The What and How of Measuring Digital Platform Work

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Recently, there has been a great deal of interest by researchers, policy makers and the general public in digital platform workers – a form of work where workers' interface between themselves and customers is intermediated by an app or website. However, despite this interest, measuring digital platform workers has presented unique definitional and operational challenges. This paper lays out 9 dimensions of work that could be considered when constructing a measure of digital platform workers - 1) the location of workers and customers (i.e. in-person versus completely online), 2) the types of customers for whom the work is done (i.e. peer-to peer, peer-to business, business-to-business), 3) the type of activities to include based on the amount of labor services embodied in these activities, 4) platform companies' control over the assignment of work, 5) platform companies' control over the price workers can charge and the wages they are paid, 6) the time period during which workers engage in platform activities, 7) the intensity with which workers engage in platform work during a specified time period, 8) thresholds, if any, of the proportion of total personal income platform work earnings constitute, and 9) workers' commitment to working (i.e. registering to work without doing any work, number of hours of worked, frequency of work, when last worked)

After discussing the dimensions of work that could be included in a measure of platform workers, how various countries' national statistical offices, private sector entities, and academic researchers have incorporated these dimensions into their measurement of platform workers is reviewed.

The paper concludes with a discussion of lessons learned from various attempts to measure platform work. In this discussion there is a particular emphasis on the refinement of question wording and safeguards built into the questionnaire that were found to be necessary based on early attempts to measure platform workers.