from both platforms and the state. They explained that only then can platform work once again offer the safety, respect, and economic mobility that initially drew them to the sector.

Women explained that these systems only recognize predefined categories of complaints, leaving no room for the kinds of gender-specific or context-specific grievances they frequently experience. Their sense of invisibility deepened, where they were once featured as symbols of platform inclusivity, they are now often unable to speak to a human representative even in situations of distress. Many recounted instances where safety concerns were met with delayed responses or no response at all.

Overall, workers mentioned the importance of having built-in safety tools but conveyed that strengthening speed, clarity, and follow-through could enhance their sense of security and trust in platform-based support systems. The following table summarises sector-specific emergency redressal mechanisms and their functionality as explained by the workers:

Table 8: Integration of SOS Mechanisms and Workers' Experience

Service Type	How SOS Is Integrated (Company Processes)	Implementation Gaps Reported by Workers
Ride Hailing	▶ SOS connects directly to police in many cities. ▶ First step often involves routing the call to a safety executive who guides the driver/rider (e.g., advising them to leave the area). ▶ In accidents, the SOS workflow may also route to ambulance assistance depending on severity.	▶ Police response can be slow or inconsistent. ▶ Drivers report that platform support sometimes focuses more on "protocol completion" than real-time assistance. ▶ SOS buttons occasionally fail to trigger immediate call-backs. ▶ Drivers feel unsure whether the platform prioritizes their safety over customer ratings.
Parcel Delivery	▶ Riders can report SOS through chat; they receive a call-back from the call centre. ▶ For legal/police-related issues (e.g., vehicle seizure due to illegal customer parcel), the call centre activates the city operations team, which coordinates with police and deploys a lawyer if needed. ▶ City teams often physically visit police stations to support drivers.	▶ Call-back delays reported during peak hours. ▶ Workers often feel unsupported in cases where customer wrongdoing leads to police action. ▶ Lack of clarity on compensation during long periods of vehicle seizure. ▶ Some workers feel the burden of proof falls disproportionately on them.
Food/Grocery Delivery	▶ SOS buttons available in-app; in some cities they route directly to police. ▶ For accidents, riders can send pictures of injuries to access ambulance support. ▶ Some platforms initiate an immediate call-back for verification.	▶ Workers report inconsistent availability of ambulance services. ▶ Police-linked SOS rarely works in smaller towns. ▶ Call-backs can be slow, especially during late-night hours. ▶ No guaranteed coverage of medical expenses unless injuries are "severe" as per platform criteria.
Home Personnel Services	▶ SOS directly connects to police in many cities. ▶ For unsafe customer behaviour: first step is to speak to a company executive, who instructs the worker to exit the home immediately. ▶ Executives may stay on the line until the worker reaches a safe space.	▶ Workers say executives sometimes downplay threats unless there is "clear" evidence. ▶ Slow police response in domestic settings. ▶ In multi-storey buildings, workers report difficulty exiting quickly while on call. ▶ Fear of customer retaliation or bad ratings even after reporting misconduct.

4. Team leaders/fleet managers/supervisors

Team leaders, fleet managers, and supervisors constitute the principal human interface within platform grievance-redress systems and play a central role in translating platform rules, decisions, and processes into operational action. Positioned at the frontline of platform-worker interaction, these roles are formally designated to handle a wide range of day-to-day operational grievances and queries, making them a component of human-supported grievance mechanisms.

These personnel are typically responsible for addressing grievances that fall within predefined operational boundaries, such as routine task-related issues, clarification of platform policies, or minor disputes requiring contextual judgment. Where grievances exceed their authority or fall outside standard operating procedures, team leaders function as the escalation conduit to specialized grievance-redress units or central support teams. In doing so, they act as intermediaries, ensuring that grievances are appropriately documented, routed, and tracked within the platform's internal systems.

A core part of their role is reported to involve maintaining grievance records, monitoring resolution status, and communicating outcomes once a case is closed. Team leaders are also tasked with conveying platform-generated decisions, such as warnings, notices related to ratings or performance metrics, and policy updates to workers, while simultaneously relaying operational concerns or recurring issues upward to platform management. This bidirectional flow positions them as both implementers of platform governance and carriers of on-the-ground information into central systems.

In terms of access and modality, team leaders are supposed to provide in-person support through physical offices, kiosks, or designated hubs, particularly in delivery and logistics platforms. In addition, platforms often supplement face-to-face interaction with digital communication channels. Some platforms deploy dedicated internal applications through which supervisors can message workers, share updates, or manage assignments, while others rely on semi-formal channels such as WhatsApp groups to facilitate rapid dissemination of information and coordination.

Platforms reported that they invest in structured training programmes to standardize the functioning of these roles. In delivery services, fleet managers are typically trained on detailed standard operating procedures that cover commonly anticipated grievances and operational contingencies. In logistics platforms, city-level team members are often recruited based on prior experience in similar supervisory or coordination roles. In home-based service platforms, supervisory personnel are usually selected from within the organization, based on demonstrated familiarity with platform processes and internal performance metrics, and then trained to manage service-related escalations and compliance requirements.

Table 9: Grievances Typically Routed Through Team Leaders / Supervisors

Category of Grievance	Illustrative Issues Handled by Team Leaders / Supervisors
Operational issues	Task allocation problems, incorrect job details, routing issues
Payment-related clarifications	Explanation of earnings, incentive eligibility, minor discrepancies
Ratings and performance	Rating drops, performance warnings, metric explanations
Policy communication	Clarification of platform rules, new guidelines, compliance requirements
Customer-related concerns	Service disputes, minor complaints, behaviour-related clarifications
Scheduling and availability	Shift assignments, slot changes, temporary unavailability
Documentation and verification	Profile updates, document submission, verification follow-ups
Escalation of unresolved grievances	Routing complex or unresolved issues to central grievance teams
Safety and incident follow-up	Post-incident coordination after SOS or helpline activation

4.1 Functionality and workers' experiences

4.1.1 Limited responsiveness and restricted accessibility

Across platforms, workers indicate that team leaders or supervisors are often difficult to reach in practice. Communication channels, such as phone calls, messages, or in-app communication, are reported to be inconsistently monitored, resulting in delayed or absent responses to grievances. In some platform models, particularly those with highly centralized or digital-first systems, workers report the absence of a reliably accessible human point of contact altogether, despite the formal designation of team leaders as frontline support. Workers' accounts illustrate how this inaccessibility is compounded by high staff turnover and fragmented lines of responsibility, leaving grievances unresolved despite repeated follow-ups. A home-personnel worker from Ahmedabad shared,

> **"First, I spoke to customer care. Then I spoke to the category manager. I sent all the screenshots to him. He was not coming to the office. I went there three–four times, but I was not able to meet anyone. I met another person. Then I met someone there who said that next month my account will be reinstated. But still nothing happened. And when I called that person, he said that he has left the job. Now there is some other person who has come. Earlier, no category manager stayed for two–three months. He will leave in two months."**

A rider from Mumbai also shared,

> **"The team leader makes it clear that support is only available on their terms. They openly say they don't work all day and have personal issues. After 9 p.m., no matter how many times we call, there is no response. We are simply told to raise the issue and that it will be looked into 'after a few days.' Whether you get help or not depends entirely on the supervisor's willingness, not on the urgency of the problem."**

4.1.2 Constrained authority, knowledge, and accountability

Workers' accounts suggest that team leaders frequently operate within narrow decision-making boundaries. While they are positioned as the first point of contact, their capacity to resolve grievances related to account suspensions, payment disputes, or customer complaints appears limited. In many cases, team leaders redirect grievances back into automated ticketing systems or to other departments without clear timelines or follow-up mechanisms. According to the workers, the team leaders often deflect responsibility by shifting the blame to the previous personnel or other departments, leaving the worker with no resolution. The workers reported that team leaders did not follow up on the resolution process in most cases. This diffusion of responsibility, where issues are passed between individuals or teams, often results in prolonged resolution processes, with no single actor clearly accountable for closure. As mentioned in the section above, the apparent subjective behaviour of TLs also requires attention as it can often dictate the working conditions and future of workers with the platform. In response, workers put forward a clear recommendation that grievance handling should be led by individuals with prior field experience, who can recognize and contextualize the practical challenges of platform work rather than relying solely on procedural knowledge. A home-personnel worker from Ahmedabad shared,

> **"Managers should have worked in the field and understand the nature of our work. At present, they only know the paperwork and are unaware of the issues we face on the ground. If a manager had done this work earlier, they would immediately recognise situations where customers behave unfairly, because they would have faced similar problems themselves. But when managers rely only on theory and procedures, they fail to understand the practical realities of our work."**

The box below illustrates the post-ID-blocking grievance redressal experiences of women delivery workers in Bangalore.

Box 3: Experiences of two women delivery workers

▶ CASE STUDY: Experiences of two women delivery workers: ID blocked without cause, unclear redressal despite multiple attempts

This case study documents the experiences of two women who have worked in the delivery sector for several years and have navigated multiple platforms, including food, grocery and goods delivery. Interviewed together, their accounts illustrate the economic challenges of platform-based delivery work as well as the emotional and dignity-related concerns they reported.. As workers with sole household responsibilities, their experiences highlight some of the complexities of platform labour.

Before entering platform work, both women worked as domestic workers and later in other forms of informal employment. They encountered delivery work through their interactions and decided to transition to the sector, hoping it would offer better earnings and greater flexibility. One woman noted that domestic work left them with no breaks or days off, while platform work initially appeared to offer a reprieve from such rigid schedules.

When they joined their first platform, they reported receiving relatively higher per-delivery payments, which they considered fair and motivating. Over time, however, they described a decline in per-order payments. One of them shared,

"If the customer talks rashly to us, we cannot reply to them, they block our id if we say anything, they give only 15 rupees per order."

The worker's account linked declining payments with concerns about customer interactions and the consequences of raising objections. She also described situations in which customer behaviour and platform decisions affected her ability to work. One of the women narrated a particularly difficult experience:

"They used to demand. They used to behave like God. They ask us to pick up the order, but when we reach the location the customer won't receive the calls itself, if we ask they come to fight us, if we tell our sir, he tells us to come. We will have to take orders, we set how many orders we should take, when we have to wait for 30 mins, probably anyone will get angry, when I scold them they behave too harshly. He abused me, used bad words, so I asked, "How can you tell me about my mother, they blocked my id, we are ladies so they treat well for one week, then they give long trips like 8km away, if we say it's unsafe they block our id."

She described making repeated efforts to regain access to her account, including contacting platform staff and submitting an apology at the supervisor's request. According to her account, she was later offered the option of moving to another work location, which she considered impractical because of the distance, cost and safety concerns. She eventually left the platform and joined another.

She reflected that having to repeatedly plead for access to work despite believing that she had not acted improperly affected her sense of dignity.

Their experiences highlight the role of supervisors in grievance redressal. Supervisors may serve as an important point of contact between workers and platforms, particularly where workers require assistance that cannot be addressed through automated systems. The participants emphasized the importance of supervisors responding to grievances with fairness, sensitivity and clear procedures.

For women workers balancing household responsibilities, financial pressure and safety concerns, a supportive and rational grievance handling process is not simply a benefit, it is essential. Their experiences point to the potential value of supervisor training, clear escalation procedures and transparent processes for reviewing account restrictions and other platform decisions.



4.1.3 Regulation of collective engagement

Some workers reported that supervisors discouraged participation in informal gatherings or collective activities. These accounts raise questions about workers' ability to organize and engage collectively and warrant further examination.

The table below summarises the intended functionality of the team leaders/fleet managers/ supervisors and workers' experiences with redressal mechanisms:

Table 10: Role of immediate supervisors and workers' experience

Service Type	Roles and responsibilities	Workers' experiences
Ride-Hailing	▶ Assisting the workers with documentation and compliance ▶ Serving as a critical channel for deactivation and appeal, disputes with customers, etc ▶ Resolving issues which automated system couldn't address ▶ Providing specialized support to the vulnerable groups, such as women drivers ▶ Collecting feedback on the new features, fares, policies and communicating the feedback to the platform companies	▶ Received assistance in documentation and minor queries ▶ Unable to help with the deactivation issues as the issues remain unresolved even after numerous back and forth ▶ Unable to come up with effective solutions for issues not resolved in the automated system, and redirects the workers to the ticket raising system ▶ Workers' feedback/concerns remain unheard
Parcel Delivery/ Food delivery	▶ 24/7 human point of contact resolving the daily operational issues and beyond ▶ Directly responsible for workers' performance which include retraining them, explaining quality standards, communicating platform warnings to the workers ▶ Playing an active role in safety and distress coordination since the emergency team is supposed to coordinate with the fleet managers for on-ground support ▶ Maintaining a logbook of all the grievances, undertaking a root-cause analysis to go beyond resolution and understand the grievance origins.	▶ Unable to solve the grievances, instructs the workers to go back to the 'ticket-raising system'; the team leaders also lack the knowledge to resolve issues ▶ The new TLs often could not help, stating lack of knowledge about past issues, shift the blame to other departments and could not come up with any actual resolution ▶ Workers observed lack of empathy, or urgency even in cases of accidents, insurance claims, ID blocking
Home personnel services	▶ To serve as the empathetic first layer and help in stress alleviation of the workers ▶ Acts as a crucial point for the performance management process, guiding them through the retraining process etc. ▶ Serves as the workers' voice for grievances which are beyond their resolution ability	▶ Varied experiences depending on the personal traits of the team leader/managers ▶ Initial experiences in grievance resolution were satisfactory, but that support eroded over time and the team leaders also became inaccessible ▶ The team leaders often discouraged collectivization, association among the workers ▶ The team leaders often directed the workers to retraining as a solution to grievances related to rating decline, instead of assisting to address the root cause

5. Physical offices

Across ride-hailing, food delivery, parcel delivery, and home-services platforms, physical offices and in-person support centres constitute a distinct component of the grievance-redress architecture, operating alongside app-based and remote channels. These offices, variously designated as Partner Seva Kendras (Partner Help Centres), city operations offices, experience centres, or support kiosks, are designed to serve as formal, human-mediated interfaces between platforms and workers, particularly for grievances that require verification, discretionary review, or coordination across multiple internal teams.

In institutional design, physical offices are positioned as escalation points within the broader grievance system. Their core functions include verification of onboarding and identity documents, resolution of account access issues such as suspensions or deactivations, correction of system-level errors, and handling of payment-related disputes that cannot be resolved through automated or remote channels. Platform staff stationed at these offices are tasked with reviewing case details, conducting secondary checks, and routing grievances to appropriate backend, administrative, or legal units where required.

Platforms describe structured access models for these offices, combining app-enabled appointment booking with limited walk-in support during fixed operating hours. Appointment systems are intended to manage footfall, standardize service delivery, and reduce waiting times, while walk-in windows allow for urgent or time-sensitive cases. Some platforms also outline prioritization protocols within offices, such as fast-track appointments or designated counters for specific categories of workers (for example, women drivers) or for emergency grievances.

Parcel delivery platforms, in particular, emphasize the role of city-level teams located within or linked to physical offices. These teams typically include operations, administrative, and legal personnel, enabling coordination with external institutions such as police stations or municipal authorities when required. Food delivery platforms similarly reference decentralized legal or response units that can be activated through physical offices in cases involving accidents, disputes, or safety incidents flagged through SOS mechanisms.

In the home-services sector, platforms highlight partner-centric support roles embedded within physical offices, such as Mitras, who are internal staff trained to handle operational issues, documentation, and escalation processes. These roles are designed to act as intermediaries between field-level service provision and centralized digital systems, facilitating case review and internal coordination.

Overall, while platforms continue to digitize routine grievance handling, physical offices remain a key institutional mechanism intended to provide structured, face-to-face engagement for high-stakes, verification-intensive, or procedurally complex grievances that require human judgment, cross-departmental coordination, or multi-level approval.

Table 11: Grievances Typically Raised at Physical Offices / In-Person Support Centres

Grievance Category	Illustrative Issues Handled Through Physical Offices
Account access and deactivation	ID blocking, account suspension, permanent or temporary deactivation reviews
Document verification and onboarding	KYC verification, document resubmission, biometric checks (if any)
Payment and earnings disputes	Large payout discrepancies, unresolved deductions, pending settlements
Zoning and allocation issues	Incorrect city or zone mapping, forced relocation, service-area restrictions
Policy enforcement actions	Warnings, strikes, compliance notices, behavioural flags
Insurance and legal coordination	Accident-related claims, vehicle damage cases, third-party liability documentation
System errors requiring verification	App-account mismatches, duplicate profiles, technical flags
Escalation of unresolved grievances	Issues previously raised through chatbots or helplines without resolution

5.1 Functionality and workers' experiences

Despite platforms positioning physical offices as accessible and responsive escalation points, workers across ride-hailing, food delivery, parcel delivery, and home-services platforms report significant gaps in how these mechanisms function in practice. While these centres are intended to resolve high-stakes or verification-intensive grievances, workers describe persistent barriers that limit their effectiveness.

5.1.1 Limited accessibility and responsiveness

Workers report that physical offices are often located far from residential areas or active work zones, requiring long travel and loss of working hours to access support. In some cities, workers state that offices are permanently shut or operate irregularly, with little clarity on operating hours. Frequent turnover of local managers or support staff further complicates access, making it difficult for workers to identify whom to approach or whether relevant personnel will be available on a given day. As a ride-hailing worker from Hyderabad shared,

"There's almost no communication from the platform. It's very difficult to reach them. Some of them have their office around 30 kilometres away from my home in Chandra Gutta. I have to travel all the way there and wait for hours, and even then there's no guarantee that I'll get to talk to someone. They just take the complaint and that's it- no assurance, no proper response."

5.1.2 In-person resolution and escalation challenges

Workers approach physical offices primarily for grievances requiring verification or discretionary review, such as ID blocking, wrongful deactivation, payment disputes, technical errors, or document updates. While platform staff or specialized teams (such as help kiosks in home-services, legal response teams in food delivery, or city-level teams in parcel delivery) are tasked with reviewing and escalating these cases, workers report having to submit the same grievance multiple times across visits. They describe inconsistency in how similar cases are handled, with outcomes varying depending on the staff present or the office visited.

5.1.3 Appointment-based and walk-in systems

Ride-hailing and delivery platforms promote appointment-based systems that allow workers to pre-book time slots through the app, alongside limited walk-in hours. Some platforms also highlight priority access for women workers. However, workers report long queues even with appointments, uncertainty about whether senior decision-makers will be available, and frequent rescheduling or deferral of cases. Walk-in options are described as unpredictable, with workers unsure whether their issue will be addressed during a visit.

5.1.4 Role of specialised city teams and on-ground interventions

In parcel delivery platforms, workers recognize the presence of city-level teams that include operations, administrative, and legal personnel capable of coordinating with police stations or other external authorities. Similarly, food delivery workers are aware of decentralized legal response units activated during SOS or emergency cases. However, workers report limited visibility into how and when these teams are engaged, and often receive little feedback on the status or outcome of escalations made through physical offices.

5.1.5 Training and partner-centric support roles

In the home-services sector, workers interact with help desks or kiosks staffed by support personnel selected from within the platform and trained to handle partner grievances. While these roles are formally positioned as partner-centric, workers report that such staff often function primarily as intermediaries rather than decision-makers. In cases where grievances cannot be

resolved, particularly those involving customer disputes, penalties, or account actions, workers note that explanations for non-redress are rarely provided. Support personnel frequently cite system limitations or decisions taken at higher levels, without clarity on the rationale, timelines, or avenues for further escalation. This perceived lack of accountability and transparency, combined with limited familiarity with on-ground service conditions, leaves workers uncertain about why their grievance was rejected and what, if anything, can be done next.

The table summarises the intended functionality of the physical offices and worker experiences with redressal mechanisms below:

Table 12: Integration of Physical Offices and Workers' Experiences

Service Type	How Physical Offices are Integrated (as per Platform policy)	How Physical Offices are Integrated (as per Platform policy)
Ride-Hailing	▶ Structured partner support centres with appointment systems ▶ Priority queues for women drivers ▶ Clear resolution & escalation timelines (24-72 hours) ▶ Assist with document updates, account issues and app guidance	▶ Offices far away or no longer functional ▶ Lack of local presence- drivers demand help points in old city, new city areas ▶ Entry only with managerial permission- blocking walk-in access. ▶ Long-term ID blocks or documentation errors are particularly challenging to resolve ▶ Earlier systems with counters and tokens worked well; current systems feel centralized and impersonal
Parcel/Food Delivery	▶ Legal response teams with physical POCs stationed across the city ▶ Immediate activation of support when SOS/ Ambulance triggers occur ▶ In food delivery, Team Leaders serve as POC to guide workers. ▶ Rate and Review TL's support ▶ In parcel delivery, Dedicated Partner Grievance Redressal Cells (PGRC) for truckers and those with low tech literacy.	▶ TLs are found to focus on ID creation rather than resolving rider grievances. ▶ TLs make workers wait for longer hours and don't even show up sometimes. ▶ Gaps in staff responsiveness directly delay case resolution; variability in the speed and clarity of responses
Home Personnel	▶ Help desk/kiosks are available in cities with support staff ▶ Staff is trained to handle partner histories, review reasons for ID Blocking	▶ Difficulty meeting specific managers or category heads in person due to frequent staff turnover ▶ Staff may not fully understand local work conditions, routes, or operational realities

▸ Emerging practices and lessons from worker experiences

1. Lessons from earlier platform models and worker experiences

Across platform-based work arrangements, grievance redressal has increasingly come to be treated as a technical function. It is viewed as one that can be optimized through automation, standardization, and scale. However, workers with longer experience on platforms frequently recalled earlier grievance arrangements as more accessible and responsive. They described clearer communication, greater access to support and greater confidence in their ability to raise concerns and have them addressed. These retrospective accounts suggest that some practices valued by workers are not necessarily new or technologically advanced, but draw on earlier forms of support that workers perceived as more responsive.

A consistent theme emerging from worker narratives is the importance of human presence within grievance redressal systems. This includes access to identifiable supervisors, category managers, or support staff, as well as physical offices where workers could seek assistance in person. These points of contact allowed workers to "put a face" to platforms that otherwise existed primarily as mobile applications, helping bridge the distance between digital interfaces and lived work realities. Workers described these arrangements as fostering trust, accountability, and a sense of dignity, elements that can be diluted in fully automated systems.

Within this landscape, the study identified two platforms whose design choices and grievance redressal mechanisms were described by workers as comparatively supportive. One of these platforms, discussed in detail in Box 4, stood out for integrating worker-centric principles across pricing, communication, and grievance handling. Its practices offer valuable insights into how platforms can reduce conflict, prevent grievances, and respond more fairly when disputes arise. The key features and lessons from this platform are elaborated below, while the following section draws on cross-sector worker testimonies to outline broader best practices.

1.1 Human contact, physical presence, and dignity in grievance redressal

Workers across sectors consistently contrasted current grievance redressal systems with earlier arrangements in which they had more direct access to human support. Many described past systems as simpler, more transparent, and more responsive, particularly because they enabled workers to speak directly to customer care representatives, supervisors, or category managers. A beautician from Ahmedabad explained this shift succinctly:

> **"Earlier, we could directly talk to customer care. But later they made the process so complicated that you could not directly trace customer care. You could only leave a message, and after a long time you could talk to them."**

Such changes were not merely procedural; workers experienced them as a loss of voice and agency. Earlier grievance mechanisms allowed real-time explanation, clarification, and negotiation, especially in cases involving customer misconduct, cancellations, or schedule changes. As platforms moved towards ticket-based and automated systems, workers felt increasingly distanced from decision-makers and uncertain about how, or whether, their complaints were being considered.

Another dimension of earlier best practices related to reciprocal accountability between workers and customers. In the home-personnel services sector, workers recalled being able to rate customers, a feature they viewed as crucial

to maintaining dignity and safety. One worker described how this system functioned:

> **"Earlier, if I worked for a customer, she could give me five stars. But if I did not like the customer, I could give her one star. If I gave one star, then the next time I would not be tracked to that customer. Later, they stopped this. Only the customer could give the rating."**



The removal of this feature was perceived as reinforcing a skewed power dynamic, where workers remained continuously exposed to difficult or unsafe customers without recourse. Another worker from Mumbai echoed this concern, noting that earlier platforms explicitly recognized customer misbehaviour as a valid grievance category:

> **"Earlier there used to be an option to choose that the customer misbehaved. Now, we don't get that option. Earlier, if something happened, you could raise a ticket and talk to someone."**

Workers also highlighted how, in earlier phases, complaints often resulted in visible action, reinforcing trust in the grievance redressal process. Workers from Ahmedabad in the home-personnel sector described instances where collective complaints led to customers being removed from the platform altogether:

> **"There were some clients who tortured workers. All of us complained, and then they removed those clients from the platform. This was done by the category manager. After that, we did not face such issues."**

Such examples demonstrate how grievance redressal mechanisms can function preventively, by addressing problematic actors rather than repeatedly placing the burden of adjustment on workers. The role of category managers and supervisors was central in this process. Workers repeatedly described these intermediaries as individuals who understood local contexts, work conditions, and the nature of customer interactions. One worker explained why this mattered:

> **"Earlier, when category managers spoke to us, it was a good thing. They knew what happens here. They were able to help. Now customer care sits in Gurgaon, Delhi, or Bombay. They will not help in any manner. We just have to call them."**

Daily proximity and familiarity were seen as key to effective grievance handling. Supervisors who interacted regularly with workers were better positioned to assess complaints, respond empathetically, and escalate issues where necessary. Workers felt less hesitant to report grievances when they knew the person on the other end understood the realities of their work. In contrast, automated systems were described as rigid, impersonal, and dismissive of context. A beautician from Hyderabad reflected on this transition:

> **"Earlier, our category manager would warn us, talk to us. Later everything became computer-based. They say it is automated, so they cannot do anything."**

In the home-personnel sector, workers also noted that significant policy shifts, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, further reduced opportunities for dialogue and feedback. One worker explained:

> **"You don't have any scope to give feedback now. Earlier, we could say something to the trainer. After corona, everything became online. Earlier, if a customer misbehaved, you could choose that option. Now you cannot."**

Delivery workers echoed similar sentiments, recalling a time when helplines were more responsive and accessible:

> **"Earlier, whatever the problem, you could call the helpline. For the first three to four years, they used to pick calls immediately. Now they are not properly picking up calls."**

Across these accounts, several features of earlier grievance redressal systems – direct calling options, physical offices, identifiable supervisors, reciprocal ratings and visible action – emerged as best practices not because they eliminated grievances entirely, but because they were more accessible. These mechanisms reduced hesitation in reporting problems and made workers relatively better heard.

1.2 Current good practices in accessible grievance reporting

In the beauty services sector, another platform emerged with comparatively better grievance reporting access, documentation, and follow-up. Central to this platform's approach is a comprehensive in-app ticketing system that allows workers to articulate grievances in their own words rather than selecting from restrictive predefined categories. Workers can raise complaints related to hub changes, fines, payment discrepancies, customer disputes, and technical glitches, and can attach supporting evidence such as images or audio recordings (voice notes).

This system enables workers to track the status of their complaints, view assigned support staff, and monitor expected timelines for resolution. Importantly, workers can rate the resolution they receive and reopen tickets if they remain dissatisfied. Such features were described as enhancing transparency and responsiveness, particularly when compared to systems where grievances disappear into opaque queues without feedback.

The platform also maintains local support offices where workers can seek in-person assistance for issues related to equipment, digital wallets, transactions, or app functionality. While workers acknowledged that visiting these offices often involves travel and temporary loss of income, they nevertheless valued the clarity and finality of the resolutions offered. Face-to-face interaction was seen as especially important for complex or urgent issues that could not be adequately explained through text-based systems.

Another notable practice relates to handling customer misconduct. Workers are able to document instances of misbehaviour through detailed notes and evidence, which helps protect them against false accusations. In such cases, problematic ratings or bookings are removed from workers' profiles, ensuring that these incidents do not adversely affect performance scores or future work allocation. Together, these features reflect an approach that combines digital efficiency with safeguards against unilateral decision-making, offering a more balanced grievance redressal framework.

Box 4: A Model for Worker-Centric Platform Design

▶ CASE STUDY: Namma Yatri[1] as a model for worker-centric platform design: Key practices and lessons

The inclusion of this example does not constitute an endorsement by the ILO. The practices described reflect information collected for this study and worker perceptions at the time of fieldwork.

Positioning Namma Yatri as a worker-centric alternative: During the course of this study, workers compared different ride-hailing platforms and highlighted ways in which platform design and governance influenced their everyday experiences, income stability and interactions with customers. In these accounts, Namma Yatri was frequently identified as a platform with practices that workers perceived as

1 Namma Yatri is an open network mobility application built with the idea to provide multi-modal service to the commuters without the involvement of any middlemen. This application is built on the common network standards defined by ONDC built on the Beckn protocol (open source).

comparatively supportive. Workers highlighted features related to pricing, communication and grievance redressal that they considered helpful in addressing some common concerns. The practices described below reflect information collected during the study and workers' perceptions at the time of fieldwork.

Pricing structures and flexibility that support workers: Workers consistently emphasized Namma Yatri's pricing model as a source of stability and predictability. They reported that unlike platforms where fluctuating surge pricing or opaque fare calculations create uncertainty, Namma Yatri offers stable per-kilometre rates that deviate minimally across trips. This predictability allows drivers to estimate their daily earnings with greater accuracy, plan their working hours, and avoid the anxiety associated with sudden fare reductions or inconsistent incentive policies.

A central component of Namma Yatri's approach, according to drivers interviewed, was its **zero-commission model,** which they reported was replaced by a subscription fee. Drivers described this fee as nominal and said that it allowed them to accept unlimited rides within the applicable subscription period. They also reported that the subscription was payable only when they accepted a ride, meaning they did not incur the fee on days when they did not work Workers appreciated the clarity with which this information is communicated through written explanations on the app as well as accessible short videos, often resembling tutorial formats familiar to users through platforms like YouTube Shorts.

Drivers interviewed also reported that the platform compensated waiting time and the distance travelled to reach a rider's pick-up location. They considered these features helpful in reducing fuel-related costs and recognizing time spent travelling to a booking.

Similarly, drivers reported that the platform allowed multiple cancellations without penalty. They said this provided greater flexibility when managing medical appointments, family emergencies or other disruptions. Drivers also reported that Namma Yatri placed less emphasis on customer ratings, which they felt reduced the pressure associated with rating-based performance systems.

Interface design that prevents conflict and reduces daily frictions: Several everyday interactions that appear minor to an outsider can accumulate and significantly affect workers' sense of dignity and well-being. Namma Yatri's interface includes features designed to minimise these micro-conflicts. A prominent example is the distinction between AC and non-AC cabs on the customer interface. In cities such as Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Thiruvananthapuram, where non-AC cabs and Kaali-Peeli[2] taxis are common, workers frequently encounter customer dissatisfaction when expectations about vehicle type are not met. Other platforms do not always differentiate these options, leading to disputes at the pick-up point and requests for renegotiation.

Namma Yatri's clear categorisation allows customers to choose the type of vehicle they prefer before booking the ride, ensuring transparency and preventing confusion. Drivers explain that this significantly reduces altercations, re-negotiations, and the pressure to offer discounts upon arrival. Workers, therefore, spend less time managing conflict and more time focusing on their core task, improving their overall working environment.

Accessible and responsive grievance redressal mechanisms: Drivers interviewed frequently highlighted Namma Yatri's direct helpline as a useful point of contact. They reported that the helpline connected them with a support executive, allowing them to explain issues directly, including during emergencies.

Drivers also reported that the platform generally did not permanently or repeatedly block their IDs without warning. According to their accounts, when a customer filed a complaint, the helpline contacted the worker and heard their version before action was taken. Drivers perceived this process as allowing them to be heard and reducing the likelihood of unilateral decisions. They also reported that when they raised complaints about customers, including concerns relating to discriminatory behaviour or harassment, the platform was willing to intervene.

2 Kaali Peeli taxis are the Padmini Premiere yellow and black taxis operated by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Transport Authority (MMRTA). They have been operational since December 1909.

Ranjan, S., Durgude, U., Rai, S., Dhawan, A. & Singh, P. (2024). The End of An Era: A Customer's Perspective on The Decline of Padmini Kaali Peeli Taxis in Mumbai. Naturalista Campano. Volume 27, Issue 3.

As discussed in the preceding sections, workers' experiences with grievance redressal mechanisms on platforms reveal significant limitations in both access and effectiveness. Across sectors, workers demonstrated limited awareness of grievance redressal processes, largely because these mechanisms are complex, stringent, and poorly disseminated. Among the workers interviewed, awareness of formal grievance procedures was limited, and many reported learning about them through experience or peers.Instead, they described learning about these processes through trial and error, often after already facing adverse consequences such as penalties, income loss, or ID blocking.

At the same time, workers who have been engaged with platforms for longer durations, particularly in sectors such as home and beauty services, described a noticeable deterioration in policies, earnings structures, and grievance redressal mechanisms over time. What were once more accessible points of contact or responsive systems have gradually been replaced by automated interfaces, delayed responses, and opaque decision-making. Simultaneously, new workers continue to enter platform work, many of whom have no reference point for how policies or redressal mechanisms functioned earlier. This creates a workforce where long-term workers experience decline and erosion, while newer workers are introduced into already constrained systems with minimal institutional support.

Against this backdrop, it is important to understand how workers seek support when formal mechanisms fail to provide timely or meaningful recourse. Specifically, what alternative channels do workers rely on to manage everyday grievances and respond to emergency situations? Our findings suggest that in the absence of effective institutional support, workers increasingly turn to peer networks, informal collectives, and solidaristic practices as critical strategies for survival, knowledge-sharing, and emotional reassurance.

2. Peer networks and collectives as recourse and strategy for workers

Platform work is marked by spatial and social fragmentation. Workers are rarely co-located in traditional workplaces, and interaction with peers is often incidental rather than designed into the structure of work. In ride-hailing and delivery sectors, workers may encounter each other at hubs, parking areas, or within shared geographic zones, allowing for intermittent interaction. These physical proximities, though limited, enable workers to exchange information, share grievances, and build informal connections.

In contrast, workers in home personnel services, such as beauty and cleaning services, experience a higher degree of isolation. Their work is conducted within private households, and direct interaction with other workers is largely absent. In such cases, training centres serve as one of the few spaces where workers meet, usually during onboarding or occasional retraining sessions. These encounters are often brief and sporadic, yet they have become important sites for building connections. Even within these constrained spaces, solidarities have emerged organically, reflecting workers' shared vulnerabilities and dependence on one another.

Across sectors, these informal ties have evolved into important support systems that fill the void left by weakening formal grievance redressal mechanisms. Peer networks, particularly those facilitated through digital platforms such as WhatsApp, function as parallel infrastructures of care, knowledge, and collective action.

WhatsApp groups and informal channels: One of the most prominent forms of peer support identified in this study is the use of WhatsApp groups and informal digital channels. Workers across sectors described these groups as immediate, accessible spaces where they could seek guidance during moments of confusion, distress, or crisis. In situations where formal mechanisms were perceived as slow or difficult to navigate, workers relied on peers to make sense of their circumstances.

For delivery workers in Bangalore, these groups play a crucial role during emergencies. As one worker explained:

> **"If there is an accident we have a WhatsApp group, among the workers. So, it will be there that an accident has occurred and they will be taking the person to hospital. Few of us will leave aside our work and will be going there. We will be losing money because we will be getting some profit for so much hours based on the orders we take. But that time we will have to leave aside that and go there. So, it will take some time for the person's people to come."**



This account illustrates how peer networks can provide immediate practical and emotional support during emergencies. In this instance, workers reported being willing to forgo income to assist an injured colleague, highlighting the role these networks can play in providing support when immediate assistance is needed.

WhatsApp groups also serve as informal knowledge repositories, particularly for newer workers who struggle to understand earnings structures, penalties, and deductions. Workers in Hyderabad described how peers act as interpreters of opaque app interfaces and policies:

> **"They even don't know what they have earned, what penalty and all, so they come to us and ask the same, so it like even those who have no knowledge they giving job,"**

Through such exchanges, workers develop collective financial literacy, learning how incentive systems function, how penalties are applied, and what forms of social security or insurance are nominally available. Information about accident insurance, medical claims, and eligibility criteria is rarely communicated clearly by platforms, making peer explanations crucial for access.

Beyond routine queries, workers across sectors described reaching out to peer groups during situations involving harassment, customer misbehaviour, injuries, or safety concerns. Women workers, in particular, spoke about alerting peers when facing inappropriate conduct or unsafe work environments. These groups become spaces where workers can seek reassurance, practical advice, and sometimes physical assistance.

Peer networks also function as informal directories of support within platform hierarchies. Workers frequently exchange contact details of supervisors, hub managers, or helpline executives perceived to be more responsive or empathetic. When their immediate point of contact is unhelpful, peers guide them towards alternative channels. A beautician in Hyderabad explained:

> **"Basically we find out the number from one another. We get the number from our friends who are working there. Because some executives tell you to raise**

> **a ticket and put a message and when you call up again they don't take your call. When you message they don't reply...I got the number of a manager and she has a very nice nature and she always picks up the call- others don't even take our call and they don't message or read our message."**

Such practices reflect how workers collectively navigate challenges in accessing support, relying on informal reputations and personal networks to identify alternative points of contact when formal mechanisms were perceived as slow or difficult to navigate.

In-person help: Digital connectivity through WhatsApp is often complemented by in-person support, particularly during acute emergencies or situations requiring physical presence. Workers described numerous instances where peers intervened directly to prevent financial penalties, ensure safety, or provide assistance.

A beautician in Hyderabad shared how, during an emergency that required her to urgently cancel an assignment, she was unable to reach customer care to explain her situation. To avoid being penalized for cancellation, she contacted her peers, and a fellow worker stepped in to complete the service on her behalf. This act of substitution was driven by a mutual understanding of the rigid and unforgiving nature of platform penalties.

Ride-hailing workers in Mumbai similarly described collective efforts to support families of workers who had lost their lives. Peers accompanied bereaved families to police stations, assisted with filing accident reports, and supported legal proceedings against perpetrators. In these moments, peer networks extended beyond workplace solidarity to encompass social and emotional support for families navigating complex bureaucratic processes.

In the delivery sector, in-person assistance was particularly visible at hubs. Younger or more technologically adept workers often helped older workers or those with limited literacy navigate app interfaces, submit complaints, or understand earnings dashboards. In Bangalore, delivery workers recounted how peers assisted an older worker who was partially blind by helping him operate his phone and accompanying him during night deliveries so that he could meet incentive thresholds and sustain his income.

Across cities and sectors, workers repeatedly emphasized that these acts of mutual assistance—whether helping with app navigation, resolving minor technical issues, or responding to emergencies—were central to their ability to continue working. Even when peer intervention did not result in formal resolution, these interactions provided spaces for workers to vent, share frustrations, and feel heard in an otherwise isolating work environment.

From informal support to collective action: While peer networks often function as immediate coping mechanisms, they also facilitate the identification of shared grievances that are difficult to contest individually. Through informal communication, workers begin to recognize patterns—policy changes implemented without consultation, declining earnings, inadequate social security, or persistent non-responsiveness from platforms. When such grievances remain unresolved, workers increasingly turn towards collective action.

As discussed further in the next section, these collective responses take multiple forms, including demonstrations, strikes, boycotts and social media campaigns. For instance, participants described a coordinated action in which a large number of drivers simultaneously tested a government-mandated panic button following a worker fatality in Mumbai and concerns about the system's effectiveness. According to participants, the action was intended to assess whether the panic button was functioning and whether it would elicit a response.

In another instance, participants described how beauticians in Bangalore mobilized through social media to raise concerns about long working hours during weekends and festivals. According to participants, they organized a campaign referred to as "Black Diwali" to draw attention to their inability to celebrate festivals with their families.

There are also instances where collective action has led to tangible outcomes. Delivery workers in Trivandrum described how sustained protest resulted in the creation of restroom facilities for women at the Pattam hub:

"They have done a strike at Pattam for women's restroom. It was for the toilet facility in Pattam. So, some of the workers had started a strike for the parking and toilet issues. After the strike only they are creating a new building. There they are making a toilet for both men and women. They are giving a small dressing room there. In other Instamart there is no dressing room there"



While not all collective actions yield lasting change, workers reported turning to such efforts when formal grievance redressal mechanisms were perceived as opaque or unresponsive. In this sense, peer networks and collectives can complement existing systems by providing informal and trusted avenues for support and information.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that peer networks serve as crucial lifelines for platform workers. They offer immediacy, trust, and empathy that formal mechanisms can inadvertently lack. However, their very necessity points to a deeper structural concern: the reliance on informal solidarity reflects the absence of robust, accessible, and accountable institutional grievance redressal systems. While peer support is invaluable, it should not substitute formal responsibility. Instead, it highlights the urgent need for platforms and the state to recognize, strengthen, and integrate worker-centred approaches to grievance redressal.

Across cities and sectors, workers repeatedly emphasized that these acts of mutual assistance—whether helping with app navigation, resolving minor technical issues, or responding to emergencies—were central to their ability to continue working.


10:30 am
Last Minute
Cancellation!

Discussion

Despite various mechanisms for redressing grievances in platform-based work, a wide array of worker concerns exists in a space beyond formal grievance systems. Not all concerns expressed by workers fall within the ambit of grievances that platforms recognize as raiseable or resolvable. These include structural issues like pay and commission models, algorithmic incentives, and everyday interpersonal friction with customers that falls short of harassment, as well as broader concerns around physical strain, emotional stress, and the costs of mandatory equipment. Workers also articulated aspirational demands for improved benefits and policy changes that fall outside the remit of existing grievance systems. Some concerns raised by workers fall outside the categories accommodated by existing platform grievance systems.

Addressing this gap requires acknowledging a shared landscape of responsibility. Platforms have the primary responsibility for providing channels through which workers can raise both individual and recurring concerns.

Not all concerns expressed by workers fall within the ambit of grievances that platforms recognize as raiseable or resolvable.

▸ Procedural gaps in platform GRM design

Assessed against effectiveness principles such as transparency, clarity of decision-making, the opportunity to be heard and access to review, workers' accounts point to several procedural gaps in existing grievance redressal mechanisms. Rather than functioning primarily as forums for dispute resolution, current GRMs appear oriented towards operational efficiency and standardized handling, which workers reported could constrain their ability to fully engage with or challenge decisions affecting their livelihoods. Pay determination illustrates these procedural gaps clearly. Workers describe a gap between rising operational costs and their shrinking share of nominal fares, order or service values, especially once commissions, taxes, and service fees are deducted. The formulas governing fares, incentives, and penalties remain opaque to most workers, producing information asymmetries. When algorithmic outputs diverge from workers' on-ground experiences and no explanations are forthcoming, perceptions of fairness and control are further eroded[7].

A similar pattern emerges in the governance of metrics and ratings, which workers identify as pivotal for work allocation, incentives, and even access to social protections, yet which are governed by algorithms that are not fully transparent to them. Workers report having limited or no channels to formally contest ratings, reinforcing a sense that penalties can be both disproportionate and irreversible. Importantly, workers' narratives show that ratings frequently capture factors outside their control including

7 Kadolkar, I., Kepes, S., & Subramony, M. (2024). Algorithmic management in the gig economy: A systematic review and research integration. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 46(7), 1057–1080. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2831

traffic, weather, platform-side technical glitches and customer misunderstandings and yet the system treats these scores as neutral indicators of individual performance. When ratings decline, platforms often respond with measures such as reduced order allotment, loss of bonuses, or even account blocking rather than prioritising guidance, accommodation, or investigation, even in cases where workers have long and otherwise positive records. Existing literature has highlighted concerns about the use of rating systems in employment governance, including the incorporation of customer assessments into decisions that can affect workers' opportunities and the scope for workers to challenge such assessments[8].

The possibility of account deactivation further intensifies perceptions of procedural insufficiency. Workers describe deactivation as sudden, anxiety-inducing, and largely unreasonable; they may receive a brief message that their account has been blocked due to 'performance' or 'customer feedback', but are seldom provided with a clear explanation of the specific incident, evidence, or steps required to seek review. As a woman worker in the home-personnel sector from Delhi shared,

> **"When we join a platform for work, we give our 100 percent. With what we earn, we plan our lives including buying a bike or a house. The EMI for the house runs on our earnings. Suddenly if the platform blocks us, we only know how difficult that situation would be. If need be, they could suspend us for two or three months so that we can work on the mistakes. But completely cutting off is very wrong. The platform continues to run, but we alone bear the loss."**

This account underscores how deactivation is not merely an administrative action but a rupture in workers' economic stability, particularly for those with fixed financial obligations. Here again, the system does not consistently align with minimal due-process standards as understood in dispute resolution practice. Workers interviewed frequently reported that they did not have access to a clear hearing or independent review process before or following deactivation. Taken together, the findings point to gaps in procedural fairness, particularly in relation to opportunities to be heard, access to review and the transparency of decisions. Procedures also appear closely integrated with performance management, with repeated unresolved attempts, auto-closed tickets and limited support responsiveness reported by workers. Procedural justice research suggests that acceptance of even unfavourable outcomes depends on whether individuals feel heard, respected, and provided with understandable reasons. Where these conditions are perceived to be absent, grievances tend to persist and may migrate to informal networks, collective action, or external legal avenues, as workers look beyond internal mechanisms for redress.

Allocation of risks between platforms, customers and workers

Beyond procedural shortcomings, workers' accounts suggest that some operational and demand-side risks are borne disproportionately by workers. They describe repeatedly bearing the financial, temporal and bodily costs of events that originate in platform design or customer behaviour. As a driver explained this asymmetry between customers and workers reflected in platform's responsiveness,

> **"If a customer forgets even something worth ₹100 in the car, the company will call me ten times asking about it. Customer issues get immediate attention. But if a driver meets with an accident or faces any problem, there is no response from the company. If a driver ever asks for extra money or misbehaves, the ID gets blocked immediately. We have to explain ourselves and apologise, and only then they consider reactivating it. But when a customer refuses to pay, even for genuine reasons, the company says, 'That's your problem, handle it yourself.'**

8 Duggan, J., Carbery, R., McDonnell, A., & Sherman, U. (2023). Algorithmic HRM control in the gig economy: The app-worker perspective. Human Resource Management, 62(6), 883–899. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22168

Drivers only want one thing, if there is a complaint, fine, take action, but at least listen to the driver's side."

Unpaid or partially paid cancellation, penalties in 'customer not responding' scenarios, compliance with return to hub protocols, and uncompensated travel or waiting time all point to a model in which customer and platform volatility is absorbed downward. These experiences are consistent with strands of literature that point to a power imbalance between platforms and a workforce that appears to have limited bargaining power and institutional protections[9].

Customer-facing rules and metrics are central to this risk transfer. Cancellations and punctuality standards are designed to shield customers from inconvenience and platforms from reputational harm, while providing relatively limited protection for workers against loss of income or opportunity in last-minute changes, no-shows, or unrealistic expectations. The requirement for workers to go through elaborate, time-consuming protocols to prove customer unavailability exemplifies how the burden of verification and its associated costs are placed on workers. Ratings and algorithmic allocation further entrench this model. Workers emphasize that these metrics are highly sensitive to factors they cannot control such as traffic, weather, last-minute customer demands, building rules that restrict lift access, or delays caused by previous jobs. Fear of negative ratings or lost incentives can push workers toward behaviours such as unsafe driving, excessive physical exertion, or tolerance of customer mistreatment, in order to comply with expectations embedded in platform rules.



Automation features like auto-assignment of tasks which are presented as efficiency-enhancing or income-maximising, can also curtail workers' ability to accept or refuse jobs based on their own assessment of safety, economic viability, or personal circumstances. Customer misbehaviour and unreasonable expectations further illustrates the limits of worker protection within this governance model. Accounts of intrusive surveillance, verbal abuse, penalties tied to technical glitches, forced doorstep delivery under physically taxing conditions, and customers refusing to pay fare adjustments show how contentious situations are experienced as being resolved in ways that favour customer satisfaction. Platforms frequently respond to such incidents by prioritising damage control on the customer side by issuing apologies, waiving charges, or offering credits, while allowing the worker to absorb the financial loss, rating impact, or emotional stress linked to the encounter.

Viewed together, these patterns underscore that grievance redress is not merely an administrative function but also a key site where the political economy of platform work becomes visible. Procedural gaps in GRM design and routine risk transfer through customer-driven governance appear mutually reinforcing. The everyday experience of bearing disproportionate financial, temporal, and bodily risks under the constant possibility of ratings-based sanctions or account loss amplifies the impact caused by weak grievance processes. In this context, where these procedural gaps persist, grievance mechanisms may be experienced by workers primarily as operational complaint-management systems rather than as effective avenues for remedy.

9 Siep. (2020, February 22). Platform Capitalism. 2017. Nick Srnicek. SIEP. https://ecumenico.org/platform-capitalism-2017-nick-srnicek

Shift from human-centred GRMs to automated systems

Across sectors and geographies, many longer-tenured workers interviewed for the study described a shift from grievance mechanisms that relied more heavily on local offices, identifiable supervisors and reachable helplines towards app-based and automated systems, in which chatbots and standardized tickets have become important and, in some cases, the only routes for raising concerns. Workers also reported changes in the availability of physical centres, managerial staff and human support. These accounts suggest that changes in grievance infrastructure may affect workers' access to human support and the conditions under which grievances can be articulated, interpreted and resolved. As a ride-hailing worker shared,

> **"There should be a direct, open communication system just like customers have. The moment a customer raises a concern, the company immediately calls them. The same should happen for drivers. There should be quick responses and proper follow-ups on whether the issue was resolved. If such a system existed, 70% of the complaints would be reduced. Direct connectivity between drivers and customer support would solve most problems."**

For instance, workers in the beauty sector emphasize a sense of abandonment that they feel when the 'help centre option' vanishes from their apps and repeated ticket-raising yields silence rather than support. Automation also shapes who is able to engage with the system. The ticket-raising process assumes a level of digital and textual literacy as workers are expected to navigate drop-down menus, correctly identify categories, follow multi-step prompts and articulate their issues succinctly in writing. For those with limited literacy or unfamiliarity with platform-specific terminology, these requirements convert an already stressful moment into an intimidating ordeal. The language of the interface further compounds this exclusion. As chatbots available only in English or a limited set of regional languages, workers who don't speak these languages find themselves unable to describe their grievances or rely on colleagues to translate or type on their behalf.

Automation doesn't only filter who can complain but also narrows down what can be said. The design of ticket menus allows a finite list of predefined categories that correspond to issues the platforms has already anticipated and encoded. Anything that falls outside these boxes is difficult if not impossible to report. Workers repeatedly describe situations where their lived experience does not 'fit' the available options. They then attempt to choose the closest category, funnelled into standard workflows and template responses that do not respond to the substance of their complaint. Therefore, the central feature of automated GRMs is delimiting the universe of 'legitimate' complaints by software design, filtering out forms of harm that are harder to quantify or rectify within the existing system.

A recurring theme in workers' narratives is the temporal cost imposed by automated grievance processes. The back-and-forth exchanges with chatbots, repeated automated calls, and prolonged waiting periods translate into lost working time, with the entire opportunity cost borne by the worker. Importantly, the role of intermediate human actors such as team leaders, supervisors, or category managers does not appear to mitigate these limitations. Workers across platforms reported that supervisors were often inaccessible, unresponsive, or lacked the authority to intervene meaningfully in disputes related to payments, deactivations, or customer complaints. Even when contact was established, workers were frequently redirected back to the ticket-raising system, reinforcing the centrality of automation.

In platforms where chatbots are complemented by accessible helplines and empowered staff, automation may streamline simple cases while preserving human discretion for complex or urgent matters. Overall, the findings suggest that workers' experiences with automated grievance systems may limit opportunities for workers to explain complex grievances and obtain human review.

Fragmented and fatiguing grievance pathways

The shift to automation constrains access at the front end including who can complain and how, the fragmentation of grievance pathways shapes what happens to complaints once they enter the system. Workers' accounts reveal grievance journeys that are long, circuitous and emotionally draining. Rather than encountering a coherent and continuous pathway for dispute resolution, workers described procedurally lengthy, complex and fragmented pathways involving repeated contact with different channels and points of contact, with timelines that were often unclear. Workers reported that even when they manage to reach a helpline agent, the scope of assistance is limited. While certain pay-related issues may occasionally be resolved, helpline agents often lack the authority to intervene in on-ground disputes or systemic problems. This is particularly evident in situations requiring immediate support, such as conflicts with customers, restaurant staff, or housing societies. As platforms rely heavily on remote and digital systems, frontline agents are constrained to issuing warnings, sending notifications, or escalating cases without clear follow-up. For more complex cases, workers are told that the issue will be 'escalated' or 'noted', with little clarity on timelines, responsible persons or next steps. This combination of gatekeeping, limited authority and vague escalation practices means that the path from initial complaint to actual remedy is both unclear and exhausting.

The emotional toll of these repeated, fragmented interactions is significant. Workers speak of having to narrate upsetting incidents such as harassment, false accusations or serious financial losses again and again to different people, only to see no tangible change. The act of retelling becomes draining, particularly when workers suspect that their prior accounts are not even recorded or read. Over time, workers reported that this repetition could generate a sense of futility, with some coming to believe that investing further time and effort in formal grievance mechanisms was unlikely to lead to a resolution. This fatigue is not merely psychological but material as every minute spent in queues, on calls, or writing follow-up messages is time that can be used to complete trips, orders or services. Fragmentation is also spatial and informational. Workers highlight that they are rarely given one stable, long-term contact point for their grievances such as a named case-handler or a dedicated number for ongoing issues. For ongoing issues, this lack of traceability makes it difficult to assess progress or ensure that grievances are being addressed. Uncertainty around response times particularly in emergencies adds to this strain. Delivery workers, for example, reported SOS response times of 30–45 minutes, a delay that feels misaligned with the immediacy of road accidents or hostile encounters.

In this context of fragmented formal mechanisms, peer networks emerge as crucial, alternative systems of grievance support. WhatsApp groups and informal worker circles function as spaces for sharing information about earnings, deductions, penalties, and platform practices areas where official communication is often opaque or inadequate. These networks provide not only informational clarity but also



emotional reassurance, helping workers navigate uncertainty and isolation.

Fragmentation and fatigue do not arise solely from the absence of mechanisms, but from the cumulative burden of navigating systems that are disconnected, repetitive, and emotionally taxing. Over time, many workers respond by disengaging from formal GRMs altogether, turning instead to informal networks that, while supportive, lack the authority to address systemic issues. Taken together, the findings suggest that fragmented grievance pathways not only undermine resolution but also reshape workers' strategies of coping, resistance, and collective action. In doing so, they highlight challenges associated with grievance systems that prioritize procedural availability without ensuring continuity, accountability and clear follow-up.

Gendered dimensions of grievances, safety, and redress

The findings suggest that largely gender-neutral grievance systems may not adequately address some of the differentiated risks and constraints reported by women workers. In some cases, women workers reported that existing grievance mechanisms did not adequately respond to concerns relating to safety, dignity and other gender-specific experiences. For instance, in male-dominated sectors including ride-hailing and delivery, women workers report instances where their grievances are not always taken seriously by team leaders or support staff, with several accounts pointing to dismissive communication and delayed responses. Some women described having to appeal directly to male supervisors to have their accounts reinstated, pointing to possible gendered dynamics in workers' access to platform grievance processes. This suggests that access to redress may at times depend on interactions shaped by informal dynamics alongside formal procedures. Although formally gender-neutral, GRMs may need additional safeguards or differentiated responses where workers face gender-specific risks.

Gendered vulnerabilities are particularly pronounced in the home personnel services sector, where work takes place within customers' private residences. Workers described experiencing harassment, intimidation, and, in some cases, being prevented from leaving the premises. A recurring concern relates to dignity and bodily autonomy, especially the denial of access to basic facilities such as washrooms. Women workers recounted completing long and physically demanding services without being permitted to use the restroom, leading to distress and forcing them to restrict water intake. These experiences highlight the particular challenges of addressing safety and dignity concerns in private, in-home workspaces, where workers may have limited avenues for immediate support or intervention. Additionally, safety risks are exacerbated by mismatches in service bookings, such as male customers registering under female names. These risks are potentially intensified by algorithmic systems that appear to prioritise efficiency, ratings and task completion over proactive safety verification. These accounts suggest a need for clearer safeguards to address such mismatches and strengthen the way safety concerns are addressed within platform systems.

Emergency response mechanisms, such as SOS features, also appear insufficiently attuned to gender-specific risks. Women delivery workers noted that while the presence of an SOS button offers some reassurance, responses are often delayed or not differentiated for situations involving harassment or heightened gender-based vulnerability. In home-based services, workers explained that guidance during incidents of inappropriate behaviour typically focuses on immediate withdrawal advising workers to leave the premises but post-incident follow-up and redress remain inconsistent. This approach prioritizes risk avoidance over accountability, leaving workers uncertain about whether complaints will lead to any consequences for customers or systemic changes.

Collectively, these observations highlight how platform GRMs, by approaching grievances as individualized and gender-neutral, may not fully capture the interplay of safety, dignity, health, and caregiving responsibilities in women's platform work. Women often adapt through informal strategies, such as adjusting hours, avoiding certain areas or customers, or relying on peer networks for guidance and support.

These practices fill gaps in formal mechanisms but underscore opportunities for GRMs to incorporate more tailored responses to gendered experiences, potentially enhancing accessibility and effectiveness for all workers.

Legal and institutional gaps affecting platform-led redress mechanisms

The study points to a number of legal and institutional gaps affecting grievance redress in India's platform economy. In the absence of a comprehensive regulatory framework specifically governing grievance redress for platform workers, platform-led mechanisms may in practice constitute an important avenue through which workers seek redress. Workers highlighted that policy changes including introduction of new penalties, revised incentive structures or additional requirements while raising grievances, are often communicated with little advance notice. Where such changes are introduced without clear legal or procedural safeguards, workers may face uncertainty and difficulty in adapting to them.

Workers also reported that they rarely receive written records of grievances, decisions, or closures, impeding escalation through independent forums including unions or even state authorities. In practice, this can result in a largely platform-controlled grievance process, where disputes are acknowledged, processed and closed within the same system against which grievances are being raised.

The individualisation of complaints is another urgent issue. Platform GRMs are not intended to handle systemic or collective issues; instead, they are intended to handle individual complaints. This individualised approach weakens workers' bargaining power and prevents collective action by dividing common problems into discrete cases. Initiatives to institutionalize registration, welfare boards, and internal grievance processes are indicated by emerging state-level legal frameworks including those in Karnataka, Bihar, Rajasthan, and the upcoming Telangana Bill. These frameworks have so far placed considerable emphasis on registration and welfare measures, while provisions concerning some labour rights and collective representation remain uneven. The extent to which these frameworks address collective representation and minimum earnings pay varies and warrants further examination. Current provisions require workers to appeal to the same entity that took the contested decision, with no clear appellate body or judicial recourse.

Platform-led grievance systems prioritise efficiency and automation. However, without independent oversight, clear timelines, enforceable accountability, or algorithmic transparency, the fairness and effectiveness of these systems are constrained. Rather than delivering justice, they consequently limit access to justice.

Taken together, these findings suggest that grievance redress in platform work is less about the availability of mechanisms and more about their design and orientation. Systems that prioritize automation and efficiency over dialogue tend to externalize risk and responsibility onto workers, while human-mediated mechanisms, even when informal, offer greater scope for fairness and trust-building. The strong worker preference for in-person or live human support underscores the limitations of purely digital grievance architectures, particularly in sectors characterized by income volatility, safety risks, and asymmetric power relations. Strengthening grievance redress in platform work therefore requires moving beyond digital compliance toward mechanisms that recognize workers' rights, circumstances and need for effective participation in grievance processes. This includes clearer escalation pathways, proportional responses to worker grievances, and greater investment in human-facing support structures, especially for sectors and worker groups facing heightened vulnerability.

This is where the state and society play an indispensable role. Many of these unaddressed concerns, from fair earnings and social protection to safety standards and protection from algorithmic arbitrariness, are matters of public interest and labour rights. Regulatory frameworks can establish appropriate protections concerning pay, data transparency and fair

deactivation procedures creating a baseline upon which grievance systems can operate. Social dialogue institutions, including tripartite forums involving workers, platforms, and governments, can provide a forum for dialogue on the evolving conditions and governance of platform work. Ultimately, building fair and sustainable platform economies requires a dual architecture: responsive and worker-sensitive business practices coupled with robust and adaptive public policy.

Drawing upon these analysed accounts of workers, and the information provided by platforms, the way forward can be guided by the following recommendations:

Systems that prioritize automation and efficiency over dialogue tend to externalize risk and responsibility onto workers, while human-mediated mechanisms, even when informal, offer greater scope for fairness and trust-building.



Recommendations

▸ Recommendations for platforms

The following recommendations draw on the study findings and are intended to propose options for strengthening grievance prevention and redress.

Short-term

A. Enhance support infrastructure and accessibility

Increase human support: The GRM is recommended to enhance access to human support, particularly for complex, sensitive or unresolved grievances, alongside appropriate digital channels.

Assign a dedicated human point of contact: Platforms could consider assigning a consistent human point of contact for complex or recurring cases, which will eliminate the inefficiency of re-explaining details to the rotating support agents, thus preventing information loss and improving resolution efficiency.

Deployment of regional operations managers: Platforms should ensure access to personnel with knowledge of local operational conditions such as unique traffic patterns, hyperlocal network congestion and safety hotspots to bridge the gap between platform's centralized policies and on-the-ground realities faced by the workers.

Establish multilingual support systems: The helplines and the support interfaces should be available in multiple languages including the prevalent regional languages to eliminate language as a barrier to grievance submission and resolution.

Diversify grievance submission modalities: The existing grievance submission mechanism should be complemented with voice-based complaint submission to accommodate workers with varying levels of digital literacy. The pre-defined grievance categories should be complemented with open-text field options for detailed incident description.

Establish proactive status communication protocols: Along with acknowledging the receipts of the complaints immediately, an automated system to provide regular and transparent updates on grievance resolution status to the complainant, should be established.

Optimize direct communication channels: The direct communication channels are recommended to be staffed adequately to meet demand, minimize waiting times and resolve reachability issues.

Empower the team leaders/supervisors: Platforms should consider giving designated frontline personnel sufficient authority to resolve defined categories of grievances, with clear safeguards and escalation procedures.

B. Strengthen the emergency response protocols of the GRM

Operate a dedicated 24/7 emergency number: The platforms are recommended to have an immediately reachable 24/7 emergency number, distinct from the standard helpdesk, and making it displayed in the app and physical ID cards.

Operate a women-specific emergency line: The platforms should ensure emergency support is equipped to respond effectively to gender-specific safety concerns, including through appropriately trained personnel and, where required, dedicated channels.

Staff with trained human operators in these emergency lines: These emergency lines should be staffed adequately with personnel trained in de-escalation techniques, crisis management, and possessing knowledge of local emergency service integration protocols to offer effective solutions.

Ensure panic button functionality and integration: The platforms are recommended to ensure that the panic buttons, installed in apps or hardware-based, should be functioning properly, connecting the worker to the 24/7 emergency helpline, facilitating connection to local emergency services if needed, and sharing the live location data with the response team.

Make access to the emergency system free of cost: Emergency channels in platforms should be accessible without financial barriers. Any measures addressing misuse should be proportionate and should not discourage genuine use in emergencies.Deploy a platform-specific rapid-response team: Every platform is recommended to maintain an internal, trained and equipped rapid-response team who are capable of executing the rescue operations.



C. Review platform policy design to better address grievance triggers

Restore and strengthen the two-sided rating and feedback system: Customer feedback and misconduct reports should be subject to transparent review, with proportionate measures for substantiated or repeated misconduct.

Verification of customers: Platforms should consider proportionate customer-verification measures, consistent with applicable privacy and data-protection requirements, particularly where these can help address repeat misconduct and serious safety risks.

Reforming compensation policies for cancellation and unresponsive customers: Platforms should review compensation arrangements for travel and waiting time arising from customer cancellations or non-responsiveness.

Formalizing an emergency cancellation category in the app: To address the fear of penalties for cancellations from the workers' end due to emergencies, it is recommended that the apps should have an 'emergency cancellation' category. When this option is selected by the workers, it should connect the workers to the platform's emergency services, without any usage limits.

Enhancing transparency in the payment structures: The mechanisms determining payment structures, incentive calculations, commissions, penalties and fines should be communicated transparently to the workers. Any

policy changes in this earning structure should be communicated well in advance.

Designing algorithms to factor in workers' well-being: Platform systems should account for factors outside workers' reasonable control, including severe weather, traffic disruption and safety considerations, when assessing delays in service delivery or performance.

Policies governing deactivation of workers' accounts: Account deactivation should be subject to human oversight. A standardized and effective mechanism should be available for workers to appeal deactivation decisions.

Tracking the quality of grievance redressal post-closure and analysing grievance origins: A systematic collection of the workers' feedback on the resolved grievances is recommended. The platforms should publish the anonymized data on the volume and types of grievances received, and the outcomes. This data should be further analysed to identify the recurring problems in the sectors, deeper analysis going beyond the resolution mechanism and understanding the root cause.

Simplifying and streamlining the social security claims process: The insurance claim processes should be clearly communicated and simplified, along with a dedicated support team dealing with social security claims.

Eliminating the non-essential tasks associated with service delivery: The platforms could periodically review operational requirements to identify requirements that impose disproportionate burdens on workers relative to their operational purpose.

Establish regular feedback channels for workers to contest and shape platform policies: This option should allow the workers to raise concerns against the platform policies like maintaining perceived unrealistic rating standards, a decline in rating leading to fewer gigs, limited social security benefits, high commission rates, incentive structure, penalties, and platform's policy changes related to these.

Institutionalizing a collective grievance channel in GRM: Whereas the current GRM can only process the individual's complaints, particularly where a group of workers is affected by a common or systemic issue, it is recommended that the GRM should be extended to accept collective grievances.

Solicit workers' feedback on the GRM on a regular basis: The platforms should implement a structured channel for reporting the systemic issues within the grievance redressal processes such as delays in resolution, erroneous closures, unresponsive support to evolve the GRM into a more effective and trusted system.

Initiating GRM training programmes for the workers: The platform companies should develop and deploy training modules to educate workers on the full spectrum of the GRM, including the grievance categorization, submission, and navigating the resolution pathways.

D. Formalizing engagement with workers' formal and informal collectives on GRM policy

Recognition and engagement with workers' collectives: Platforms should establish channels for engagement with workers and their representative organizations, consistent with freedom of association and the effective recognition of the rights to collective bargaining.

Ensuring protection against retaliation: The platforms should guarantee that the members of these groups and their collective action remain protected from any kind of retaliation by the platforms, aligning with the fundamental principles of freedom of association.

Medium term

A. Strengthening the internal GRM capacity

Training of the GRM personnel: The help-centre agents, team leaders, and the emergency response team should be provided regular training, so that they are updated with the newer emergency scenarios and procedures.

Ensuring a pre-decided number of women representatives in the Grievance Redressal Committees: The platforms should seek proportionate representation of women in grievance bodies and ensure access to personnel trained to handle gender-based discrimination, violence and harassment.

Shifting performance metrics of GRM personnel from quantity to quality of resolution: The GRM personnel should be assessed periodically and the assessment metrics should focus on workers' satisfaction scores and resolution quality, instead of solely on quantitative metrics such as 'number of tickets closed'.

Expanding physical support infrastructure: The platforms are recommended to establish more physical offices/hubs where the workers would be able to meet platform representatives, and raise their grievances. An effective face-to-face channel for grievance redressal fosters trust and confidence among workers.

B. Ensuring GRM standardization and external accountability

Establishing sector-specific standardized grievance redressal mechanism: The GRM across the platforms in a particular sector should be standardized, regardless of which platform the worker uses, or which city the worker operates in. The standardization will include adhering to strict timelines for grievance resolution, consistent communication protocol on the status of redressal, and following a uniform grievance redressal policy related to ID blocking, penalties, ratings, social security claims etc.

Instituting an external oversight body: To support effective access to justice, an arbitration body comprising the necessary expertise should be established to address appeals and review evidence where applicable.

Long term

Establishing a centralized grievance redressal authority (CGRA): The government may wish to examine options for strengthening independent grievance review for platform work, including whether an existing institution, or a new dedicated mechanism would be most appropriate.

▸ Recommendations concerning workers' organizations

The implementation of the following recommendations must be situated within existing legal provisions and limitations affecting collectivisation of platform workers. The recommendations presented here however reflect pathways that may be considered for incremental implementation.

Build evidence and public awareness of GRM failures: Workers' unions should prioritize documenting workers' experiences with unresolved grievances, deactivation, penalties and other recurring concerns. Systematically collecting and documenting such cases can help build an evidence base to support evidence-based dialogue and advocacy. Unions may also use this evidence to inform engagement with platforms, policymakers, the media and other stakeholders and to highlight recurring concerns and areas requiring improvement.

Develop union-controlled digital infrastructure: To empower this evidence-based advocacy, it is recommended that unions invest in developing their own robust digital infrastructure. A union-controlled platform should serve as a central hub, featuring a shared repository of "know-your-rights" information and a secure database for digitally recording members' unresolved grievances and experiences. This collective ledger would not only provide vital support to individual workers but also enable the union to analyze data to identify the most recurring or serious concerns related to grievance handling.

Demand accessible, transparent, and human-centric GRMs, workers' voice in GRM design: A core strategic demand must be for platforms to redesign their GRMs to be accessible, transparent, and human-centric. Workers' organizations can use social dialogue and other lawful forms of representation to advocate for accessible, transparent and human-centred GRMs. Platforms should provide meaningful opportunities and mechanisms for workers and their representatives to contribute to the design and periodic review of GRMs.

Advocate for regulatory intervention: Finally, beyond engaging individual platforms, unions must advocate for appropriate regulatory and policy measures, developed through consultation with relevant stakeholders. This involves engaging with policy makers and relevant public institutions to establish a standardized code of conduct for platform GRMs, supported by a strong enforcement framework and clear technical specifications. By pushing for this overarching regulatory architecture, unions can seek to institutionalize fair practices across the industry, moving beyond case-by-case battles toward systemic accountability and protection for all workers.

▶ Recommendations for the State and Central Government

Establish a mandatory regulatory framework for platforms' GRM: The central government should establish clear minimum standards for platform GRMs, following consultation with workers' and employers' organizations and other relevant stakeholders. These standards should include requirements for effective human review of consequential automated decisions, including suspension or deactivation, together with notice, reasons and access to appeal. They should also promote respect for workers' freedom of association and, where applicable, effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, consistent with relevant legal and international labour standards. In addition, platforms should be required to disclose data on grievance volumes, types and resolution rates at regular intervals to support transparency and evidence-based assessment of GRM effectiveness.

Integration of platforms' GRM with public safety and national emergency infrastructure: The central government should mandate the platforms' emergency protocols to integrate with the national emergency response system so that a trigger from the workers' app creates an alert in the national emergency number. The platforms also should be required to map the safe spots such as police stations, metro stations etc on the workers' app so that the workers can reach these places for emergency assistance.

Bridge the digital skill and informational divide: The state skill development authorities should include a training session in their digital literacy camps on navigating the platform rights and redressal, with a focus on the marginalized cohorts.

Institute independent oversight to audit platforms' GRM performance: The state governments should assess options for independent review or oversight of platform grievance mechanisms, including the potential role of existing labour or other competent authorities. Such mechanisms could also include appropriate arrangements for reviewing aggregated and anonymized grievance data, with participation from government officials, platform representatives and workers' organizations, to identify recurring issues and inform policy and regulatory responses.

Legal recognition of the informal workers' collectives: The state governments should review legal and practical barriers affecting platform workers' ability to organize, be represented and raise concerns collectively, consistent with principles of freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Address the gap in public infrastructure: The relevant ministries should issue platform worker-friendly city guidelines that translate into measures to assess the adequacy and geographic accessibility of sanitation, rest, drinking-water and charging facilities in areas with high concentrations of platform work. Relevant authorities could explore measures to improve platform workers' access to restroom facilities at suitable commercial and transport locations, including through licensing requirements, partnerships or other locally appropriate arrangements.

Mandatory provision of restroom access to platform workers: To strengthen platform workers' access to the essential urban infrastructure, the state governments should mandate that the restaurants, shopping malls, fuel stations and office complexes to provide them with access to restroom facilities and enforce this with penalties for non-compliance as part of their occupational safety rights.

Annexure

Box 5: Need for Customer Verification

▶ CASE STUDY: The Imperative of Customer Verification

The rise of the platform economy has fundamentally reshaped service delivery across multiple sectors, creating unprecedented convenience for consumers. Concurrently, the legal and regulatory landscape is evolving to address the novel challenges of this new form of work. It is commendable that legal frameworks governing platform work are gaining traction globally, with numerous states enacting legislation to regulate it. In India, for instance, while a comprehensive national framework for gig workers remains nascent, the Code on Social Security explicitly recognizes platform workers, marking a significant step towards formalising protections, while scope for better recognition under the other three codes remains. However, an equally critical yet under-examined dimension is the behavioural risk posed by a subset of customers and the systemic lack of accountability for their actions. This brief analysis from fieldnotes examines customer misconduct across the three key sectors and argues that robust customer verification, complemented by evolving legal frameworks, is paramount for establishing equitable and safe services.

Home Personnel Services: Platforms offering in-home services, such as beauty treatments or appliance repair, place workers in uniquely vulnerable positions within private, unmonitored spaces. The case of 'Rini' is a telling example of how customer power can be abused. Although customer misbehaviour was highlighted in all cities, an FGD in Mumbai, workers reported a particular customer's demeanour that demands attention. Rini's behaviour extended beyond transactional requests into exploitative territory: borrowing cash from a worker, demanding off-protocol uncompensated labour ("preparing egg biryani won't take that much time"), and attempting to substitute products in violation of platform standards. Her tone and attitude were consistently questionable. Crucially, while collective worker reporting eventually led to the blocking of Rini's number, it surfaced a critical systemic flaw: the absence of customer verification. Workers rightly feared she could re-onboard using a different number or a family member's name. Their compliance with unreasonable demands was often driven by fear of retaliatory poor ratings, a power imbalance that platforms inadvertently reinforce. Another vital concern was highlighted by beauticians across cities who shared their own or their peers' experiences of sexual harassment at a household, where, as new entrants in an alien surrounding, despite the SOS option, they often feel unequipped in the moment but demand serious action once they exit the household. This sector highlights how sexual harassment and psychological pressure are endemic risks, exacerbated by the customer's anonymity.

Delivery Services: This presents a different dynamic, characterized by brief but frequent interactions at customers' doorsteps, often under time pressure. Here, humiliation and verbal abuse appear commonplace, as evidenced by workers in Bangalore who reported a 'running joke' at an active hub about a particularly crude regular customer. Despite the Team Lead's (TL) awareness of this persistent misconduct, and even instances of worker ID blocking initiated by the same customer, the platform's response remains reactive and insufficient. A woman delivery partner's first encounter with this customer involved being shouted at for following protocol, an initiation ritual that normalizes abuse. This case demonstrates that even when misconduct is an open secret within local hubs, systemic mechanisms to pre-emptively protect workers from known offenders are lacking. The power dynamic allows a problematic customer to continue accessing services and wielding the threat of complaints with impunity, while workers bear the emotional and professional cost.

Ride-Hailing Services: The risks in ride-hailing services escalate to potentially life-threatening levels, given the mobile, secluded, and extended nature of the interaction. Reports from drivers in various cities

include harrowing accounts of robbery and fatal violence, where customers booked rides with criminal intent. In one tragic instance, an altercation over a small amount of cash led to a driver's death. The aftermath revealed further systemic failures: the erasure of trip data and the profound difficulty in tracking and holding customers accountable, not least because of the ease of obtaining unverified, disposable phone numbers. This sector underscores the most severe consequence of the verification gap: physical safety. While platforms rigorously verify drivers, including background checks, vehicle papers, and licence validation, the person hailing the ride remains a digital ghost, creating a stark asymmetry in accountability that can have fatal outcomes.

The continuum of misconduct across these sectors, from uncompensated demands and the delivery customer's routine humiliation to the ride-hailing robberies, points to a common, glaring vulnerability: the unverified customer.

Therefore, alongside advocating for stronger legal protections, it is imperative to demand that platforms institute robust customer verification processes. If service partners must undergo thorough KYC (Know Your Customer) checks, a parallel, proportionate verification for clients is not merely reasonable but a cornerstone of the duty of care. This is not a call for invasive surveillance but for basic accountability, linking user accounts to verified identities. Such a measure would fundamentally alter the power dynamic, resulting in monitoring customers' conduct concretely by removing anonymity, enabling effective exclusion of serial offenders across identities, and providing law enforcement with actionable data in severe cases. Platforms with significant leniency in digital interactions have the capacity and responsibility to architect safer ecosystems. Verification would ensure that in cases of harassment, theft, or violence, platforms can be critical participants rather than silent intermediaries.

Ultimately, creating an equitable platform economy requires balancing the scales. Just as workers are assessed and held accountable, so too must customers be brought into the framework of verified, responsible participation. This is the next critical frontier in regulating the gig economy, one where safety and dignity are safeguarded not just by law, but by deliberate and ethical platform design.

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