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# Platform Workers Need Protection from New Forms of Exploitation

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SOCIAL ISSUES

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# Platform Workers Need Protection from New Forms of Exploitation

 **The Indian Express**    2 June 2026    **GS2**    **GS3**

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Gig workers resist formal employment classification because it may reduce flexibility; but flexibility without a social floor is precarity. Can India design a protection framework that preserves flexibility while guaranteeing a safety net?"*

*Gig workers face algorithmic exploitation, income-risk shifts, and social-security denial. Portable benefits, algorithm transparency, and a UK-style "worker" category are the minimum regulatory baseline.*

## THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

**The gig economy's exploitation is structural and algorithmic** — existing labour law cannot address it; portable benefits and a third worker category are the fixes.

## INDIA'S GIG SECTOR AT A GLANCE

- **7.7 million+ gig workers** (NITI Aayog 2021 estimate); projected ~24 million by 2030.
- Platforms: Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Uber, Urban Company, Meesho, etc.
- **Code on Social Security 2020** — first recognition of "gig worker" and "platform worker".
- Implementing rules for gig worker social security: **still pending**.

## THE NEW EXPLOITATION TOOLS

TOOL	HOW IT EXPLOITS
<b>Algorithmic ratings</b>	Opaque deactivation; income suppression
<b>Dynamic pricing</b>	Platform captures upside; worker bears demand risk
<b>Contractor classification</b>	Avoids EPF, ESI, gratuity, minimum wage

## UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	RELEVANCE
<b>GS2</b>	Labour law; gig economy; social security; Code on Social Security 2020
<b>GS3</b>	Economy — platform economy; e-commerce; EPF, ESI
<b>Prelims</b>	Code on Social Security 2020 (4 Labour Codes); ESIC; EPF; gig worker definition

Sources: *Indian Express, Ministry of Labour and Employment*

Source: Platform Workers Need Protection from New Forms of Exploitation — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

### ● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The rapid growth of gig and platform work has outpaced India's labour regulatory architecture, creating new forms of exploitation — algorithmic surveillance, dynamic pricing that shifts income risk to workers, and denial of social security — and the piece argues for portable benefit frameworks and algorithm transparency mandates as the baseline floor for platform worker protections.

#### ✓ SUPPORTING

- India's four Labour Codes — including the Code on Social Security, 2020 — formally recognised "gig workers" and "platform workers" for the first time, but implementing rules and the actual social-security framework for this category remain incomplete.
- Algorithmic management creates exploitation mechanisms invisible to traditional labour inspection: ratings systems that suppress income unpredictably, surge pricing that extracts more work during peak demand without proportional reward, and geo-tracking that limits workers' autonomy.
- Platform companies classify workers as "independent contractors" to avoid EPF, ESI, gratuity, and minimum wage obligations; the binary classification of "employee" vs "contractor" is inadequate for a relationship that is dependent but not salaried.


**COUNTER**

Platform companies argue that workers value flexibility and choose the gig model over formal employment; mandating EPF and minimum wages could raise costs that platforms cannot absorb, reducing platform supply and ultimately worker income.


**WAY FORWARD**

Enact a “worker” category between employee and contractor (as the UK has done); establish a portable benefits pool (a contribution from platforms per transaction, going into a worker’s portable account covering health, accident, and retirement); mandate algorithm-explainability for gig workers so they can understand and contest deactivation.

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**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**
**QUESTION**

*"India's platform economy has created new forms of exploitation that existing labour law was not designed to address." Critically examine and suggest a regulatory framework. (250 words)*

**INTRODUCTION**

India’s gig economy, estimated at 7.7 million workers in 2021 and growing rapidly, is governed by labour laws that were designed for factories and offices. The worker on a delivery platform or ride-sharing app faces a new and largely unregulated form of work dependency — one that carries the disadvantages of employment (schedule dependence, algorithmic control) without its rights (social security, minimum wage guarantees).

**BODY**

India’s Code on Social Security 2020 broke important ground by defining “gig workers” and “platform workers” for the first time, explicitly noting their entitlement to social security. But the implementing rules — which would specify the schemes, contribution rates, and delivery mechanisms — remain incomplete.

In the interim, workers face three distinct new exploitation mechanisms: algorithmic rating systems that can suppress income or trigger deactivation based on opaque criteria; dynamic pricing that offloads

demand volatility risk entirely to the worker while the platform captures the upside; and denial of social security by insisting on contractor rather than employment classification. The international experience suggests a “third category” — the UK’s “worker” category, which sits between employee and independent contractor and carries minimum protections (holiday pay, minimum wage) without full employment status — may be the appropriate intermediate solution for India.

A portable benefits architecture (per-transaction platform contribution into a transferable account covering ESI equivalent and accident cover) would provide a social floor without forcing the binary classification debate.

### CONCLUSION

India is at an inflection point: the platform economy is large and growing, and the window to build a fair governance framework before power imbalances calcify is narrowing. Portable benefits, algorithm transparency, and a third worker category that sits between contractor and employee are the building blocks of a just platform economy.

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