



PLATFORM WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT AND ALGORITHMIC WAGE FORMATION: A GLOBAL REVIEW AND POLICY SYNTHESIS WITH AN INDIAN REGULATORY ASSESSMENT

Dr. N Subbukrishna Sastry¹, Dr. Manjula Mallya M²

¹Professor, School of Management, CMR University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India. ORCID ID: 0009-0009-0460-7057,

²Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of Economics, Government First Grade College for Women Balmatta Mangalore, Karnataka, India. ORCID ID: 0009-0005-8812-6912

ABSTRACT

Digital labour platforms have replaced the negotiated or posted wage with a rate computed by software. This study examines how platform human resource control systems – task allocation, rating and evaluation, dynamic pricing, and deactivation – determine the wage formation mechanism, and contrasts the dynamic pricing regime now in operation with the prospect of algorithmic price discrimination in labour, under which workers performing identical work receive individually computed and systematically different rates. The method is a systematic review of the empirical, legal and institutional literature combined with a policy synthesis across jurisdictions; no new estimation is undertaken. The review identifies three transmission channels through which control systems reach wages: information asymmetry over the rate function, estimation of individual reservation wages from behavioural data, and management of labour supply elasticity through targeted incentives. Together these convert the platform's informational advantage into wage-setting power of a kind that classical monopsony analysis did not anticipate. The comparative regulatory assessment finds that the European Union's Platform Work Directive 2024/2831 is presently the only instrument addressing all three channels directly, while India's framework – the Code on Social Security 2020 and the pioneering Rajasthan and Karnataka statutes – has advanced welfare financing substantially while leaving the wage formation mechanism itself almost entirely unregulated. With India's platform workforce projected to reach 23.5 million by 2029–30, the study argues that rate transparency, explanation rights over automated pay decisions, and a data-processing boundary are the three interventions of greatest urgency, and sets out an implementation sequence consistent with the existing constitutional division of labour legislative competence.

KEYWORDS: Algorithmic Management, Platform Work, Gig Economy, Wage Formation, Algorithmic Wage Discrimination, Labour Regulation, Human Resource Management, India

1. INTRODUCTION

The wage has historically been formed in one of two ways: posted by an employer and accepted or refused, or negotiated between parties with some knowledge of one another's position. Digital labour platforms have introduced a third. On a platform, the rate offered for a unit of work is computed — in real time, by software, from data the worker cannot see, using a function the worker is not told. The human resource control systems that platforms operate are therefore not merely administrative; they are the wage-setting apparatus itself.

This study takes platform HR control systems as the independent variable and the wage formation mechanism as the dependent one. It asks three questions. First, through what channels do allocation, evaluation, pricing and access-control systems reach the wage? Second, what distinguishes the dynamic pricing regime that platforms operate today from the algorithmic price discrimination in labour that the same technical capability makes available? Third, which regulatory instruments address the mechanism rather than its symptoms, and what does the comparison imply for India?

The Indian case gives the questions urgency. NITI Aayog estimated the country's gig and platform workforce at 7.7 million in 2020–21, or 2.6% of the non-agricultural workforce, and projected 23.5 million by 2029–30, some 6.7% of that workforce [1]. A tripling of scale within a decade, concentrated in a workforce that is 31% low-skilled and holds little bargaining power individually, makes the design of the wage formation mechanism a question of macroeconomic and not merely contractual consequence.

Figure 1 sets out the transmission model that organises the argument. The distinction it draws — between the control levers a platform operates and the channels through which those levers reach the wage — carries the paper's central regulatory claim: instruments aimed at the levers tend to be evaded by redesign, whereas instruments aimed at the channels are not.

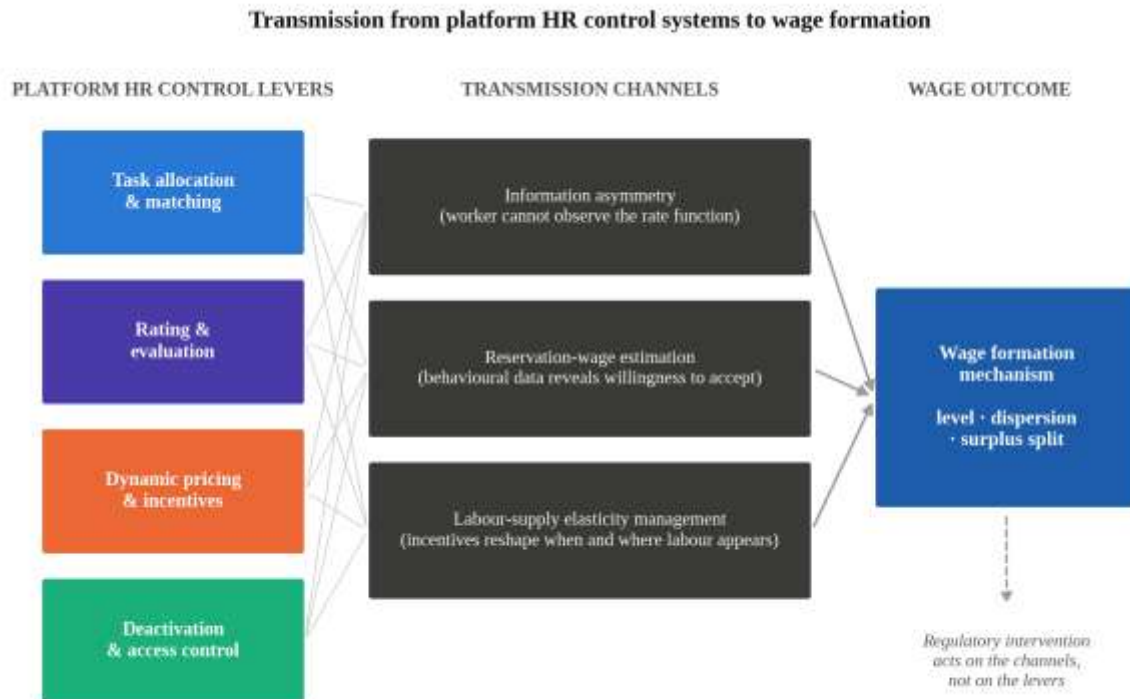


Fig. 1. Transmission from platform HR control systems to the wage formation mechanism. The four control levers operate on wages through three channels; regulatory instruments that address the channels are more durable than those addressing the levers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The review draws together four literatures that rarely cite one another: the organisational research on algorithmic management, the labour economics of platform work and monopsony, the legal scholarship on wage discrimination and worker classification, and the human resource management research on evaluation, autonomy and work intensification. The last of these supplies mechanisms the first three tend to assume.

2.1 Platform HR control systems as an object of study

Kellogg, Valentine and Christin [2] provide the organising framework, characterising algorithmic control through six mechanisms — direction by restricting, recommending and recording; evaluation by rating and replacing; and discipline by rewarding and replacing — and arguing that algorithmic control constitutes a new contested terrain rather than an intensification of the old one. Duggan, Sherman, Carbery and McDonnell [3] bring this into the HRM field directly, distinguishing app-work, crowdwork and capital platform work and showing that in app-work the algorithm assumes functions — assignment, evaluation, discipline — that the HRM literature had always attributed to managers. Parent-Rocheleau and Parker [4] complete the argument by treating algorithms as work designers, mapping how algorithmic management alters autonomy, feedback, workload and social contact simultaneously.

The Indian HRM evidence on analytics-driven decision systems is directly relevant here. Sastry and Mallya [5] examine AI analytics in hiring and find that the efficiency gains are real but accrue asymmetrically: the organisation gains speed and reach in selection, while the candidate loses visibility into the criteria on which the decision turned. That asymmetry — capability concentrated on one side of the transaction and opacity imposed on the other — is the same structural feature that appears in platform wage setting, and it appears there without the countervailing institutions that formal employment supplies. The platform case is the limiting case of a pattern already visible in conventional HR analytics.

2.2 Rating systems, evaluation and social comparison

Rating is the platform's performance appraisal, and it differs from the organisational version in three respects: it is continuous, it is generated by customers rather than supervisors, and it is consequential for work allocation without an appeal process. Rosenblat and Stark [6] document, in the ride-hail case, how rating and information asymmetry combine so that drivers are managed through mechanisms they cannot inspect. Veen, Barratt and Goods [7] show, through a labour process analysis of food delivery, that platforms retain substantive control while divesting the formal responsibilities of employment.

Two of the author's studies establish what such systems do to behaviour. Sastry and Selvarasu [8] find that performance appraisal shifts engagement only where workers judge the link between assessment and consequence to be credible and intelligible; an evaluative system whose logic is opaque produces compliance behaviour without the motivational gain the system was designed to capture. Applied to platform ratings, this predicts precisely the pattern the ethnographic literature reports: intense worker attention to the rating, coupled with widespread misunderstanding of what actually drives it. Sastry and Mallya [9] add the comparative dimension, showing empirically that formally designating a subset of workers as 'talent' generates social comparison effects that depress effort among those excluded. Platform tier systems — priority access, preferred status, badge schemes — are designation acts of exactly this kind, and they are administered at a scale and frequency no organisational appraisal system approaches.

2.3 Autonomy, decision rights and the intensification channel

Platform work is marketed on autonomy and experienced as constraint. Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta and Hjorth [10] resolve the paradox with evidence from remote gig workers across four continents: algorithmic control delivers genuine temporal flexibility while simultaneously producing work intensification, low pay and exhaustion, because the worker controls when to work but not the terms on which work is offered. Möhlmann, Zalmanson, Henfridsson and Gregory [11] formalise the tension as one between matching and control. Lee, Kusbit, Metsky and Dabbish [12] established early that workers form folk theories of the algorithm and act on them, so opacity does not suppress response — it misdirects it.

The delegation literature specifies what is missing. Sastry and Ravish [13] show that empowerment produces measurable gains only where delegated authority is accompanied by the resources needed to act on it, and their companion study [14] isolates genuine decision rights, rather than consultative involvement, as the element that converts delegation into initiative. Platform work inverts both findings: the worker holds the decision to log on and little else, while the decisions that determine earnings — which task, at what rate, on what terms — sit with the system. What the platform offers is the appearance of autonomy with none of its economically consequential content, which is why measured flexibility premiums coexist with reported powerlessness. The intensification consequence is the one Sastry and Ravish [15] document in the organisational setting: where the discretionary effort reserve is exhausted, further incentive pressure yields attrition rather than output, and platform designs that assume an inexhaustible supply of marginal effort mistake churn for elasticity.

Table 1. Platform HR control levers, their organisational analogues, and the wage formation channel each operates through

Control Lever	Organisational Analogue	Primary Wage Formation Channel	Worker Visibility
Task allocation and matching	Work assignment and scheduling	Elasticity management — determines which offers reach whom	Offer visible; allocation rule not
Rating and evaluation	Performance appraisal	Estimation — behavioural record feeds worker-level inference	Score visible; weighting not
Dynamic pricing and incentives	Compensation and bonus design	Information asymmetry — rate function withheld at the point of offer	Rate visible; components often not
Deactivation and access control	Discipline and termination	Elasticity management — raises the cost of refusal	Outcome visible; reasons often not

2.4 Wage formation under the present regime: dynamic pricing

What platforms operate today is a dynamic pricing regime. The rate for a task varies by time, location and instantaneous supply–demand balance, but is in principle the same for any worker who accepts that task at that moment. Chen, Chevalier, Rossi and Oehlsen [16] estimate the value drivers place on the flexibility this regime provides and find it substantial, which is the strongest available argument for the model. Hall and Krueger [17] document the labour-market characteristics of the driver population, and Cook, Diamond, Hall, List and Oyer [18] exploit the setting's unusual feature — a gender-blind algorithm — to show that a roughly 7% earnings gap between men and women persists nonetheless, arising from experience, driving speed and route choice rather than from discriminatory pricing.

That last finding is the pivot of the present argument, and it is commonly misread. A gender-blind rate function does not produce gender-neutral outcomes, because the rate is only one input into earnings; but neither, in the dynamic pricing regime, does it produce differential rates for identical work. The gap arises downstream of wage formation. The question this paper poses is what happens when the rate function itself ceases to be common across workers.

2.5 The prospective regime: algorithmic wage discrimination

Dubal [19] names and analyses the transition. Algorithmic wage discrimination arises when firms use granular behavioural data and machine learning to compute individualised, fluctuating rates for workers performing the same task, so that pay is set not by the market value of the work but by the platform's estimate of what each particular worker will accept. This is first-degree price discrimination applied to labour supply, and Dubal argues it ruptures the wage norms that minimum-wage and equal-pay law

presuppose, imposes gambling-like uncertainty on earnings, and falls hardest on immigrant and minority workers with the fewest outside options.

Economic theory explains why the capability is so consequential. Manning [20] shows that monopsony power is pervasive wherever labour supply to the individual firm is less than perfectly elastic, and that its usual expression is a wage below marginal product paid uniformly. Personalised wage setting removes the uniformity constraint: a platform that can estimate each worker's reservation wage can extract the surplus that a single posted rate necessarily leaves with inframarginal workers. Calo and Rosenblat [21] anticipated the informational structure of this — the platform's capacity to act on what it knows about individuals — and Prassl [22] sets out why the legal categories inherited from the employment relationship cope badly with it.

Figure 2 renders the contrast schematically. Panel A shows the dispersion of effective pay for identical work under the three regimes; Panel B shows the corresponding division of the transaction surplus. The values are illustrative of the mechanism the reviewed literature describes and are not estimates; the direction of movement, not its magnitude, is what the evidence supports.

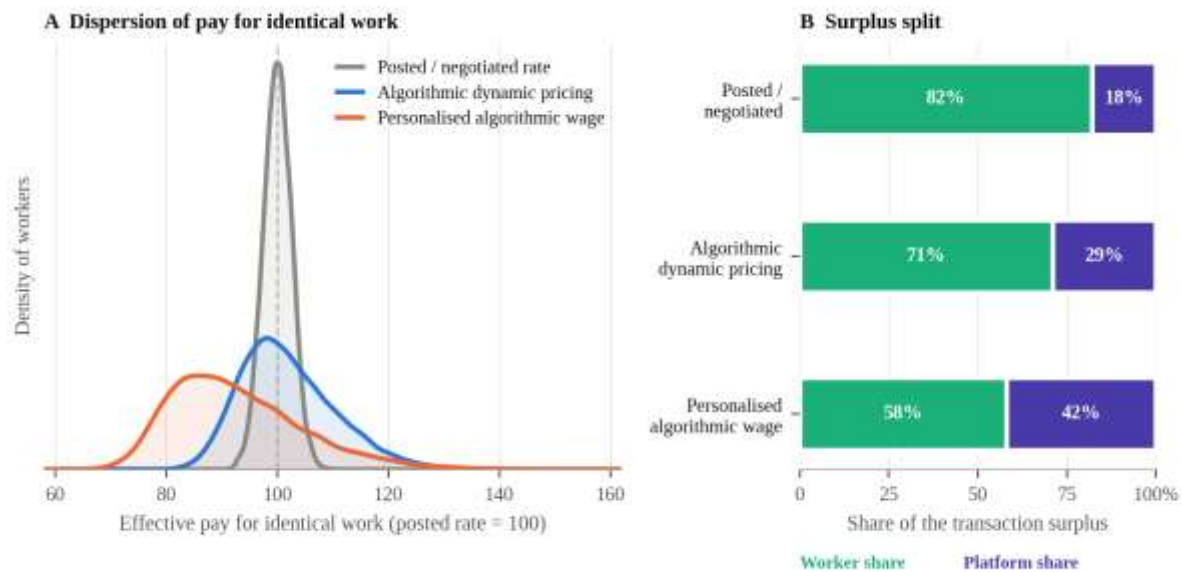


Fig. 2. Wage formation regimes compared: dispersion of pay for identical work (Panel A) and division of the transaction surplus (Panel B). Schematic illustration of the mechanism described in the reviewed literature; values are indexed to a posted-rate baseline of 100 and are not empirical estimates.

Table 2. Wage formation regimes compared across their defining properties

Property	Posted / Negotiated Wage	Algorithmic Dynamic Pricing	Personalised Algorithmic Wage
Rate common across workers	Yes, by contract or collective agreement	Yes, at a given time and place	No — computed per worker
Basis of the rate	Job value, negotiation, statutory floor	Task, time, location, supply–demand	Task characteristics plus individual reservation-wage estimate
Worker knowledge of the rule	Full or substantially full	Partial — surge visible, formula not	None — personalisation itself undetectable
Dispersion for identical work	Minimal	Moderate; varies with conditions, not persons	High; varies systematically with the person
Surplus retained by inframarginal workers	Substantial	Reduced	Approaches zero
Legal status in India	Regulated	Unregulated	Unregulated and presently lawful

2.6 Distributional consequences and the participation margin

Rani and Furrer [23] show that algorithmic management in developing countries operates on workforces with weaker outside options and thinner social protection, so the same mechanism produces sharper distributional effects than in the settings where it was first studied. The ILO's survey of digital labour platforms [24] reaches a compatible conclusion at global scale.

Two of the author's Indian studies specify the participation margin on which these effects land. Sastry and Mallya [25] document the structural barriers women encounter in Bengaluru's technology and startup ecosystem, and Sastry [26] finds parallel constraints on capital, mobility and market access among women micro-entrepreneurs in Karnataka. Both point to the same conclusion for



platform work: where entry to the workforce is already unequal, a wage mechanism that individualises rates on the basis of observed willingness to accept will price that inequality in rather than out. A worker with fewer outside options is, to a reservation-wage estimator, simply a worker who accepts less. Sastry and Mallya [27] frame the wider economic stake: labour market dynamics under technological disruption are governed by how the gains from new technology are divided, and wage formation is the division mechanism.

3. METHOD

This study employs a two-stage design combining systematic review with policy synthesis. No new estimation is undertaken; the contribution is analytical and regulatory.

Stage 1 — Systematic review. Structured searches were run across Scopus, Web of Science, EconLit, SSRN and HeinOnline, combining terms for the control system (algorithmic management, platform HR, gig work, app-work) with terms for the outcome (wage formation, pay setting, earnings, price discrimination, monopsony). Legal and institutional sources were retrieved separately from official gazettes, the EUR-Lex database and government reports. Records were screened for direct treatment of the control-to-wage relationship rather than platform work in general. The retained corpus is classified by theme and evidence type in Table 3.

Stage 2 — Policy synthesis. Regulatory instruments were coded against the three transmission channels identified in Stage 1 and against three institutional design questions: whether the instrument establishes an employment-status presumption, whether it creates individual rights over automated decisions, and how it is financed. Coding was applied uniformly across jurisdictions and is reported in Figure 3 and Table 4. Because the coding rests on statutory text rather than on enforcement outcomes, it should be read as a map of formal coverage; a provision coded as present may still be weakly enforced.

Table 3. Review corpus by theme and evidence type

Theme	Principal Evidence Type	Representative Sources
Algorithmic control and work design	Conceptual review; qualitative and ethnographic	Kellogg et al.; Duggan et al.; Parent-Rocheleau & Parker; Möhlmann et al.
Worker experience of algorithmic management	Multi-country qualitative; labour process analysis	Wood et al.; Veen et al.; Lee et al.; Rosenblat & Stark
Platform earnings and labour supply	Large-N administrative and platform data	Chen et al.; Cook et al.; Hall & Krueger
Wage-setting power and monopsony	Theoretical and empirical review	Manning
Legal analysis of algorithmic wage setting	Doctrinal and ethnographic legal scholarship	Dubal; Calo & Rosenblat; Prassl
Developing-economy platform work	Survey and institutional analysis	Rani & Furrer; ILO; NITI Aayog
HRM mechanisms: evaluation, autonomy, intensification	Empirical HRM studies, Indian organisational settings	Sastry & Selvarasu; Sastry & Mallya; Sastry & Ravish
Statutory and regulatory instruments	Primary legal sources	EU Directive 2024/2831; Code on Social Security 2020; Rajasthan Act 2023; Karnataka Act 2025

4. FINDINGS

4.1 The transmission mechanism

The review supports a three-channel account. The first channel is informational: the worker observes the offer but not the function that generated it, so cannot distinguish a low offer reflecting weak demand from a low offer reflecting an estimate of their own willingness to accept [6, 21]. The second is estimative: continuous behavioural telemetry — acceptance and rejection patterns, session length, responsiveness to incentives, financial urgency inferred from working hours — yields an individual reservation-wage estimate that no conventional employer possesses [19]. The third is elasticity management: targeted bonuses and quests reshape when and where labour appears, so the platform influences the supply curve it then prices against [11, 10].

The channels compound. Informational opacity prevents workers from detecting personalisation; estimation makes personalisation profitable; elasticity management suppresses the collective response through which workers might otherwise discover it. This is why instruments aimed at individual levers — capping commission, mandating a bonus structure — are absorbed by redesign, while instruments aimed at the channels are not.

4.2 The international regulatory response

Directive (EU) 2024/2831 [28] is presently the only instrument addressing all three channels. It requires platforms to inform workers of automated monitoring and decision-making systems that significantly affect working conditions; it mandates human monitoring of those systems and human review of significant decisions, with a right to an explanation; and it prohibits the processing of data

not strictly necessary to the contract, expressly excluding emotional and psychological state, private conversations, and data gathered outside working time. Critically, those algorithmic-management provisions extend to platform workers irrespective of employment status, so their operation does not wait on the classification question. Member States must transpose by 2 December 2026.

Other jurisdictions address classification without addressing the mechanism. Spain's 2021 reform established a presumption of employment for delivery riders and a limited right of works councils to be informed of algorithmic parameters; California's trajectory through AB5 and Proposition 22 produced an earnings guarantee and benefit contributions while confirming independent-contractor status, leaving pay computation untouched. Figure 3 and Table 4 set out the comparison.

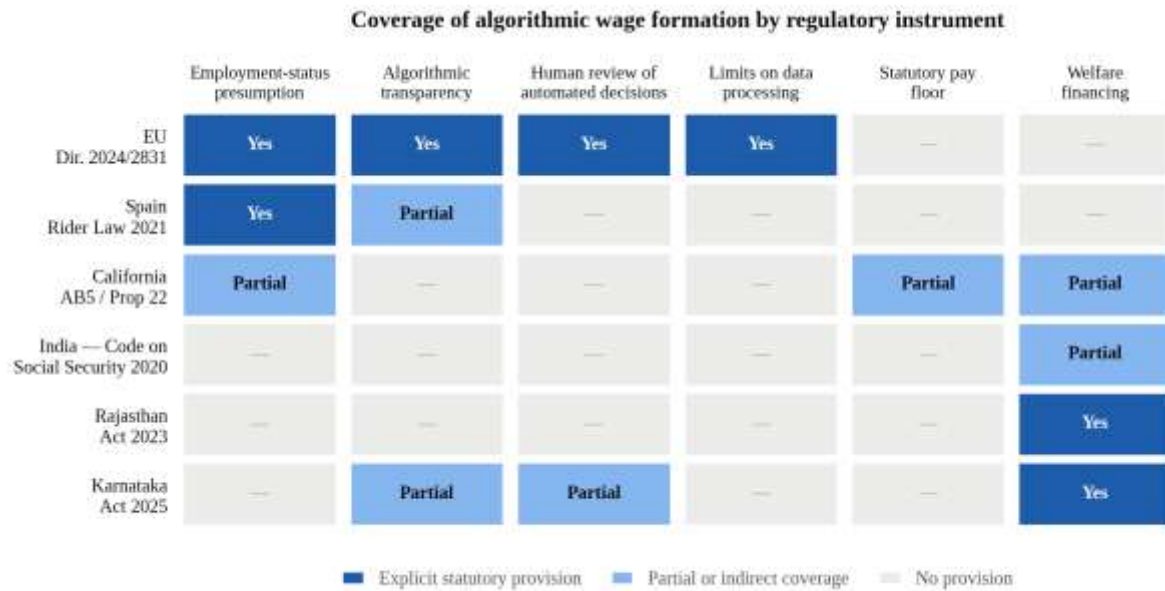


Fig. 3. Coverage of algorithmic wage formation by regulatory instrument across six jurisdictions and six design dimensions. Coding reflects statutory text rather than enforcement intensity.

Table 4. Comparative regulatory instruments and their treatment of the three transmission channels

Instrument	Employment Status	Ch. 1 Information	Ch. 2 Data / Estimation	Ch. 3 Elasticity	Financing
EU Directive 2024/2831	Rebuttable presumption	Disclosure of automated systems; explanation right	Processing limited to contractual necessity	Human oversight of significant decisions	Member State discretion
Spain, Rider Law 2021	Presumption for riders	Works council access to algorithmic parameters	Not addressed	Not addressed	General social security
California, AB5 / Proposition 22	Contractor status confirmed	Not addressed	Not addressed	Earnings guarantee on engaged time	Platform benefit contributions
India, Code on Social Security 2020	Gig and platform worker defined; not employees	Not addressed	Not addressed	Not addressed	Aggregator contribution, 1–2% of turnover
Rajasthan Act 2023	Not addressed	Transaction monitoring system (regulator-facing)	Not addressed	Not addressed	Welfare cess, 1–2% per transaction
Karnataka Act 2025	Not addressed	Procedure to seek information on automated parameters	Not addressed	Notice and written reasons before termination	Welfare fee and worker contribution

4.3 India: scale, statute and the regulatory gap

India's platform workforce is large, growing rapidly, and concentrated in the segments with the least individual bargaining power. Figure 4 reports the NITI Aayog estimates: 7.7 million workers in 2020–21 rising to a projected 23.5 million by 2029–30, with a 2020–21 skill composition of 31% low-skilled, 47% medium-skilled and 22% high-skilled, and a stated expectation that the medium-skilled share will fall as the two tails grow [1].

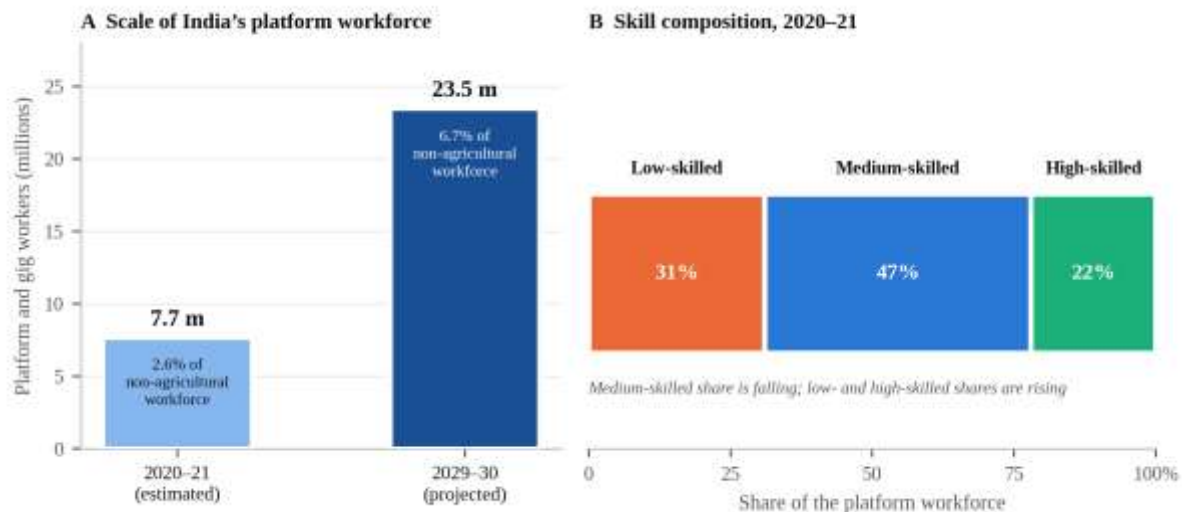


Fig. 4. India's platform and gig workforce: scale and projected growth (Panel A) and skill composition (Panel B). Source: NITI Aayog (2022).

The statutory position has advanced considerably, but along one dimension only. The Code on Social Security 2020 [29] was the first central legislation to define the gig worker and the platform worker and to contemplate aggregator contributions to a social security fund, though the relevant provisions await full operationalisation. Rajasthan legislated first among the states: the Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023 [30] creates a welfare board, a unique worker identifier, a welfare cess set between 1% and 2% of the value of each platform transaction, and a Central Transaction Information and Management System through which commission, tax and cess flows are monitored.

Karnataka's Platform Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act 2025 [31] goes further and is, for the purposes of this paper, the most significant Indian instrument yet enacted. Alongside the welfare fund and the payment verification system, it requires aggregators to inform workers — in Kannada, English or another language the worker understands, and in simple language — of the procedure for seeking information about automated monitoring and decision-making parameters; it obliges platforms to take measures preventing discrimination through those systems; and it bars termination without written reasons and fourteen days' notice, with a two-tier grievance mechanism. These are, in substance, the first algorithmic-management provisions in Indian labour law.

The gap is nonetheless precise and consequential. Karnataka creates a right to know the procedure for seeking information about automated parameters — a procedural right of access, not a substantive right to the rate function or to an explanation of a particular pay decision. No Indian instrument at any level addresses the second or third transmission channel: none limits the behavioural data a platform may process for pricing purposes, and none requires that the rate offered for a given task be common across workers. India has, in other words, built a welfare architecture around a wage formation mechanism it has not yet regulated. Because the Karnataka Act is drafted around welfare and grievance rather than pay computation, personalised rate-setting would be lawful under it today.

5 .POLICY SYNTHESIS

Three interventions follow directly from the channel analysis, and they are ordered here by the ratio of protective effect to implementation cost rather than by ambition.

First, rate transparency. A requirement that the platform disclose, at the point of offer, the components of the rate — base, distance or time, surge multiplier, incentive — and a periodic obligation to publish the distribution of rates paid for comparable tasks would close the first channel at low cost, since platforms already compute these components internally. Disclosure of the distribution matters more than disclosure of the formula: it is what makes personalisation detectable without requiring the regulator to inspect a model.

Second, an explanation right over automated pay and access decisions, with human review on request. Karnataka has established the procedural shell; converting it into a substantive right — the reasons for this rate, this deactivation, this allocation — would align Indian practice with Articles 7 and 8 of the EU Directive without requiring the employment-status presumption that makes that Directive politically difficult to transplant.

Third, a data-processing boundary for pricing. A rule that rates may be computed from task and market characteristics but not from worker-specific behavioural inferences would prohibit algorithmic wage discrimination at its source, and does so without prohibiting

dynamic pricing, whose efficiency case [16] is genuine. This is the intervention that distinguishes the two regimes analytically, and it is the one no jurisdiction outside the European Union has yet attempted.

Two design considerations condition all three. The constitutional division of competence places labour in the Concurrent List, so state statutes of the Rajasthan and Karnataka type can move faster than central legislation but produce fragmentation for platforms operating nationally; a central framework establishing floors, with state welfare boards retaining financing and administration, resolves this. And the welfare cess model now operating in Rajasthan and Karnataka creates the transaction-level data infrastructure on which rate distribution reporting could be built at almost no marginal cost, since the payment verification systems already capture the per-transaction values the disclosure requires.

Table 5. Policy recommendations for India, mapped to transmission channels and implementation requirements

Recommendation	Channel Addressed	Instrument	Implementation Requirement
Rate component disclosure at the point of offer	Ch. 1 — information asymmetry	Central rules under the Code on Social Security; state rules in the interim	Low: components already computed internally
Periodic publication of the distribution of rates for comparable tasks	Ch. 1 — makes personalisation detectable	Reporting obligation to the state welfare board	Low: builds on existing transaction monitoring systems
Substantive explanation right over pay, allocation and deactivation, with human review	Ch. 1 and Ch. 3	Amendment extending the Karnataka procedural right	Moderate: requires a grievance capability at scale
Prohibition on worker-specific behavioural inference in rate computation	Ch. 2 — estimation	Central framework legislation	High: requires audit capability and technical standards
Central floor with state administration	All three	Concurrent List framework statute	Moderate: political rather than technical

6. CONCLUSION

Platform HR control systems determine wage formation, and they do so through channels that the categories of employment law and the instruments of labour regulation were not built to reach. The present dynamic pricing regime already relocates wage setting from negotiation to computation; the prospective regime of personalised rates would go further, replacing the common price for common work — a norm older than the statutes that assume it — with a schedule of individual offers calibrated to what each worker can be induced to accept.

For India the timing is favourable and narrow. The workforce will roughly triple within the decade, the Karnataka Act has established that algorithmic-management provisions are legislatively feasible in the Indian context, and the transaction monitoring systems that rate disclosure would require are already being built for welfare cess collection. Regulating the mechanism before personalised rate-setting is entrenched is considerably cheaper than unwinding it afterwards, and the three interventions proposed here are available without resolving the classification question that has stalled reform elsewhere.

The study has clear limitations. It is a review and synthesis rather than an estimation exercise, so the magnitudes in Figure 2 are illustrative of a mechanism rather than measured; the regulatory coding reflects statutory text and not enforcement, which in the Indian context is frequently the binding constraint; and direct empirical evidence on personalised wage setting remains thin because the data required to detect it are held by the firms whose conduct is at issue. Each limitation points to the same research agenda: audit studies capable of detecting rate personalisation from the worker side, estimation of the surplus division under Indian platform conditions, and evaluation of the Karnataka Act's implementation as the first natural experiment in algorithmic-management regulation in a developing economy.

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