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Online Work in the Philippines: Some Lessons in the Asian Context

Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy, Aniceto C. Orbeta Jr., Ramonette B. Serafica, and Lora Kryz C. Baje

CONTACT US:

RESEARCH INFORMATION DEPARTMENT
Philippine Institute for Development Studies

18th Floor, Three Cyberpod Centris - North Tower
EDSA corner Quezon Avenue, Quezon City, Philippines

publications@mail.pids.gov.ph
(+632) 8877-4000

https://www.pids.gov.ph

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Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy
Aniceto C. Orbeta Jr.
Ramonette B. Serafica
Lora Kryz C. Baje

PHILIPPINE INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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Abstract

The landscape of life and work, once shaped by the advancements in ICT, is being disrupted once again due to the ongoing pandemic. As people adjust their attitudes towards risks and firms adjust their losses, platform work/online work, or work that is delivered and transacted online, is likely to become part of the new normal. This paper looks into some stylized patterns in online work in the Philippines within the bigger context of the Asian experience. This highlights some of the challenges that pertain to skills and social protection; and recommends ways to address these challenges.

Keywords: Online work, platform work, Asia

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Online work in the Philippines: Some lessons in the Asian context*

*Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy, Aniceto C. Orbeta, Ramonette B. Serafica, and Lora Kryz C. Baje***

1. Introduction

Due to advancements in information, communication, and technology (ICT), a new form of globalization that redefines how people work and live is ushered in. This new form of globalization has been defined as the third unbundling[1], which, in the words of Baldwin (2019a), is essentially telemigration or virtual migration. Telemigration is not an entirely new concept and dates way back in 1980s when companies have started offshore outsourcing to take advantage of talent pools in low-cost nations (see for example, Graham et al, 2017b; Sako, 2005). One example is the Business Process Outsourcing, which has benefited from the pool of human resources in India and the Philippines.

In the coming years, exports of services have been predicted to grow considerably due to digital technology (see Baldwin, 2019b). True enough, digital technologies have facilitated the evolution of offshore outsourcing into a work arrangement mediated by digital platforms. These platforms bring together markets in the fastest, most efficient, and most convenient ways, thereby benefiting both firms and individuals. Firms have now access to a pool of diverse and geographically dispersed human resources while individuals have now access to economic opportunities that are not available in the local labor market. Platforms facilitate the demand and supply of at least three commodities: labor (e.g. Uber, Upwork, and Amazon Mechanical Turk), asset (e.g. Airbnb), and activities (e.g. Spotify). Platforms generally share three basic characteristics, they are technologically mediated, link user groups, and allow user groups to do particular things (Koskinen et al, 2019, p.320). One of the defining features of online work (interchangeably used with platform work hereafter) is the flexibilization of labor markets. Under this feature, firms can choose from a number of workers to finish short-term tasks at a relatively low cost (firm-driven flexibility) and at the same time, allows workers to achieve work-life balance (worker-driven flexibility) (Hunt and Samman, 2017). This flexibility has been an important selling pitch to most women due to the realities of care economy and housework. Given their possible role in economic inclusion, digital labor platforms can help

** The first three authors are senior research fellows while the fourth author is research assistant at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies.

[1]The first unbundling is related to the separation of production and consumption when countries exploit the price differential between tradeable goods. This coincided with the 1st wave of globalization that was characterized ty steam-powered production. The second unbundling is related to the relocation of factories to low-cost countries to exploit price differential between inputs (e.g. offshoring). This coincided with the 2nd 3rd waves of globalization that were characterized by mass production and automated production, respectively. The third unbundling is related to the separation of laborers with their labor services (*https://harvardpress.typepad.com/hup_publicity/2016/11/globalizations-three-unbundlings-richard-baldwin.html*). This coincides with the 4th industrial revolution that is characterized by unparalled ICT developments.

achieve SDG targets on women empowerment and gender equality (targets 5.b, 5.c, 5.5) and on the eradication of poverty (target 1.1).

The landscape of life and work, once disrupted by the advancements in ICT, is being perturbed once again due to COVID-19. The pandemic has started to change consumption habits that will likely have a significant impact on employment in micro, small and medium enterprises, and services sectors such as tourism, hotel/restaurant, and retail. It has accelerated the digitization of work, as companies implement work-from-home schemes due to community lockdowns and quarantines. The adoption of telecommuting and virtual collaboration as a new normal in the standard work arrangement is likely to blur the line that separates online and offline work, as firms adjust their operations to mitigate losses brought about by economic downturns and as workers calibrate their preferences and evaluate their attitudes towards risk. Indeed, data from Google Trends show that interest in "online work" has increased in India and the Philippines starting March 8, 2020. This search term reached its peak popularity in the Philippines at the time when the State has made definite pronouncements on the shift towards more relaxed community quarantines.

However, even online jobs are not pandemic-proof since businesses that outsource these work are also forced to streamline their operations, although there are jobs that appear to be resilient. Evidence in the US indicates that projects related to software development/technology have been largely unaffected by the ongoing pandemic while those related to creative/multimedia and sales/marketing support have been adversely affected (Stephany et al, 2020). This puts to the fore the development of skills necessary for value creation in online work, especially in countries where workers are doing jobs at the lower end of the value chain.

Other than concerns for skills development, online work has implications on decent work. Online workers do not have security benefits and protection entitlements that workers in standard work settings enjoy because they are classified as contractors or self-employed (Hunt et al, 2017; Forde et al, 2017). As the young population may be naturally drawn to work, there are concerns pertaining to the erosion of contribution base, leading to problematic gaps in terms of social protection coverage. Social protection schemes may become unsustainable. Critical issues such as the lack of collective representation (Graham et al, 2017a; Berg, 2016), duration of employment (Graham et al, 2017b; Barnes et al, 2015), and the types of skills developed in platform engagements (Forde et al, 2017; Barnes et al, 2015) are relevant to young and productive workers. The lack of social protection is likely to exacerbate gender inequalities since women, who are responsible for care economy and housework, are more likely to engage in online work.

Given the above, the sustainability of work in digital platforms is the overarching issue that the government needs to address so that Filipinos can take full advantage of online opportunities. This paper analyzes global and regional patterns of online work and looks into challenges related to skills, social protection, and others. It then provides ways to address these issues so that platform work becomes sustainable.

2. Definition and typology

The attention paid to the work in labor platforms has put forth serious concerns to be resolved, among which is the apparent lack of consensus on taxonomy that classifies the broad

range of economic activities mediated by platforms. This lack of consensus is attributable to the complex dimensions that pertain to differences in skills, market structure and clients, and employment status. Acknowledging the importance of parsimonious classifications which enhance analytical value, Forde et al (2017) have focused on the combination of the type of market and control/autonomy of workers to map the work in labor platforms. In this mapping, taxi services and food delivery are work that are highly controlled by platforms and serve the local market while creative projects are work that serve either the local of global market and give workers a high degree of autonomy (figure 1).

In a parallel work, these economic activities have been classified by Hunt et al (2017) and Graham et al (2017b) into either crowdwork or on-demand work. The former pertains to work that is commissioned by firms (local or abroad) and is transacted and delivered online while the latter requires a close interaction between workers and demanders (e.g. food delivery, ride hailing services, nanny services, and laundry)[2]. Crowdwork is further classified into macrotask and microtask. Microtasks are clerical in nature (e.g. copywriting, content access, product categorization, verifying and validating data, content moderation, text or audio transcription, and filling out surveys) with contract prices set by the client or platform without negotiation[3]. Macrotasks are longer-term projects that require specialized skills (e.g. IT programming, web development, graphic design) with contract prices that can be negotiated and eventually paid per project or if hourly, work is monitored by a surveillance software[4]. Platforms charge the worker a fee ranging from 5% to 20% of the project cost[5].

Consistent in meaning with the crowdwork parlance in Hunt et al (2017), Kuek et al (2015) use online outsourcing to refer to the contracting of third-party workers to perform tasks via Internet-based marketplaces or platforms. In this typology, online outsourcing is classified into microwork and online freelancing. Microwork and online freelancing often overlap, the major difference between the two is the size and complexity of the tasks and the compensation offered (Kuek et al, 2015). Microwork and online freelancing are akin to microtask and macrotask, respectively.

Yet another typology by Schmidt (2017) distinguishes digital labor markets based on whether tasks are assigned to a specific individual or given to an undefined group of people online (crowd) and whether the tasks are bound to a specific location or can be done remotely via the internet. Tasks bound to a specific location are considered gig work while those that are web-based are called cloud work. These distinctions are important as they determine how the platform operates, the situation of the independent contractor, the legal framework that applies, and potential regulatory measures (Schmidt, 2017).

In relation to the economy associated with platform work, there are at least four popular terms that are used in the literature, namely, gig economy, platform economy, collaborative economy, and sharing economy. The term gig economy is rooted in the observation that workers take on particular "gigs" without any guarantee of further employment. Invariably, gig economy workers are classified by companies as independent contractors. Hunt et al (2017)

[2] Another typology by Schmidt (2017) distinguishes digital labor markets based on whether the tasks are assigned to a specific individual or given to an undefined group of people online (crowd) and whether the tasks are bound to a specific location or can be done remotely via the internet. Tasks bound to a specific location are considered gig work while those that are web-based are called cloud work. He adds that these distinctions are important as they determine how the platform operates, the situation of the independent contractor, the legal framework that applies, and potential regulatory measures.

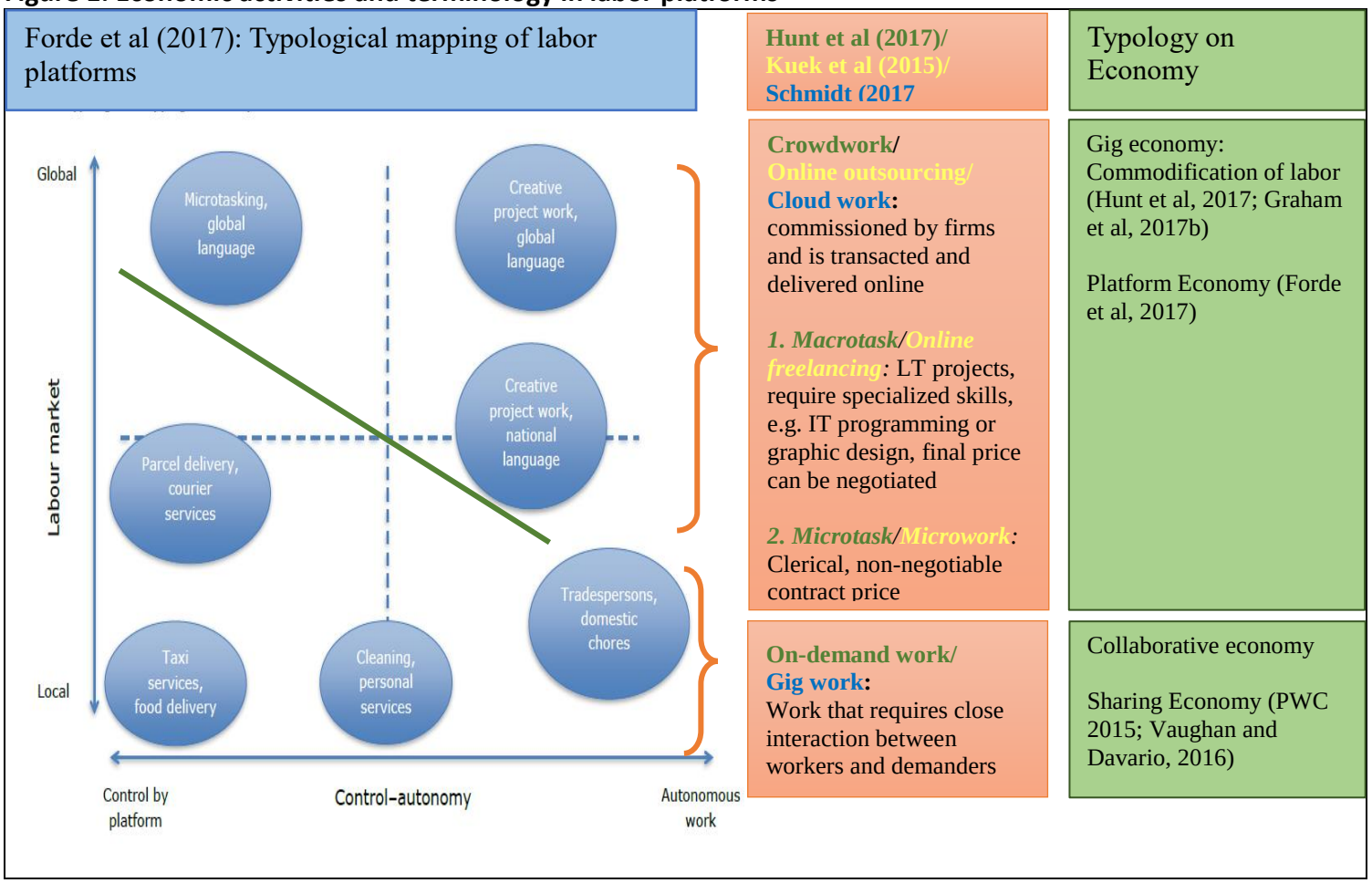
[3] *https://voxeu.org/article/working-conditions-digital-labour-platforms*

[4] *https://voxeu.org/article/working-conditions-digital-labour-platforms*

[5] *https://voxeu.org/article/working-conditions-digital-labour-platforms*

and Graham et al (2017b) have used gig economy to refer to the commodification of labor as opposed to the commodification of assets that is often referred to as sharing/collaborative/platform economy. However, gig economy has negative connotations due to its association with low-paying precarious work while collaborative economy, in its broadness, ends up classifying economic activities of varying complexities into a one big category (Forde et al, 2017).

Figure 1: Economic activities and terminology in labor platforms



Source: Authors' compilation of taxonomy based on Kuek et al (2015), PWC (2015), Vaughan and Davario (2016), Forde et al (2017), Hunt et al (2017), Schmidt (2017), and Graham et al (2017b)

Used interchangeably with sharing economy, collaborative economy has been used to refer to the monetization of assets or the sharing of idle resources such as in Airbnb, Uber, and Lyft (see PWC, 2015). On-demand economy, such as household services and professional services, is also discussed in the context of collaborative economy (see Vaughan and Davario, 2016). On the other hand, platform economy is viewed in the context of platform-mediated jobs that can be delivered online or offline (Forde et al, 2017), a typology consistent with the crowdwork and on-demand work classification of Hunt et al (2017).

In the succeeding discussion, this paper adapts the term platform work/online work to refer to work that is mediated by digital platforms and is transacted and delivered online.

3. Online work in selected Asian countries

Digitally-deliverable services

ICT have enabled the growth of services trade beyond the traditional exports of travel, transport, and construction services. With digitization, the types of services that could be supplied across borders have further expanded. Digitally-deliverable services comprise of various services that could be supplied digitally, which include insurance and pension services, financial services, charges for the use of intellectual property, telecommunications, computer and information services, other business services and audiovisual and related services (UNCTAD 2015, p. 9)[6].

Table 1: Share of digitally-deliverable services in total trade in services, exports

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
World	49.17	49.67	50.62	50.14	50.15
Developed economies: Asia and Oceania	47.22	47.44	49.22	48.27	48.79
Developing economies: Asia and Oceania	37.45	38.68	39.94	39.38	40.28
Developing economies excluding the People's Republic of China	34.14	35.90	36.82	36.05	35.92
Asia and Oceania	38.86	39.90	41.34	40.70	41.45
India	71.24	72.49	72.06	66.00	64.65
Philippines	71.88	74.31	67.82	62.05	61.58
Singapore	48.94	53.87	56.12	56.42	56.44
Japan	53.25	53.00	55.19	54.38	55.18
Pakistan	31.70	32.30	43.22	44.19	51.20
The People's Republic of China	45.15	42.49	44.51	44.78	49.26

Source: *https://unctadstat.unctad.org/*, accessed on June 30, 2020

As table 1 shows, digitally-deliverable services account for half of services exports globally and 40 % in Asia and Oceania. For India and the Philippines, its share was more than 60% in 2018, which was lower than in previous years. In other countries such as Singapore, Japan, Pakistan, and the People's Republic of China, its share has steadily increased over time. While the numbers are substantial, given the different services that could be digitally delivered and the varying complexity of the activities involved, these aggregate figures hide the types of tasks and skill levels behind a country's services trade. Thus, while the shares of digitally-deliverable services may be the same in two countries, one may be focused on more sophisticated activities with higher value added while the other may be concentrated in more simple tasks along the services value chain.

Aggregate patterns in online work

Partly due to the lack of consensus on definition and terminology, data on non-standard work arrangement are scarce, although national statistics offices in the US and the UK have started to develop methodologies that integrate this work arrangement into their labor force surveys (Hunt and Samman, 2019). However, there are aggregate data, such as the Online

[6] Digitally-deliverable services are based on the concept of potentially ICT-enabled services (ITES) developed by UNCTAD (2015). Although the various ITES products could be delivered remotely, there is no information to confirm whether they were actually delivered digitally. ITES conceptually include "activities that can be specified, performed, delivered, evaluated and consumed electronically" and is has been proposed that ITES be defined as "services products delivered remotely over ICT networks (i.e. over voice or data networks, including the Internet)" (UNCTAD 2015, p. 9).

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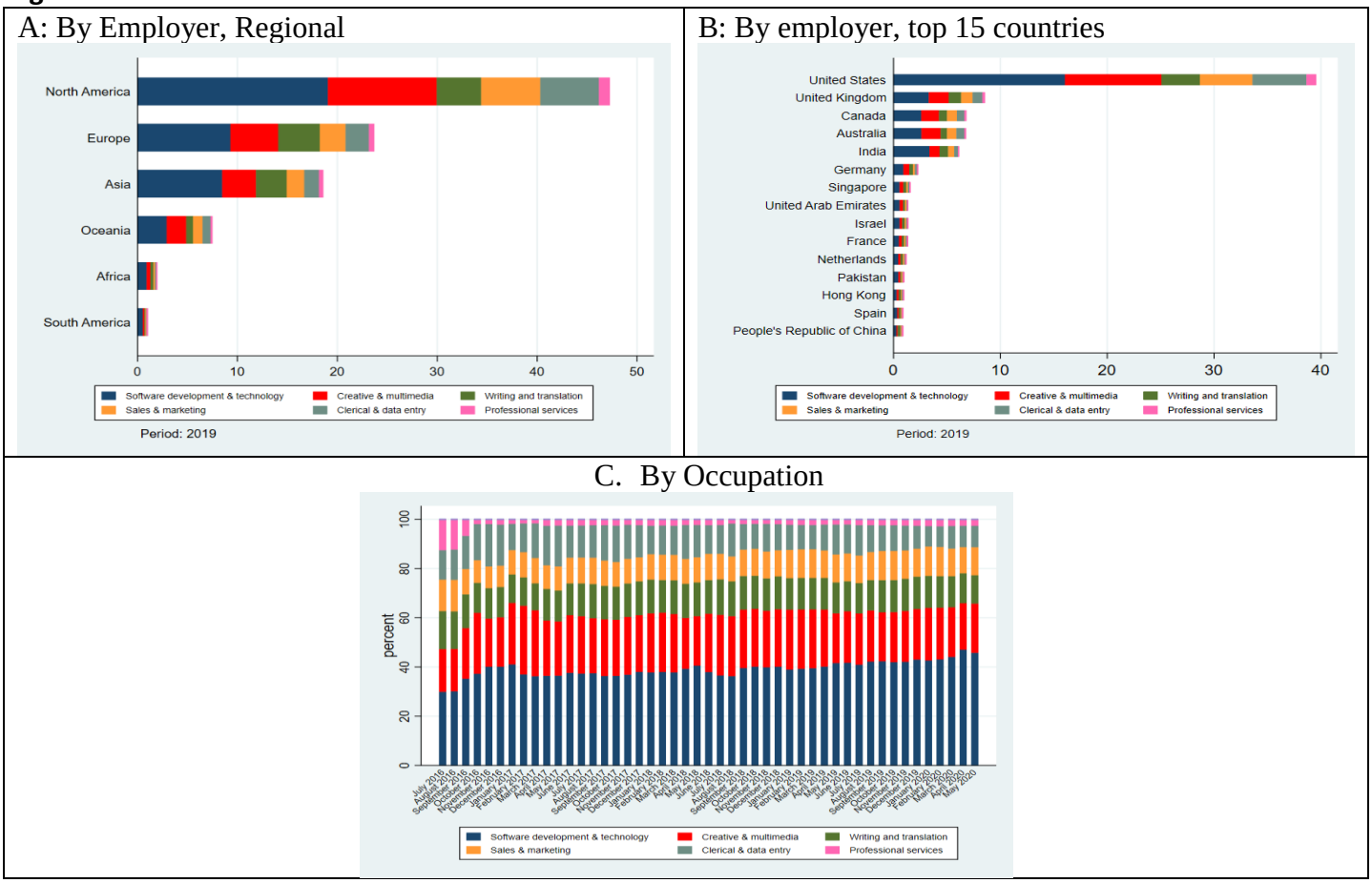
Labor Index (OLI)[7] that provide information on the distribution of online work in different economies. Based on the OLI, projects/tasks in online work have increased by 72% since its inception in September 2016. Using data from the OLI, we describe the global trends in online work.

The distribution of projects by location shows some notable patterns. First, in 2019, projects are concentrated in North America (47%), followed by Europe (24%) and Asia (19%) (figure 2, panel A). Data from 2017 up to the present show that this pattern has not changed much. Second, among the top 15 countries where the projects are located, the US accounts for 40%, UK 9%, Canada 7%, Australia 7%, and India 6% (figure 2, panel B). It is noteworthy that five Asian countries are included in the top 15, namely, India, Singapore, Pakistan, Hong Kong, China, and the People's Republic of China. Third, in terms of occupation, the share of software development/technology has been rising. By 2020, this is almost 50% of the global online work while around 20% is in creative and multimedia (figure 2, panel C). How do these jobs fare given the COVID-19 pandemic? Initial evidence indicates that jobs related to software development/technology are jobs that appear resilient while those related to creative and multimedia and sales/marketing support have substantially decreased (see for example, Stephany et al, 2020).

Figure 2: Distribution of online work

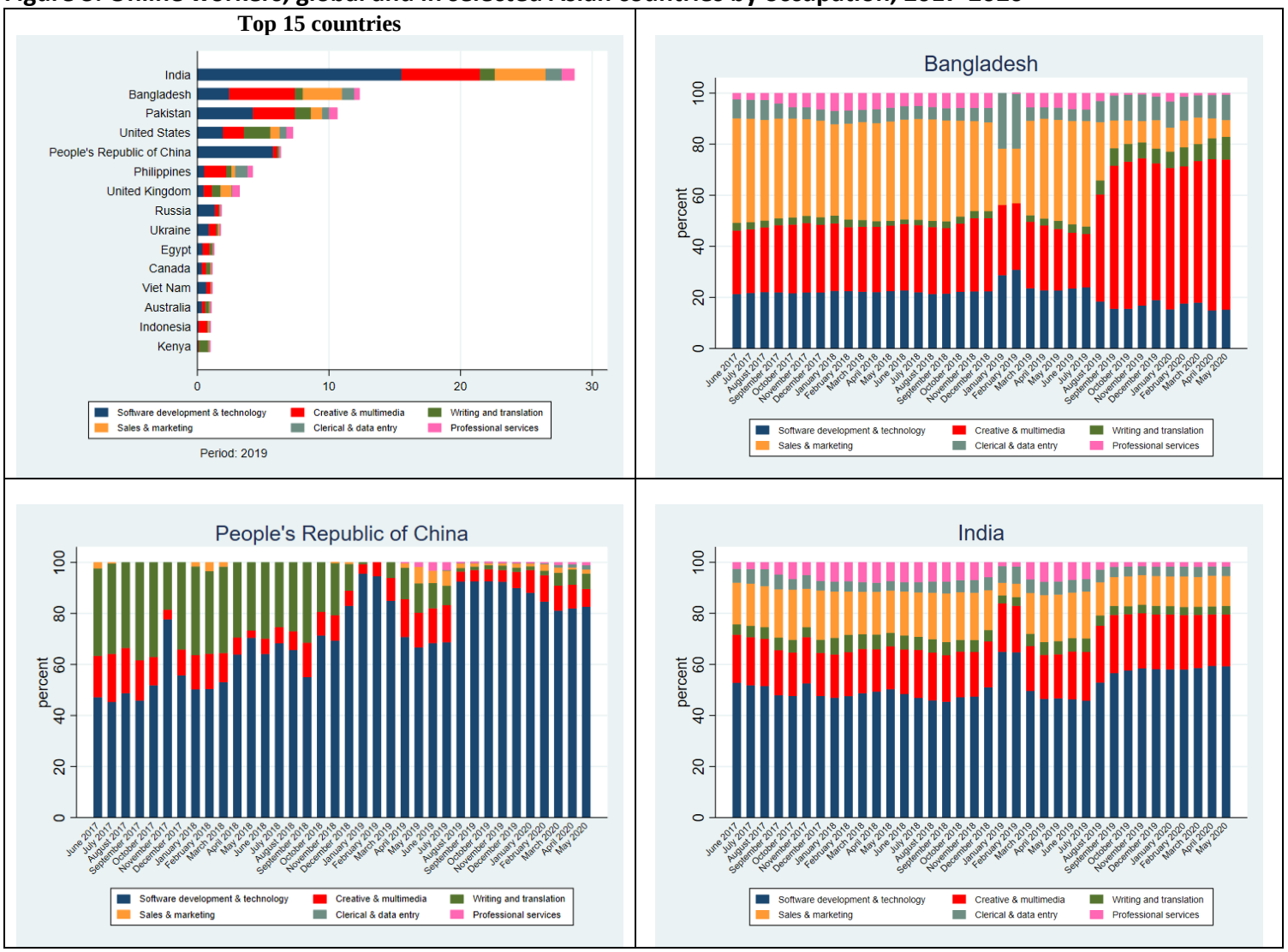


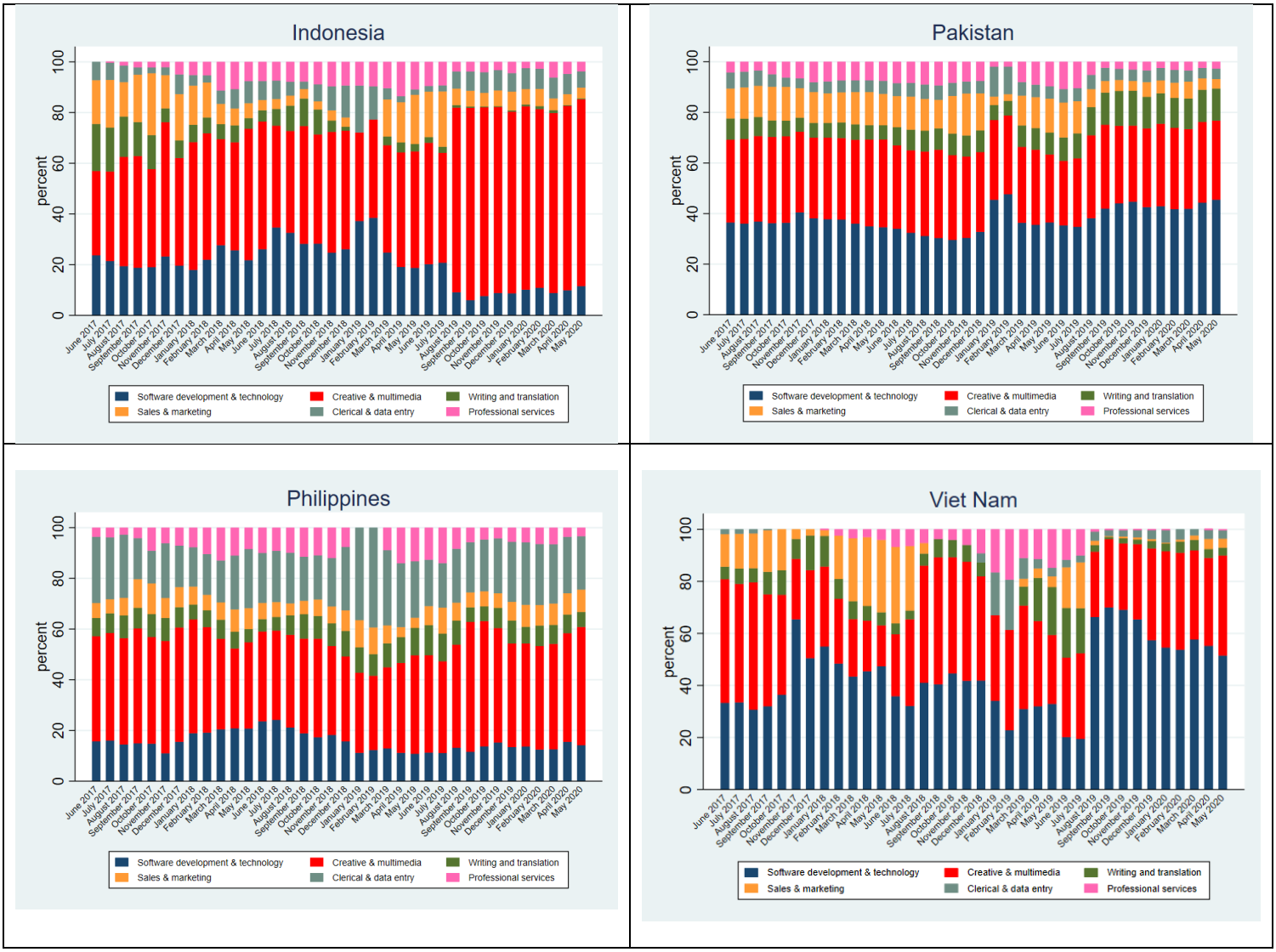
Source: Online Labor Index, downloaded May 30, 2020

[7] Index that measures the utilization of online labor platforms, or those labor through which buyers and sellers of labor or services is delivered digitally, excluding platforms for local services such as Uber and Airbnb. Samples are limited to the largest English language platforms accounting for at least 70% of all traffic to online labor platforms (*http://ilabour.oii.ox.ac.uk/how-the-online-labour-index-is-constructed/* and Kassi and Lehdonvirta (2018)). OLI database is maintained by the Oxford Internet Institute and the University of Oxford.

Turning to the distribution of online workers, the top three are Asian countries - India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (figure 3). Together, these countries account for 52% of the global online workforce. The Philippines (top 6), Viet Nam (top 12), and Indonesia (top 15) also have their share of the global online workforce although at less than 5% each. Some observations are worth noting as well. First, there is a disparity in the distribution of online work done in each country, which potentially reflects how a country's comparative advantage is viewed by the global market. A large percentage of online workers in the People's Republic of China, India, Russia, Ukraine, Viet Nam, and Pakistan work in the software development/technology while a large fraction of workers in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines perform creative and multimedia tasks. In the UK and the US, large fraction of online workers is engaged in professional services or tasks that have high value added.

Figure 3: Online workers, global and in selected Asian countries by occupation, 2017-2020





Source: Online Labor Index, downloaded May 30, 2020

Second, majority of online work are tasks related to software development/technology and creative/multimedia. Such types of online work are mostly done in Southeast and South Asia, although there are tasks done in the MENA, US, and UK as well (figure 2, panel B). This is consistent with the earlier models of offshore outsourcing that took advantage of the large pool of low-cost talents in Asian countries. More importantly, this has implications on the bargaining power of workers as workers from different countries with heterogeneous levels of development compete for work. Initial evidence shows that crowdworkers in Northern America, Europe, and Central Asia earn more than those in Africa and Asia and the Pacific (see Berg et al, 2018) and that non-western workers could be poorly rewarded in online work (Beerepoot and Lambregts, 2014).

Compensation may also be driven downwards by the number of people seeking jobs. In one platform, evidence shows that the Philippines accounts for 12% of the global oversupply (table 2). Not only will oversupply exert a downward pressure on compensation as workers potentially underbid each other but this will adversely affect the workers' bargaining power as well. For example, Filipino crowdworkers included in the ILO Survey of Crowdworkers have indicated concerns such as delayed communications of crucial instructions and getting a failing mark even after following the work requirements/specifications. Other than their admission of

mistakes due to language barriers and carelessness, those from Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Pakistan have articulated problems of time-bound outputs without any rooms for revision and of unscrupulous firms who simply did not want to pay. In almost all instances, workers have no recourse against abuse since there are no grievance mechanisms that are designed to handle disputes.

Table 2: Labor oversupply in one major platform

Country	Potential workforce	Successful workers	Over- supply
Global	1,775,500	198,900	1,576,600
Philippines	221,100	32,800	188,300
Malaysia	11,900	500	11,400
Viet Nam	7,700	1000	6,700
Kenya	21,700	1,500	20,200
Nigeria	7000	200	6800
South Africa	10,200	800	9400

Source: Graham et al (2017b)

Third, a large portion of online workers in the Philippines are working in jobs that have low value-added (figure 3). Around 25% of online workers in the Philippines are into clerical and data services while such workers account for less than 10% in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Meanwhile, only around 14% of Filipino online workers are doing tasks that are related to software development and technology, which is quite low compared to the proportion of such workers in India, Pakistan and even Viet Nam, at 59%, 45%, and 52%, respectively. In addition, the share of workers in software development and technology is increasing following the rising share of the occupation in global market.

Fourth, creative and multimedia have become key sources of online employment in some Asian countries (figure 3). From 2017-2020, the share of these workers has increased by 34 and 40 percentage points in Bangladesh and Indonesia, respectively. To date, it accounts for around 59% and 74% of Bangladesh and Indonesia's online workforce, respectively. In the Philippines, the share of creative and multimedia online workers is the highest (47%) while in Pakistan, its share is largest next to software development and technology (31%). This trend is not surprising since the creative industry has been recognized as an emerging industry that has a big potential in generating employment and income early on. At the global stage, the world exports of creative goods[8] has grown in value from $208 billion in 2002 to $509 billion in 2015 while the trade in creative services[9] in developed economies as a share of total export services has increased from 17.3% in 2011 to 18.9% in 2015 (UNCTAD, 2018). In Asia, the creative industry is likely to flourish, as countries boast of a big pool of young, creative, and technology-savvy people.

Social protection in the platform economy

Most platform workers do not enjoy security benefits and protection entitlements since they are classified as contractors or self-employed **(**Hunt et al, 2017; Forde et al, 2017). Indeed,

[8] Consists of Art crafts, Audiovisuals, Design, Digital fabrication, New media, Performing arts, Publishing, and Visual arts (UNCTAD, 2018).

[9] "To calculate the share of creative services, UNCTAD obtained balance of payments data of 38 developed economies and added the items that have a significant creative component at the most disaggregated level available (UNCTAD, 2018)."

based on the 2015 ILO Survey of Crowdworkers, only around 60% were covered by health insurance and around 35% had a pension plan (Berg et al, 2018). In a survey of five major platforms in 2017, Forde et al (2017) find that only around 36% are subscribed into a personal pension while 70% could not access protections such as maternity, childcare, and housing benefits.

Despite this reality in platform work, there are certain segments of the population that may be naturally drawn to online work. Young people are skilled at navigating online tools and resources and handling new technology. They are also likely to belong to a network of equally adept people. Indeed, Berg et al (2018) find that the average age of crowdworkers is 33 years. Geographical differences across workers are observed, with workers in developing countries being much younger (28 years) than those in developed economies (35 years). In the Philippines, the average age of platform workers is 31 years and the estimated probability of a 25-year-old being a platform worker is around 8 percentage points higher than a 35-year-old[10]. Because of the age composition of platform workers, the increasing number of young people attracted to platform work can result in the widening of gaps in the current protection coverage. The sustainability of existing social protection schemes also becomes a pressing concern as potentially more people do not regularly contribute to social security funds and health insurance. The erosion of the contribution base today will have significant effects on financing future entitlements and this problem is more pronounced in societies with an increasing elderly population. In the Philippines, the elderly population is projected to hit 10% in 2025 and 16% by 2045[11].

In addition, more women will likely engage in platform work since the latter promises flexibility that allows women to perform non-market work/care work alongside gainful economic opportunities. This can exacerbate gendered gaps in terms of social protection.

Work practices in online work

Due to concentrated markets that the relatively heterogenous workers serve, some work practices and ethics are observed. Price or rate competition in the form of underbidding, which help individual workers land a job but may prove to be disadvantageous to online workers as a group (Forde et al, 2017; Graham et al, 2017a). In addition, reintermediation, a situation in which successful online workers are taking on work that they farm out to other less visible and less experienced online workers, can lead to exploitation. Compared to the turn-around and remuneration when tasks are coming directly from end clients, Graham et al (2017a) find that some Malaysian and Filipino workers perform tasks with shorter turn-around time and receive lower compensation from reintermediation. On the positive side, workers are able to perform "skills arbitrage", in which workers are no longer confined to the local labor market and are, thus, able to get more for their talents (see for example, Graham et al, 2017a).

4. Moving forward

There is a need to create skills and training systems.

Just like other jobs, online work may be affected by adverse shocks, although there are jobs such as those in the software development and technology that appear resilient. These jobs

[10] Based on the 2020 PIDS-DICT Online Survey of Market and Non-Market Work (May version)

[11]Computed based on the PSA data downloaded from *https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/attachments/hsd/pressrelease/Table1_8.pdf* (Accessed May 20, 2019).

account for around 50% of the global online work and are mostly outsourced to the People's Republic of China, India, Pakistan, and Viet Nam. In addition, broad patterns indicate that Asian countries, like Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines are mostly into creatives and multimedia, a sector that has been found to have experienced substantial downturn in terms of projects due to the ongoing pandemic. On one hand, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines may want to capture some jobs in software development and technology and may opt to invest in ICT skills and focus the training and education system into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. On the other hand, these countries can create their niche in online work and focus on the creative and multimedia, which have jobs that differ in scope and complexities ranging from digital marketing to content creation, creative design, and creative technology. Skills development appears vital especially in the Philippines, which has a significant number of workers who are into data and clerical services. Thus, at the country-level, there is a need to assess the skills of the workforce vis-à-vis the requisite skills of the target occupation and industries and create enabling environments for workers to prosper in platform work.

However, instead of focusing on specific skills, a much better emphasis would be on the creation of a sustainable ecosystem encompassing skills development programs and training support initiatives that are useful in any types of work setting. As a starting point, countries need to craft a competency framework and a national strategy for skills and human capital development. A whole-of-government approach in developing the framework and strategy is useful as the collaboration of government, businesses, labor unions, workers, the academe, and service providers will ensure the continuity of the skills system and will strengthen the sharing of information, tools, and resources as the system evolves with the needs of global and local labor markets.

Currently, there are skills systems that government planners for platform economy can emulate. One such system is the SkillsFuture of Singapore, which provides an opening credit of SG$ 500 to at least 25-year-old Singaporeans in 2015 and a one-time top-up of SG$ 500 by October 2020[12]. Singaporeans can use these credits to enhance skills mastery and pursue lifelong learning. SkillsFuture exploits the digital platform to provide a comprehensive mapping of resources on education, career, and training with the goal heling Singaporeans make more informed labor market choices.

There is a need to design a social protection system that covers all workers.

As more young people are engaged in short-term, intermittent, or non-standard work arrangements, the erosion of contribution base may exacerbate coverage gaps, thereby weakening existing social protection schemes and increasing public finance strain because of social assistance to the unemployed. In addition, women are more likely to work in the platform, which can exacerbate gendered inequalities. In the context of the future of work, there has been calls for social protection to be decoupled from employment or be replaced by a universal basic income. However, decoupling social protection from employment will likely result in inadequate coverage and limited benefits, since some workers may not be able to accumulate sufficient entitlements due to the nature of their work and income patterns, and in the weakening of the employers' responsibility towards their workers (Behrendt and Nguyen, 2018). Issues on the universal basic income include the inadequate benefit levels to cover a

[12] *https://www.skillsfuture.sg/*

decent standard of living and the potential crowding-out of other public services (Browne and Emmervoli, 2018).

While the exact types of social protection are being debated, there appears to be a consensus on the desirable characteristics of a social protection systems. These include:

- **Universal and equal access** (ILO and OECD, 2018; WEF, 2017) and **flexibly designed** (Johal, 2018): This will involve flexible eligibility definitions that will cover workers in any work arrangements and can be customized to accommodate the needs and preferences of workers.
- **Portable** (WEF, 2017), **agile** (WEF, 2018), or **transferable** (ILO and OECD, 2018): Following the general principle that the facility follows the worker rather than being bound to a specific employment, the system should seamlessly support workers' mobility and recognize that workers will move in and out of work in response to local and global opportunities. One way of doing this is to explore a central entity that manages contribution and benefits of workers and provides a range of benefit even if they move from employer to employer or job to job (WEF, 2018). However, it should guard against delegating greater roles to private entities that may exacerbate the gaps in the provision of social protection (Behrendt and Nguyen, 2018).
- **Integrated with allied services and programs** (Johal, 2018): Social protection systems should have links with allied services and programs covering related risks. An example of a potential linkage is an unemployment insurance that not only provides minimum income while unemployed but also covers reskilling/upskilling and training cost to facilitate movement in-between jobs.
- **Facilitated by technology:** The system should leverage on technology not only in facilitating enrollment and payments of contributions and benefits but in providing nudges through information campaign that can reshape behavior and mindsets.

There is a need to strengthen infrastructure support for the creative industry and the creative process outsourcing.

At the national level, countries are cognizant that creative services will grow with the expansion of the ICT frontiers. However, some countries are quicker to recognize the contribution of the creative industry more than others. In Indonesia, the Creative Economy Agency, created in 2015, is tasked to oversee the development of the creative sectors, with the view of integrating these into Indonesia's economy. In 2017, the sector has employed 15.9 million people and generated more than 7% of Indonesia's GDP[13]. In the Philippines, there is a move in early 2019 to craft the Creative Economy roadmap that identifies priority sectors with the aim of strengthening the competitiveness and attractiveness of the country's creative talents and of making the country a leader in the creative economy in terms of size and value[14].

Some Asian countries have also shown big strides in innovation, an important ingredient for the creative economy to prosper. Among the Asian countries in the top 15 economies where platform work is outsourced, the Philippines and India belong to economies with innovation performance that exceeds expectations commensurate to their level of development. The Philippines ranks 63rd out of the 130 countries surveyed in the 2019 Global Innovation Index in terms of creative output and is 40th in the creative goods and services sub-

[13] *https://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2019/05/article_0003.html*

[14] *https://boi.gov.ph/creative-economy-roadmap-eyes-5-sectors-for-development/*

index. Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh rank 76th, 104th, and 115th in terms of creative output, respectively.

Although the improvement in innovations in creative goods and services bodes well for Asian online workers, there are challenges that need to be addressed. These include slow connectivity that hampers the efficient production of creative outputs in audio-visual arts and inefficient production of visual graphics. While this is a problem for all online work, this is more pronounced for the creative industry due to the bandwidth requirement necessary to execute the creative production. For example, in a February, 2020 Senate hearing in the Philippines, the Design Center of the Philippines testified that a 1-week production time of a creative output (e.g. advertising, film) in Thailand is roughly equivalent to a 3-month production time in the Philippines.

There is a need to explore the inclusion of platform economy as an area of cooperation among Asian nations.

In a standard work arrangement, workers can organize themselves into labor groups that can effectively provide a voice for advocacy and negotiation. Mounting a call to action or organizing a labor rights group can be challenge to a geographically and anonymous pool of platform workers who likely view each other as competitors, however. Thus, platform economy can be explored as an area of cooperation among Asian nations to collectively address critical issues, to influence the narrative from competition to collaboration, and to influence workers' unfavorable practices such as underbidding and "race to the bottom" mentality, among other things. Currently, the power is skewed in favor of firms while risks and costs are borne by workers. A starting point would be to include the platform economy in the ASEAN agenda so that issues and challenges can be mapped to potential solutions. Setting-up of a digital space where workers share experiences and information can help workers find good firms and avoid unscrupulous ones. Agreeing to a wage floor, for example, can help address the "race to the bottom" mentality. While putting a united front in the digital space is a challenge, sending a cohesive message has the potential to balance the fulcrum of power.

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