

# Searching for a better job

Indonesian gig workers and the limits of decent work agendas

*Arif Novianto, Anindya Dessi Wulansari and  
Yeremias T. Keban*

**Arif Novianto** is a Researcher in the Institute of Governance and Public Affairs in the Department of Public Policy and Management in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia.

**Anindya Dessi Wulansari** is a Lecturer at Universitas Tidar, Indonesia and a Research Fellow at the Institute of Governance and Public Affairs in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia.

**Yeremias T. Keban** is a Lecturer in the Department of Public Policy and Management in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia.

## ABSTRACT

The conditions of gig workers, such as platform drivers, differ sharply between countries in central and peripheral capitalism. Working conditions with long working hours, low incomes and lack of social protection tend to be more severe for gig workers in peripheral than in central capitalism. This article draws on a survey of 290 drivers working for ride-hailing, food-delivery and courier platforms in one of the peripheral capitalist countries, namely Indonesia. It examines the precariousness of their working conditions in relation to the International Labour Organization's Decent Work Indicators and concludes that of the ten decent work indicators, platform drivers only receive two. However, this decent work agenda has limitations: first, the decent work indicators have not been able to protect specific forms of work in digital labour; second, the minimum wage in decent work in Indonesia does not represent a living wage, so is rejected by many platform drivers; and third, the concept of decent work cannot be extended to cover future working conditions that are fair and without exploitation.

## KEY WORDS

gig worker, precarious job, digital labour, limits of decent work, gig worker in peripheral capitalism, Indonesia

## Introduction

The development of digital technology has disrupted many types of work, both those that were previously carried out without using technological devices (such as smartphones, internet, applications, GPS or algorithms) and those that rely on technological inputs. Some of the jobs that have been disrupted are those in services involving the delivery of passengers, food and parcels. The use of digital input technology has made it easier for consumers because the peer-to-peer mechanism allows them to place orders wherever and whenever they are. This digitalisation has also created an effective and efficient transaction process between consumers and producers/workers mediated by a platform.

At first, the role of platforms in passenger, food and parcel delivery services was only as an intermediary or middleman between consumers and drivers (Frenken & Schor, 2019). However, as they developed, platform companies increasingly became not only intermediaries but also employers who control the work process and the distribution of work. Termed 'platform capitalism' (Srniczek, 2017; Vallas, 2019) this situation can be described as one where the platform is built not only to facilitate the relationship between buyers and sellers or consumers and drivers, but primarily to continue to maximise profitability. With this goal in mind, platform companies are constantly looking for opportunities that allow them to generate a lot of profit. The steps they take are not only based on extracting more value from workers on the platform (Woodcock & Graham, 2019) but also on capitalising on data that have been collected (Van Doorn & Badger, 2020).

The presence of digital platform-based gig work has indeed provided various conveniences on the one hand, but, on the other hand, it has created vulnerabilities for its workers. The vulnerability experienced by these gig workers is considered by many academics to be due to their misclassification as independent contractors rather than employees (Kennedy, 2017; Ravenelle, 2019; Cherry, 2016). By being classified as independent contractors partnering with a platform company, gig workers are not entitled to work rights and protections following the decent work agenda of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which has been ratified in the employment laws of many countries (Heeks, 2017; De Ruyter & Rachmawati, 2020). These include, for example, the right to a minimum wage and rights to regular paid holidays, social security and social dialogue. Several studies also show that the extent to which platform companies are able to extract extra value is so extreme that it can be referred to as 'super-exploitation' (Nastiti, 2017). It is only by means of such super-exploitation that it has been possible for platform companies, such as Uber, Deliveroo, Lyft, Grab, or Gojek, to experience such a large growth in valuation and market share in less than five years.

There have been many studies showing the vulnerability of gig workers (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2021; Schor et al., 2020), but there is a tendency for this vulnerability to be seen as occurring equally in each country. The vulnerabilities experienced by gig workers, in reality, do not occur to the same degree internationally (Heeks, 2017). The different economic and associational power of gig workers in a country give rise to different levels of vulnerability. Structurally, the imbalance of

economic conditions in countries in central capitalism with peripheral capitalism contributes to differences in worker precarity (Surie & Huws, 2023). In the countries of central capitalism, through the powerful gig worker movement, some workers have been able to obtain various rights, for example changing the classification from independent contractors to company employees. The classification of drivers as employees of Uber has been established in Spain and the Netherlands, and in the UK Uber drivers have been classified as 'workers' (Toh, 2021). The demand to become employees of platform companies has been pursued in central capitalist countries because by being classified as employees, platform workers are legally entitled to better job security and income than if they are classified as independent contractors (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Barratt, Veen & Goods, 2021). Even so, studies on the condition of drivers who are classified as employees in Paris, Lisbon and Berlin show that there various problems are still experienced by drivers, and that this classification still results in a lack of social security and workers' rights (Niebler et al., 2023).

Despite some superficial similarities, it is nevertheless apparent that platform drivers' conditions in peripheral and central capitalism are different in a number of respects (see Bertolini et al., 2023). For example in Indonesia 53.1% of platform drivers for passenger, food and parcel delivery services (hereinafter referred to as platform drivers) at Gojek, Grab and Maxim, as our research results show, say that they want to be classified as company employees, while 46.9% want to be independent contractors.<sup>1</sup> The percentage of 46.9% of platform drivers who want to remain as independent contractors is a fairly large number because the survey was conducted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when platform driver earnings fell drastically to 67% from February 2020 to April 2020.

To examine the precarious working conditions of gig workers in the peripheral capitalist country of Indonesia, we tried to use the decent work indicators developed by the International Labor Organization. Using ten decent work indicators, we sought to show the working conditions of platform drivers from a survey of 290 platform drivers at Gojek, Grab and Maxim. Using the results of the survey, we compared the working conditions of platform drivers with what the situation would have been if they had been classified not as independent contractors but as employees of platform companies.

## Literature review

### The concept of 'decent work' and its limitations

It is arguable that the issue of safe working conditions and welfare for waged labour first arose in the transition of the mode of production from feudalism to capitalism. The working class, or the so-called proletariat, came along with the development of capitalism which began in England in the eighteenth century, a class that did not have sufficient means of production to meet their daily needs, so they had to sell their labour power to the employer or capitalist class to get wages (Marx, 1992). The logic of accumulation and the coercive law of the market in capitalism expanded the process of

---

<sup>1</sup> Drawn from the authors' research, presented later in this article

enclosure, which resulted in subsistence farmers losing their means of production, forcing them to become wage labourers (Wood, 2002). In its development, capitalism spread to all corners of the world through the colonisation of countries in the Global South. This colonialism then played an important role in creating a separation between central capitalism (former colonisers) and peripheral capitalist countries (former colonies) (Holloway, 1994). The term 'central capitalism' is used here to denote capitalist countries that take advantage of the surplus value from colonialism to develop their national economies, thereby creating prosperity and a workers' aristocracy (Yates, 2018). By contrast, in countries on the periphery of capitalism, national economies and industrialisation did not develop, thus creating dependency on the central capitalist states (Wallerstein, 1979) and precarious jobs with cheap labour (Smith, 2016).

In the early capitalist era, workers were highly exploited with deplorable working conditions. Engels (1993) describes the condition of the British working class during a period of industrialisation, when workers could work more than 15 hours per day, with a lack of decent wages, bad workplaces, child labour and an absence of social protection. These poor working conditions led to various protests and resistance from the workers. One of many examples was the big protest in New York City on 8 March 1908, by workers (who were predominantly women) to demand shorter working hours and better wages (Vogel, 1995), which resulted in the agreement of a standard working day of eight hours per day. This was part of a broader context of industrial conflict between workers and employers. Marx describes the conflictual industrial relations between workers and capitalists as irreconcilable, because of their essentially contradictory interests (Marx, 1992).

In the post-World War II period, along with the birth of international institutions such as the International Labor Organization, there were various attempts to mediate the conflictual relations between workers and employers (Vosco, 2002; Hauf, 2016). In this context, the idea of 'decent work' emerged, which was later used to develop an international agenda which the ILO encouraged to be implemented in all its member countries. According to the ILO (2013), there are ten key decent work indicators: employment opportunities; adequate earnings and productive work; decent working time; combining work, family and personal life; work that should be abolished; stability and security of work; equal opportunity and treatment in employment; a safe work environment; social security; social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation.

Initially, the decent work agenda was only intended for formal work. The ILO designed its decent work agenda to promote worker productivity within the framework of harmonious industrial relations. However as the concept has developed, the ILO has sought to expand the application of this decent work agenda not only to formal work but also to informal work and, further, to the gig economy to cover work on digital platforms (Berg et al., 2019). The ILO states that:

*To promote decent and productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. All workers have the right to decent work, not only those working in the formal economy, but also the self-employed, casual, and informal economy workers ... (ILO, 2012)*

The decent work agenda was subsequently adopted by the United Nations (UN) and incorporated into its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Goal 8 of the SDGs states that it will encourage 'sustainable economic growth and decent work for all'. This means that all wage workers in the ILO definition are also encouraged by the UN to be provided with decent work as part of their human rights. This commitment places the decent work agenda as essential for the fulfilment of workers' rights, so they are trying to be implemented in many countries. The aim is that this agenda should be applied to all forms of wage labour with the target of implementation by 2030.

If we look closely, the decent work agenda seems to protect workers from injustice by offering the protections of standard employment relations, but this agenda has several limitations. Decent work agendas can be regarded as soft legal instruments that do not change the underlying power structures (Saptari, 2018). The decent work agenda in practice is not able to hinder the precarisation or informalisation of the formal job, which has reduced welfare and decent working conditions for workers (Durán & Narbona, 2021; Buckley, 2022). In this context, decent work then becomes an instrument to reconcile conflicts in industrial relations, urging workers to work more productively, while only providing wages and limited protection. Therefore, the decent work hegemony promoted by the ILO may tend to harm workers and depoliticise them, inhibiting them from demanding more, and encouraging acceptance of life within the framework of exploitative capitalism (Hauf, 2016; Monteith & Vicol, 2021).

The decent work agenda provides space for employers and governments to use to limit workers' incomes and their imagination of future jobs without exploitation and alienation. A study by Hauf (2016) in Indonesia, shows that the ILO's efforts to encourage decent work have been rejected by several labour unions on the grounds that the decent work agenda actually protects the practice of determining improper wages and bogus dialogue between employers and workers. In addition, the decent work agenda in the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) also excludes domestic workers who carry out reproductive work (Rai, Brown & Ruwanpura, 2019), thus justifying the existence of unpaid and inappropriate work in reproductive work. Various other limitations of the concept of decent work (for example, the way that it fails to provide job security and legitimises low wages) will also be analysed in this article. Limitations in the decent work agenda have thus led to some forms of precarisation in formal employment, providing an explanation for why not all platform drivers in Indonesia agree to be classified as formal workers.

## Research method

The research on which this article is based was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia in June–December 2020 and during the 'new normal' period, namely May–July 2021. This study used a mixed-method approach for data collection, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collection through this mixed method was carried out using surveys, semi-structured interviews with key informants

and platform drivers, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The research sites were in three provinces in Indonesia: Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Bali. The selection of these three provinces was based on the consideration that they represent different levels of minimum wages (Jakarta with a high minimum wage, Bali with a medium minimum wage, and Yogyakarta with a low minimum wage) and different economic characteristics (Jakarta is a metropolitan city with many formal industries, Bali has an economic focus on the tourism sector, and Yogyakarta is a province with a majority of workers in the informal economy, which is also a centre of education, with many schools and universities and a large student population).

A survey was conducted in June–October 2020 of 290 platform drivers at Gojek, Grab and Maxim. In the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was carried out by calling respondents over the telephone (approximately 40–60 minutes per respondent) and asking questions from a survey questionnaire. The selection of respondents in this study was carried out using opportunistic sampling and snowball sampling strategies. We first found respondents by contacting platform drivers in social media groups (Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups and on Twitter). After that, we asked for recommendations for other potential platform drivers to serve as survey respondents (with a recommended maximum of three further people per initial respondent). Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants in the Indonesian government (16 people, anonymity codes: IG01–IG16), gig worker cooperatives (two people, anonymity codes: GWC 01 and GWC 02), and platform drivers (34 people, anonymity codes: PD01–PD34). Meanwhile, our FGD was held once by inviting government officials, gig worker cooperatives, and gig workers (the platform company refused to attend and refused us an interview).

## Research finding

### **Far from decent work: the condition of platform drivers in Indonesia**

Employment issues in a peripheral capitalist country, such as Indonesia, are complex but are mainly characterised by low-quality work. This condition is influenced by the limitations and inability of the state to create decent jobs. The failure to transform the economy from an agrarian economy to an industrial one combined with state policies oriented towards neoliberalism has triggered the emergence of an abundant reserve army of labour (Habibi & Juliawan, 2018). To survive, while waiting in line to get a better job, members of this reserve work odd jobs in types of work that are vulnerable. This vulnerability occurs because they work informally, depriving them of protection from the state to ensure that they can obtain workers' rights, such as a minimum wage, proper working time, vacation rights, and social security.

In Indonesia, as is the case in other peripheral capitalist countries, there are more informal workers than formal workers. In 2021 based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2021), the number of informal workers in Indonesia was estimated at 78.14 million people (59.62% of the workforce), with formal workers estimated at 52.92 million (40.38%). The characteristics of informal jobs are low

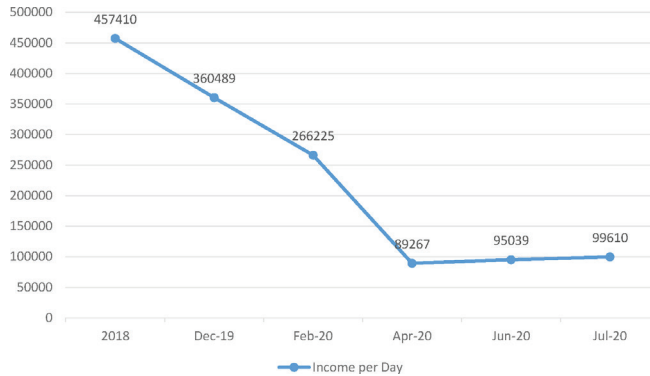
wages, temporary, unstable jobs, long working hours, and high risk (Breman & Van der Linden, 2014: 925–6; Bertolini et al., 2023; Rothenberg et al., 2016). Therefore, informal jobs tend to be treated as temporary, taken on by workers while they look for other jobs that are better and can support their daily needs. The most common types of informal work in Indonesia are farm-work, cadging, construction work and platform driving.

Since 2015, the development of platform technologies in food, parcel and passenger delivery services has encouraged the rapid growth of the online transportation market in Indonesia (Ford & Honan, 2017). The platform companies that later came to dominate the market in Indonesia, namely Gojek and Grab (Uber Indonesia was acquired by Grab in 2018), carried out a money-burning strategy or ‘honeymoon period’ in which they provided large incentives for drivers and massive discounts for consumers (Novianto, 2023). The purpose of this money-burning strategy was to further expand the market and increase the platform companies’ valuation. As a result, there are large numbers of open job opportunities to become platform drivers. Jobs as platform drivers during the honeymoon period were excellent for the workforce in Indonesia, even though this was an informal job, because at that time, although they were classified as independent contractors, the income of platform drivers was so large it could even reach double the minimum wage. Not surprisingly, many informal workers, and even some formal workers, queued up to join when the platform driver registration was opened by the platform companies (Keban et al., 2021). The earnings of platform drivers in Indonesia can be seen from the results of our survey, summarised in Figure 1. In 2018, when the honeymoon period was still ongoing, drivers’ average income reached 457,410 rupiah per day. However, this income decreased over time. By December 2019, their daily income had fallen to an average of 360,489 rupiah per day. Then it decreased to 266,225 rupiah in February 2020, and experienced a further drastic 67% decrease by April 2020, when it plummeted to 89,267 rupiah per day. The downward trend in revenue occurred not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which began to hit Indonesia in March 2020, but also because platform companies began to end the honeymoon period (Novianto, 2023). This was evidenced by massive incentive cuts for drivers, reduced fares, and reduced discounts to consumers, as the platform companies made an effort to start earning real profits.

The decline in the income received by platform drivers also opened up a number of other vulnerabilities. In the next section, we use the ILO’s concept of decent work as a framework for analysing the various vulnerabilities experienced by platform drivers in Indonesia, looking separately at each of the ten decent work indicators to structure our investigation of drivers’ working conditions.

### **1. Employment opportunities**

Platform drivers in Indonesia do not have the certainty of getting a job, or a guaranteed number of consumer orders, on the platform where they are registered as drivers. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, as many as 60% of platform drivers reported experiencing ‘very few jobs’ or being penalised for not having orders from consumers. The designation ‘very few jobs’ is part of a sanction mechanism that is set by the



**Figure 1: Platform driver's revenue per day in 2018–2020 (in rupiah) for Gojek, Grab and Maxim**

*Note.* The survey was conducted between June and December 2020 in three provinces in Indonesia: DI Yogyakarta, DKI Jakarta and Bali.

platform company to drivers based on an algorithm they have developed. Drivers will be subject to sanctions in the form of not being given priority to receive orders on their driver account when judged to be undisciplined, not working long enough hours, frequently refusing or not completing orders, or not working well according to the platform company. These indicators are measured by ratings, order completion performance and reports from consumers. When drivers are penalised for not having orders, it becomes difficult for their driver account to get further orders, so their income drops drastically and becomes insufficient to meet their daily needs.

In the context of the lack of opportunities to get a job on any given platform, around 87% of the platform drivers in our survey had driver accounts on more than one platform. PD09 (respondent anonymity code), for example, had platform driver accounts with Gojek, Maxim and Shopee Food. PD09 stated that ‘when there are no orders, I activate all of them [to increase the chances of getting a job from the platform], so which account do I get a job, that’s what I work’. Meanwhile, PD17 did something different. He reported that he had driver accounts with Grab, Gojek and Maxim. In working every day, PD17 did not activate all driver accounts on the three platforms, but only activated one of his accounts which he prioritised, namely Grab. He explained that ‘the others are just in case if my Grab account suddenly gets suspended’. Having more than one driver account on multiple platforms is a way for gig workers to survive in precarious conditions and with unstable opportunities to get a job on one platform.

## **2. Adequate earnings and productive work**

Income from platform companies for gig workers is uncertain. This is because they are classified as independent contractors, and are paid not based on the working time, but



based on the number of customer orders that they get and complete. Problems arise when the power to determine which driver gets the order is monopolised by the platform company. As a result, platform companies such as Gojek, Grab and Maxim take advantage of their power to create a competition mechanism between drivers (gamification), whereby those who are judged to work hard, be disciplined and work well will be given a lot of jobs, while drivers who are deemed to be undisciplined, get bad ratings or make mistakes, will be not prioritised for the allocation of jobs. Our survey results show that in July 2020, for every one driver whose income was above the minimum wage, there were four drivers whose income would be below the minimum wage if their working time were measured based on working 40 hours per week. This means that the income of most platform drivers is still below the prevailing minimum wage in the area where they work. It would be even less if other costs borne by drivers were taken into account (vehicle and mobile phone depreciation, vehicle maintenance, fuel, etc.).

### ***3. Decent working time***

The average working hours of platform drivers in July 2020 was 13.4 hours per day, with drivers working 26 days per month. This gives an average total of 87.1 working hours per week for platform drivers in Indonesia. This is more than double the decent working time set by the ILO, which is 40 hours per week. These long working hours are carried out without receiving overtime pay, which is paid in the formal sector to workers with employee classifications. The platform drivers in our sample, who are classified as independent contractors, tend to be forced to work longer hours to increase their chances of getting orders, so that their daily income is sufficient to meet their needs. In addition, some platform drivers consider working longer hours to be an obligation, to prevent their driver's account from being sanctioned by the platform company for getting 'very few orders' or as a form of 'therapy' for their driver's account to produce indicators that make it easier to get orders (see also Mustika & Savirani, 2021). PD22 for example, activated his driver's account for 24 hours to increase the chances of getting a customer order, due to the uncertainty of getting a job on the platform. He said that he took this step to ensure enough income to meet the needs of his family because if he only activates the driver's account for eight hours per day, according to him, he will only get a small income.

### ***4. Combining work, family and personal life***

Platform drivers in Indonesia can choose to take a day off from work, but that choice is limited. For example, choosing to take more than two days off work may result in the driver account being penalised as a result of the algorithmic system developed by the platform company (PD03, PD05, PD18 and PD21). A common sanction in such a case is to give a driver's account low priority for work until they have demonstrated that they have worked consistently and with discipline to improve their performance. This sanction is something that drivers are very afraid of because it will make their daily income drop drastically.

To minimise sanctions and maintain high priority for orders, many drivers try to understand how the platform company algorithms work. PD09, for example, said that

his understanding of the algorithm had led him to conclude that to be prioritised to get work from the platform, 'you have to work consistently and at least 12 hours a day. If I consistently activate my driver account from 08.00–21.00'. PD19 and PD22 expressed similar views, saying that overwork, overtime and discipline were all necessary to be prioritised for jobs. Such work arrangements by platform companies distance platform drivers from true work flexibility, and also distance them from combining work, family, and personal life.

### ***5. Work that should be abolished***

Our survey did not find any child labour in platform work. Furthermore, we found no evidence of forced labour with threats of violence in the delivery of parcels, food and passenger services. However, the algorithm system is set by the platform company to encourage platform drivers to work longer and harder. This can be seen when platform drivers work with short working hours, choose more than two days off work, get a bad rating from consumers, or do not accept all (or most) of the orders offered to their account, then the company sanctions drivers to not prioritise getting orders from platform companies. Despite the absence of extreme abuses, this suggests the existence of unacceptable conditions that should be abolished.

### ***6. Stability and security of work***

Platform drivers can be sanctioned and terminated or unilaterally fired by the platform company at any time. This condition is possible because of the weak bargaining position of drivers and the absence of rules regarding stability and security of work, due to the classification of platform drivers as independent contractors. In 2019, with the issuance of Regulation of the Minister of Transportation Number 12 of 2019, rules have been enacted for platform companies to make a list of any actions that cause drivers to be sanctioned. However, the mechanisms tend to be dysfunctional because their interpretation and decisions regarding sanctions and dismissals remain the domain of the platform company. This means that, in many cases, drivers can be sanctioned and fired unilaterally, without trial and even without evidence. The existence of sanctions and unilateral dismissals by the platform company deprives platform drivers of their stability and security of work.

### ***7. Equal opportunity and treatment in employment***

In the digital gig economy in passenger, food and parcel delivery services in Indonesia, there is in principle equal opportunity to get orders from consumers. This means that there is no explicit discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, gender, race or class. Nevertheless, in several cases that we encountered in the field, Muslim drivers had been sanctioned for not being prioritised for orders because they were considered undisciplined (PD21) as they had turned off the driver application during prayer times. In addition, female drivers tend to get more cancellations of orders in ride-hailing services, especially from male consumers (PD04 and PD27). This can be attributed to the strong patriarchal culture in Indonesia, where it may be considered to be something of an unnatural or a negative act for a male consumer to be served by a female driver.

## **8. A safe work environment**

Working as a platform driver, the potential for workplace accidents to occur is very high. This may happen because the drivers work on the highway with traffic that is often jammed and also because of the fatigue factor due to long working hours. In our survey, 68.62% of platform drivers stated that they had experienced illness due to their work, one of which was due to an accident on the road. During the COVID-19 pandemic, drivers were also very vulnerable to contracting the COVID-19 virus. These conditions indicate that platform drivers do not have a safe work environment.

## **9. Social security**

Because they are classified as independent contractors, platform drivers do not receive social security from platform companies. They will have health insurance or vehicle insurance when they pay independently, or when the Indonesian government puts them in the category of poor families so that their health insurance is covered by the state. From our survey data, only 54.48% of platform drivers have self-funded health insurance or free programmes from the government (not from platform companies) and only 13.45% of drivers regularly check their health services.

## **10. Social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation**

As independent contractors who partner with platform companies, platform drivers are not involved in the decision-making process and do not have opportunities to express their aspirations through official channels. In Indonesia, there is still no platform company that recognises the existence of trade unions or platform driver associations. According to Grab, Gojek and Maxim's regulations, they even openly violate the rights of drivers to express their aspirations, because these include conditions that state that they will be terminated or fired if they invite other drivers to take part in an action or if any action taken is considered detrimental to the company. Under Indonesian law, the classification of platform drivers as independent contractors who then partner with platform companies gives drivers in theory an equal position with platform companies in the making of every decision. However, these rules are in practice violated by platform companies, to the detriment of platform drivers (see also Novianto, Wulansari & Hernawan, 2021).

Having looked at the working conditions of platform drivers using these ten decent work indicators from the ILO, summarised in Table 1, we can conclude that the working conditions of drivers still render them very vulnerable. It can be seen that, out of ten indicators, platform drivers only score relatively positively on two: 'work that should be abolished' and 'equal opportunity and treatment in employment'. Meanwhile, platform drivers in Indonesia are not covered by the other eight decent work indicators. This non-fulfilment of drivers' rights is made possible and enabled by the state, due to the way that drivers are classified as independent contractors and in partnership relationships with the platforms for which they work. Under this classification, there are no rules that stipulate what rights and protections must be available to platform drivers. Similar conditions regarding the absence of protection from the state are also experienced by their colleagues who work as informal workers.

**Table 1: Decent work assessment for platform drivers at Gojek, Grab and Maxim in Indonesia**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Decent Work Points</b>	<b>Decent Work Indicator</b>	<b>Decent Work Indicators Platform Driver Working Conditions at Gojek, Grab, and Maxim</b>	<b>Fulfilled (✓) Or Not (X)</b>
1	Employment opportunities	Opportunity and certainty of getting a job	There is no certainty of getting an order, before the COVID-19 pandemic, as many as 60% of platform drivers had experienced low orders.	X
2	Adequate earnings and productive work	Component of decent living (minimum wage) + cost of production facilities and social security which is borne by gig workers	Income from platform drivers is still below the minimum wage where they work + production costs (fuel, credit, depreciation of vehicles and cell phones, vehicle maintenance, and others) (July 2020 data).	X
3	Decent working time	40 hours per week	The average working hours of platform drivers are 13.4 hours/day with around 26 days/month. So total working hours are 87.1 hours per week.	X
4	Combining work, family and personal life	The right to vacation is still paid	Gig workers can choose to take time off work, but that choice is limited. Therefore, choosing a holiday of more than two days can cause their driver's account to be sanctioned by the company's algorithm system to become empty of orders.	X
5	Work that should be abolished	No forced labour and child labour (aged 5–17 years)	Survey data shows no child labour and no forced labour with threats of violence, although the algorithm system is set to encourage gig workers to work longer and harder jobs.	✓
6	Stability and security of work	Guarantee not to be fired or dismissed at any time	Platform drivers at any time can be unilaterally sanctioned and terminated by the platform company.	X

<i>Number</i>	<i>Decent Work Points</i>	<i>Decent Work Indicator</i>	<i>Decent Work Indicators Platform Driver Working Conditions at Gojek, Grab, and Maxim</i>	<i>Fulfilled (✓) Or Not (X)</i>
7	Equal opportunity and treatment in employment	There is no discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, political views and gender	There is no discrimination in the work process carried out by platform drivers, although in some cases, there are drivers who are sanctioned for not being prioritised for orders because every prayer time turns off the driver application, because they are considered undisciplined.	✓
8	A safe work environment	A safe and healthy work environment from work accidents	The potential for work accidents is quite high, because gig workers work on roads with heavy traffic and fatigue due to long working hours. In the survey, 68.62% of driver respondents stated that they had experienced illness due to their work.	X
9	Social security	There is a health and safety guarantee	Only 54.48% of platform drivers have self-financed health insurance or free programmes from the government (not from platform companies) and only 13.45% of drivers have regular health checks.	X
10	Social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation	Involved in the decision-making process and has the right to organise and express aspirations	Platform drivers as 'partners', are not involved in the decision-making process and do not get space to express their aspirations. In Gojek's rules, the TertibJek sanctions for breaking up partners when the driver is judged to be invited to take action and harm the company.	X

Note. processed from research data.

## Discussion

### The future of work and the limits of decent work

The booming number of informal workers, who are part of the reserve army of labour, has brought about two political consequences. First, fares, or wages, can be reduced to very low levels. This is possible because of the long queues from the reserve army of labour to enter the digital gig economy by becoming a platform driver. Although historically the choice to become a platform driver was taken because when this type of work was in the honeymoon period pay and conditions tended to be slightly better than for other jobs in the informal economy, this situation no longer applies. Similarly, those who were attracted to it as a form of part-time work now find that the pressure to work long hours renders this option difficult.

Second, the large reserve army of labour has undermined the political power of platform drivers. This condition, structurally, has weakened the movement of platform drivers. With the large number of drivers on a platform, there is a scramble to get orders from consumers resulting in increased competition among the drivers. This is exacerbated by the arrangement of the platform companies' algorithms which are designed to push drivers to work harder, longer, and with greater discipline in order to avoid the sanctions that will make it difficult for them to get a stream of further work. In such a situation, it is risky for platform drivers to go on strike or take other forms of action to demand justice. Another risk is the termination of the partnership or the unilateral dismissal of the driver by the platform company. Platform companies can act arbitrarily against platform drivers, as there are still plenty of spare workers ready to hire.

In this context of structural conditions that are detrimental to platform drivers and the weak associational power of platform drivers, platform companies have had no incentive to provide drivers with rights. Interestingly, in the various demonstrations carried out by platform drivers in Indonesia, the question of their classification status as independent contractors has not been raised. During March 2020–March 2022, a total of 71 protests was carried out by platform drivers, none of which demanded that their classification be changed from partner or independent contractor to employee (Novianto, 2022a), which would act as a means of access to the rights referred to in the decent work indicators as included in the Manpower Act in Indonesia. Although, in the 71 protests, there were nine protests (12.68%) that demanded clarification on the classification of platform drivers, the main demand was for the creation of a true partnership relationship, not to become employees (Novianto, 2022b).

The tendency not to include classification as an employee as the main demand in most of the protest actions taken by platform drivers reveals the limitations of the ILO concept of decent work. There are at least two issues that appear to limit the applicability of this decent work concept for them. First, it does not represent fair working processes and conditions. There is some unwillingness among platform drivers to be classified as an employee because they think that this means they will be paid according to the current minimum wage. This minimum wage, which is regarded as

meeting the requirements of the 'adequate earnings' indicator in decent work, is considered by drivers to be very inadequate and does not represent sufficient income to meet the needs of daily life. This is because the calculation of the minimum wage in Indonesia is not based on the actual components of a decent living (Wulansari, 2021) and is far from representing a realistic living wage. Meanwhile, with an income system other than the minimum wage, such as in the piecework system in the gig economy, drivers can in principle earn more – something that was especially the case during the honeymoon period (PD02, PD11 and PD21). Rather than engage with issues relating to the minimum wage and the employee status that might entitle them to it, therefore, the organised platform workers through their movement raise different demands, speaking more about the importance of increasing fares, the abolition of unilateral sanctions, and the need for a legal umbrella to protect platform drivers (Novianto, 2022b).

A second limitation of the concept of decent work is that it legitimises the existing model of work under capitalism. In the current global context, the concept of decent work can be used to validate the hegemonic work relations that allow the capitalist class to continue to dominate the working class. In other words, the concept of decent work serves to normalise a situation in which workers' productivity is appropriated by their employers. In this context, the working class is disadvantaged, because the process of exploitation and alienation, which is still ongoing, is rendered invisible. Platform drivers tend to reject classification as an employee because it can make them lose some autonomy and their working conditions are strictly regulated by the platform company. The autonomy in question is the flexibility and freedom, even if it is very limited, to work at any time (Schor et al., 2020) and greater earning potential than the minimum wage. In addition, there is very little demand to be classified as an employee due to the normalisation of precarious work. Before the existence of platform companies, most of the jobs as ride-hailing and taxi drivers in Indonesia were informal jobs (except for couriers who were mostly classified as employees). Table 2 summarises the differences in rights between independent contractors and employees under Indonesian law.

The movement carried out by gig workers in the online transportation sector in Indonesia from 2015–2021 tends to seek to promote partnership relationships with platform companies fairly, by demanding a true partnership relationship rather than a bogus one (Novianto, Wulansari & Hernawan, 2021). Platform drivers imagine that if such a genuine partnership were to exist, they would have an equal position with a platform company, and not be controlled as they would be if they were classified as employees. In Indonesia, the partnership relationship has been regulated in Law Number 20 of 2008, concerning the equality of positions between partnering parties, but this regulation is not currently implemented by platform companies. Therefore, the current movement of drivers is focused on fostering true partnerships, not bogus partnerships.

Our analysis of the limitations of the concept of decent work reveals that as their precarity increases and their income as drivers decreases, the confidence of the drivers also decreases that a true partnership can be carried out. As a form of desperation,

**Table 2: Differences in rights between classification of independent contractors and employees in Indonesian laws**

Point	Employee	Independent Contractors in Partnership Relations
Position	Superiors and subordinates, there are those who rule and those who are ruled	Equal, no one controls and is controlled
Principle	Job, order, wage	Mutual need, trust and benefit
Work decision-making	Monopolised by entrepreneur or employer	Deliberation for consensus between partners
Basis of formation	Employment agreement	Partnership Agreement
Regulation	Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower and the Law on Job Creation	Law Number 20 Year 2008 and the Law on Job Creation

*Note.* processed from research data.

many drivers in areas with large minimum wages, such as Jakarta Province, have begun to consider demanding classification as workers, not independent contractors, as a way to improve their living conditions. This could be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, when drivers' incomes fell drastically by 67%. At this time, as many as 53.1% of drivers wanted to be employees, although they recognised that there are limitations to the advantages of formal employment in a peripheral capitalist country like Indonesia. Compare this with a survey conducted in 2018 by LD UI (2018), which showed that 86% of platform drivers at Gojek considered their status as an independent contractor in partnership with Gojek to be fair or very fair. In this context, from the perspective of platform drivers, the concept of decent work can be seen as the last resort to provide them with minimal protection. This is also due to limited options to obtain other better jobs, because of the lack of decent jobs and the abundance of the reserve army of labour in the Indonesian labour market. The most important thing for them is that, whatever their classification or work system, what matters is that they can achieve a better income and improved working conditions (PD02, PD11, PD13 and PD20).

## Conclusion

The working conditions of gig workers in food, parcel and passenger delivery services still render them vulnerable in Indonesia. This can be seen from the fact that only two of the ten decent work indicators apply, the only exceptions being 'work that should be abolished' and 'equal opportunity and treatment in employment'. Because of the



historical process of colonialism which resulted in unequal economic structures in central and peripheral capitalism, as well as the weak associational power of gig workers in Indonesia, poor working conditions persist and a situation has been created whereby gig workers in peripheral capitalist countries like Indonesia are worse off than their counterparts in central capitalism.

The concept of decent work may be useful for ensuring some of the basic rights for workers that ought to be provided by platform companies, but it is still far from sufficient. The concept of decent work has several limitations because it fails to guarantee fair working conditions and may serve to legitimate a commodified model of work, tending to reinforce reformist ideas that it is possible to create a harmonious working relationship between capital and labour, a harmonious working relationship that does not necessarily eliminate the exploitation and alienation experienced by the working class, both of which still persist in platform capitalism.

The various limitations of the concept of decent work show that this concept is not suitable for general application in relation to the future of work. A wide range of ideas about the future of work and how to create just working conditions without exploitation and alienation have emerged. In the tradition of left thinking, there is Karl Marx who presents the idea of work as a means of self-actualisation when work is not present as coercion and there is no capitalist class ruling the working class. Meanwhile, autonomic anarchist thinkers reject the idea of 'work' altogether, considering 'work' to mean creating productive value in a way that makes it closely related to coercion and exploitation. Another alternative for them is 'elimination of work' by transforming it into activities such as 'play'. In the context of the development of digital capitalism, the idea of 'platform socialism' (Muldoon, 2022) and 'digital communalism' (Fuchs, 2019) have emerged, in which the platform where drivers meet with consumers is no longer controlled by capitalist companies, but is managed communally by the working class. On this basis, we believe that fair working conditions in platform-based work will be achieved when there is a communalisation of platforms, which are no longer owned by a few rich people, but are owned and managed communally by the workers themselves.

© Arif Novianto, Anindya Dessi Wulansari and Yeremias T. Keban, 2023

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This work was supported by the Faculty of Social Science & Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada under the programme of Research, and Community Service Grants 2020. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the funding agency. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## **REFERENCES**

Anwar, M.A. & M. Graham. (2021) 'Between a rock and a hard place: Freedom, flexibility, precarity and vulnerability in the gig economy in Africa', *Competition & Change*, 25 (2):237–58.

- Barratt, Tom, Alex Veen & Caleb Goods. (2021) 'A new deal for Uber drivers in the UK, but Australia's "gig workers" must wait', *The Conversation*. Accessed 12 April 2022 from: <https://theconversation.com/a-new-deal-for-uber-drivers-in-uk-but-australia-s-gig-workers-must-wait-157597>
- Berg, J., M. Furrer, E. Harmon, U. Rani & M.S. Silberman. (2019) 'Working conditions on digital labour platforms: Opportunities, challenges, and the quest for decent work'. *Vox EU*. Accessed 12 April 2022 from <https://voxeu.org/article/workingconditionsdigitallabourplatforms>.
- Bertolini, A., M. Graham, M. Neerukonda, S. Ojanperä, B. Parthasarathy, J. Srinivasan, P. Taduri & F. Ustek-Spilda. (2023) 'Platformizing informality, one gig at a time' in *Platformization and Informality: Pathways of Change, Alteration, and Transformation* (pp. 13–45). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- BPS. (2021) 'Keadaan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia Februari 2021'. *Berita Resmi Statistik BPS*, No.37/05/Th. XXIV.
- Breman, J. & M. Van der Linden. (2014) 'Informalizing the economy: The return of the social question at a global level', *Development and Change*, 45 (5):920–940.
- Buckley, J. (2022) 'Formalising and Informalising Labour in Vietnam', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*:1–26.
- Cherry, M.A. (2016) 'Beyond misclassification: The digital transformation of work', *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 37 (3):577–602.
- De Ruyter, A. & R. Rachmawati. (2020) 'Understanding the Working conditions of gig workers and decent work: Evidence from Indonesia's online Ojek riders', *Sozialpolitik*. 2 (4):2–4.
- Durán, G. & K. Narbona. (2021) 'Precarising formality: Understanding current labour developments in Chile', *Global Labour Journal*, 12 (3).
- Engels, F. (1993) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ford, M. & V. Honan. (2017) 'The Go-Jek effect'. In E. Jurriens & R. Tapsell (Eds.), *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence* (pp. 275–288). Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Frenken, K. & J. Schor. (2019) 'Putting the sharing economy into perspective' in *A Research Agenda for Sustainable Consumption Governance*. London: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Fuchs, C. (2019) *Rereading Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Habibi, M. & B.H. Juliawan. (2018) 'Creating surplus labour: Neo-liberal transformations and the development of relative surplus population in Indonesia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 48 (4):649–70.
- Hauf, F. (2016) *Beyond Decent Work: The Cultural Political Economy of Labour Struggles in Indonesia* (Vol. 14). Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Heeks, R. (2017) 'Decent work and the digital gig economy: a developing country perspective on employment impacts and standards in online outsourcing, crowdwork, etc.', *Development Informatics Working Paper*, 71.
- Holloway, J. (1994) 'Global capital and the national state', *Capital & Class*, 18 (1):23–49.
- ILO. (2012) *Gender Equality and Decent Work: Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations That Promote Gender Equality*. Geneva: ILO.
- ILO. (2013) *Decent Work Indicators*. Geneva: ILO.
- Keban, Y.T., A. Hernawan and A. Novianto (Eds.) (2021) *Menyoal kerja layak dan adil dalam ekonomi gig di Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: IGPA Press.
- Kennedy, E.J. (2017) 'Employed by an algorithm: Labor rights in the on-demand economy', *Seattle University Law Review*, 40 (3):987–1048.
- LD UI. (2018) Dampak GOJEK terhadap Perekonomian Indonesia di 2018. *Lembaga Demografi*. Accessed 10 April 2022 from [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ecMaSKb\\_tcsuV5gJqWu9WgQD\\_hdIcUfM/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ecMaSKb_tcsuV5gJqWu9WgQD_hdIcUfM/view)
- Marx, K. (1992) *Capital: Volume I* (Vol. 1). London: Penguin UK.
- Monteith, W. & D.O. Vicol. (eds.) (2021) *Beyond the Wage: Ordinary Work in Diverse Economies*. London: Policy Press.

- Muldoon, J. (2022) *Platform Socialism: How to Reclaim our Digital Future from Big Tech*. London: Pluto Press.
- Mustika, W. & A. Savirani. (2021) “Ghost accounts”, “joki accounts” and “account therapy”, *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, 39 (1).
- Nastiti, A.D. (2017) *Worker Unrest and Contentious Labour Practice of Ride-Hailing Services in Indonesia*. In *Arrayman Symposium*, 13 May. Jakarta: Buffett Institute, Northwestern University.
- Niebler, V., G. Pirina, M. Secchi & F. Tomassoni. (2023) “Towards “bogus employment?” The contradictory outcomes of ride-hailing regulation in Berlin, Lisbon and Paris’, *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 16 (2):289–301.
- Novianto, A. (2022a) ‘The rise of gig worker protests in Indonesia’, *Notes from Below*. Accessed 24 January 2023 from <https://notesfrombelow.org/article/rise-gig-worker-protests-indonesia>
- Novianto, A. (2022b) ‘Riset: Aksi protes jadi cara pengemudi online bersuara di tengah kemitraan semu dan “pembungkaman,”’ *The Conversation Indonesia*. Accessed 30 July 2023 from: <https://theconversation.com/riset-aksi-protes-jadi-cara-pengemudi-online-bersuara-di-tengah-kemitraan-semu-dan-pembungkaman-187693>
- Novianto, A. (2023) ‘Resistance is possible: Lives of Grab workers in Indonesia’, *Asian Labour Review*. Accessed 30 July 2023 from: <https://labourreview.org/grab-in-indonesia/>
- Novianto, A., A.D. Wulansari & A. Hernawan. (2021) ‘Riset: empat alasan kemitraan di Gojek, Grab, dan Maxim merugikan ojol’, *The Conversation*. Accessed 20 April 2022 from: <https://theconversation.com/riset-empat-alasan-kemitraan-gojek-grab-hingga-maxim-merugikan-para-ojol-159832>
- Rai, S.M., B.D. Brown & K.N. Ruwanpura. (2019) ‘SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth – A gendered analysis’, *World Development*, 113:368–80.
- Ravenelle, A.J. (2019) *Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rothenberg, A.D., A. Gaduh, N.E. Burger, C. Chazali, I. Tjandraningsih, R. Radikun, C. Sutera & S. Weilant. (2016) ‘Rethinking Indonesia’s informal sector’, *World Development*, 80:96–113.
- Saptari, R. (2018) ‘Beyond decent work: The cultural political economy of labour struggles in Indonesia’, *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, 54 (2):267–70.
- Schor, J.B., W. Attwood-Charles, M. Cansoy, I. Ladegaard & R. Wengronowitz. (2020) ‘Dependence and precarity in the platform economy’, *Theory and Society*, 49 (5):833–61.
- Smith, J. (2016) *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century: Globalization, Super-Exploitation, and Capitalism’s Final Crisis*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Srnicek, N. (2017) *Platform Capitalism*. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Surie, A. & U. Huws. (2023) ‘Platformization and informality: Pathways of change, alteration, and transformation’ in *Platformization and Informality: Pathways of Change, Alteration, and Transformation* (pp. 1–12). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Tassinari, A. & V. Maccarrone. (2020) ‘Riders on the storm: Workplace solidarity among gig economy couriers in Italy and the UK’, *Work, Employment and Society*, 34 (1):35–54.
- Toh, J. (2021) ‘Another win for workers: Uber drivers are employees’, *Social Europe*. Accessed 24 April 2022 from: <https://socialeurope.eu/another-win-for-workers-uber-drivers-are-employees>
- Vallas, S.P. (2019) ‘Platform capitalism: What’s at stake for workers?’ *New Labor Forum*, 28 (1):48–59.
- Van Doorn, N. & A. Badger. (2020) ‘Platform capitalism’s hidden abode: Producing data assets in the gig economy’, *Antipode*, 52 (5):1475–95.
- Vogel, L. (1995) *Woman Questions: Essays for a Materialist Feminism*. London: Psychology Press.
- Vosko, L.F. (2002) ‘Decent Work: The shifting role of the ILO and the struggle for global social justice’, *Global Social Policy*, 2 (1):19–46.
- Wallerstein, I. (1979) *The Capitalist World-Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Wood, A. & V. Lehdonvirta. (2021) 'Platform Precarity: surviving algorithmic insecurity in the gig economy'. *SSRN*. Accessed 30 July 2023 from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3795375](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3795375)
- Wood, E.M. (2002) *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*. London: Verso.
- Woodcock, J. & M. Graham. (2019) *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Wulansari, A.D. (2021) 'Indonesia's cheap wages regime: The political economy of minimum wages policy under Jokowi presidency', *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 14 (3):417–44.
- Yates, M.D. (2018) *Can the Working Class Change the World?* New York: NYU Press.