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Reclaiming the Platform Economy through Social Solidarity

RIPESS Position Paper for the 113th International Labour Conference – Long version

Introduction: Towards a Rights-Based Digital Economy

The rapid expansion of the platform economy is reshaping work globally, presenting both new opportunities and significant challenges for workers. By 2022, an estimated 28.3 million people in the European Union were engaged in platform work, a number projected to reach 43 million by 2025. Similar trends are evident globally, particularly across the Global South, as ride-hailing, delivery, and online freelancing platforms attract millions seeking income. While digital labor platforms can offer flexibility and new income streams, they have also been accompanied by rising precarity, inadequate social protection, and ambiguous legal status for workers. Platforms often classify workers as independent contractors, thereby avoiding employer obligations—a model that leaves workers without fundamental labor rights or safety nets. Across different countries, workers in the gig economy face low and unpredictable earnings, safety and health risks, and exclusion from labor laws and social security systems.

Multinational platform economy giants, such as Amazon, owned by one of the five richest men in the world, Jeff Bezos, actively deny workers the right to unionize, and when they succeed, they will go to great lengths to eliminate the union. One example is well known. In the province of Quebec, Canada, Amazon has seven warehouses. In one of the warehouses, the CSN (a union confederation) helped the workers create a union that received official government recognition. What happened then showed total disrespect for workers' rights. They decided to close all seven warehouses! Approximately 2,000 people were laid off, and 2,500 others were affected by subcontractors. Amazon still delivers in Quebec, but from warehouses in the nearby province of Ontario. The sales are down, but they are still a big business. The reason they closed all 7 is an attempt to avoid penalties. If they had closed only the warehouse with the union, it would have been a clear violation of the labor law. This means that they are ready to lose millions of dollars invested in building and operating the warehouses. And they are certainly aware that they could face important fines and pay compensation to the workers illegally fired. Such a giant corporation, with a total revenue of 638\$ billion USD in 2024, 20\$ or 30\$ million is just small change! Why are they going to such lengths? The Quebec Labor Code forces a first contract. Even if the employer refuses to negotiate, the Ministry can appoint an expert to decide on the first contract. There are two unions in the US, one in Staten Island, New York, and one in Philadelphia. However, labor laws cannot force the employer to negotiate or force a first contract.

Besides workers, a vast number of smaller private businesses around the world are affected. In North America, many smaller local businesses are disappearing, either in traditional stores or now even in shopping centers. In the Hotel industry, giant players such as [Hotels.com](https://www.hotels.com) are worldwide. Even small hotels need to register if they want to be listed on such websites. The percentage they pay varies from 15% to 30%. The higher the pay, the more the digital platforms will promote their hotels. The effect is that this



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fee reduces income for each room by up to 30%. The profit margin is considerably reduced. Another example is Airbnb. They also have an impact on small local hotels and hostels. But they also have a huge impact on housing. Apartment owners find it more profitable to rent short-term, even just for days, to Airbnb than to people who want to rent on a yearly basis. The effect creates different unwanted problems in many cities, especially cities with high tourism. As investors get involved, the rise in property prices increases much more than inflation, which drives up rent. The impact on people with lower incomes is huge. This is part of the reason why there are more homeless people; They just cannot afford the rental cost. Politicians tend to blame the fact that there are too many immigrants, temporary international workers, or even too many international students (this is the case in Canada). But practically none in the main political parties will criticize platforms such as Airbnb.

We could explain how other digital economy platforms operate. For example, in food delivered to your door, they all rely on what they call self-contractors or self-employed people. The labor protection and social protection are either non-existent or weak, even in OECD countries. Workforce compensation for work injuries or accidents is not as well protected, if at all.

RIPESS and allied organizations believe that this digital economy can and must be governed in a way that prioritizes workers' rights and social well-being, not just technological innovation or profit. We present this position paper to advocate for integrating *Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)* principles into the platform economy as a pathway to decent work, social justice, and inclusive development in the digital era. In line with the International Labour Organization's Decent Work Agenda, we call for a rights-based approach to regulating digital labour platforms – one that ensures risk reduction and access to social protection, creates enabling conditions for cooperatives and other SSE entities, and guarantees labour rights and collective bargaining for all workers in the platform economy. Achieving these aims will require concerted policy action and international cooperation; however, it is essential to ensure that the future of work is both equitable and sustainable.

Decent Work Deficits in the Platform Economy

The current platform economy model is mired in decent work deficits, which undermine international labor standards. Most platform workers are classified as “self-employed” or “independent contractors,” which in practice means they fall outside the scope of labor protection laws. For example, in Thailand, ride-hailing and delivery riders are not covered by the Labor Protection Act or labor relations laws due to their independent status. This exclusion strips platform workers of fundamental rights, such as minimum wage guarantees, working hour limits, injury compensation, protection from unfair termination, and the right to organize and bargain collectively. The result is a growing workforce of “informal” digital labor, doing formal work under informal conditions. Earnings insecurity and algorithmic control further characterize these jobs. Many platform workers have earnings below living wages after accounting for costs, and their incomes have become increasingly unstable. Platforms have repeatedly slashed pay rates and incentives, forcing workers to work longer hours just to maintain their basic earnings. Algorithms that dispatch jobs can be



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opaque and arbitrary – workers often report unreliable app systems and unclear rating mechanisms that impact their livelihoods. Workers are at high risk, which is exacerbated by long hours and pressure from algorithmic performance expectations. These conditions – low pay, long hours, high accident risk – exemplify the precarious nature of platform work. Such precarity is not limited to any one country. Around the world, platform workers typically lack access to employer-provided social security or insurance, meaning injuries or illnesses can be devastating. As the ILO has noted, gig workers often must rely on whatever minimal voluntary schemes exist for informal workers, which offer far less protection than formal social security systems.

Elsewhere, many platform workers have no safety net at all – no health coverage, no paid sick leave, no pension, and no unemployment support. This *social protection gap* leaves workers and their families extremely vulnerable, contradicting the global commitment to universal social protection floors. Without clear legal frameworks, platform workers also face ambiguity and legal insecurity. Many courts and regulators are still grappling with the question of whether platform workers should be classified as employees or independent contractors. This ambiguity often works to the advantage of platform companies and to the detriment of workers, who exist in a grey zone with neither the autonomy of true independent businesses nor the rights of employees. The ambiguous employment status has also fueled conflict in some industries. Traditional workers and businesses (such as licensed taxi operators or delivery firms) frequently see platform workers as unfair competition operating outside regulations. In country after country, taxi driver unions and associations have protested the arrival of ride-hailing apps that bypass license requirements and labor rules, sometimes leading to heated confrontations. Taxi drivers have staged strikes and even violent protests in cities across Europe, Asia, and Latin America, reacting to competitors “who didn’t have to play by the same rules” under lax or outdated regulations. This adversarial dynamic – pitting groups of workers against each other – is a direct consequence of inadequate regulatory frameworks. It underlines the urgent need for consistent rules that protect all workers, prevent unfair competition, and extend rights and protections to platform labor. In summary, the platform economy as currently structured has created a large and growing workforce of *informalized* workers who lack basic protections and rights. These deficits undermine global goals of decent work and equality. However, this outcome is not inevitable. The challenges in platform work stem from policy choices and power imbalances, and they can be addressed by applying the principles of the Social and Solidarity Economy, along with robust labor standards enforcement, to this new world of work.

Embedding Social and Solidarity Economy Principles in Digital Work

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) offers a vision and practice of economic activity that is centered on people’s needs, workers’ rights, and collective well-being. SSE enterprises – such as cooperatives, mutual associations, social enterprises, and other forms of worker- or community-owned organizations – explicitly prioritize social objectives over profits. They operate based on values of solidarity, democratic governance, equity, and sustainability, making them well-suited to address the shortcomings of the



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mainstream platform economy. Crucially, SSE principles can serve as a pathway to formalizing and dignifying work that is currently precarious and informal. Around the world, many workers in informal employment have organized themselves into cooperatives and other SSE entities to improve their livelihoods and gain a collective voice. These worker-led initiatives *“put people and the collective at the centre”*, demonstrating how the SSE can facilitate formalization and empowerment. By coming together in cooperatives or associations, workers can gain a legal identity, negotiate better terms, pool resources for social protection, and engage with policymakers. SSE entities have demonstrated success in various sectors, ranging from waste picking to home-based work, transforming informality into formal employment with recognized rights. Recognizing this, the ILO’s 2022 International Labour Conference adopted a definition of the SSE and affirmed its role in advancing decent work and social justice. The United Nations General Assembly in 2023 likewise passed a resolution acknowledging SSE organizations and enterprises as critical “drivers of sustainable development” and calling for supportive ecosystems for SSE globally.

Bringing SSE principles into the platform economy means designing digital labor platforms in a fundamentally different way – one that prioritizes workers’ welfare, collective decision-making, and long-term sustainability over short-term profits. SSE values align closely with the demands emerging from gig workers and labor advocates: fair and stable incomes, safe working conditions, social protection, equality of opportunity, and a voice for workers in how the platform is run. SSE approaches emphasize solidarity and cooperation instead of cut-throat competition – a much-needed shift in an industry where workers are often pitted against each other by algorithms. In practical terms, applying SSE to platform work could involve organizing gig workers into cooperatives or mutual aid societies that can bargain on their behalf or even manage platform services themselves. It also means developing policies that support worker-owned and community-oriented business models in the digital economy, rather than granting a monopoly to profit-driven tech giants. Policymakers should note that enabling the SSE in the digital realm is a direct way to improve job quality and formalize platform work. SSE enterprises inherently strive to provide decent livelihoods and tend to reinvest surpluses in social objectives. When platform workers form cooperatives, they collectively ensure better working conditions and can guarantee access to social protection and benefits for members. SSE-based models put decision-making power and profits into the hands of workers and users. Members of a platform cooperative jointly decide on the rules and operations of the service, exercising democratic control rather than being subject to opaque algorithmic management. This collective decision-making not only improves fairness but also builds solidarity and trust among workers, outcomes that traditional gig platforms have utterly failed to achieve. Incorporating SSE principles in the platform economy also contributes to broader societal goals. SSE organizations are known to foster inclusivity and equity, for instance, by empowering women, youth, and marginalized communities as economic actors, and to promote sustainable local development. Platform cooperatives often address community needs in socially responsible ways (for example, delivery co-ops using bicycles to reduce emissions, or cooperatives focusing on ethical care services). In this way, a solidarity-based digital economy can be both worker-centered and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, in contrast to the current extractive models. However, to realize the potential of SSE in platform work, governments must create an enabling



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environment through the implementation of appropriate policies and legal frameworks. Current regulatory systems, where they exist at all for platform work, are typically designed for either traditional businesses or for individual “entrepreneurs,” and they often do not recognize cooperative or collective models in the digital space. We call for targeted measures to support and legitimize SSE enterprises in the platform economy. Legal frameworks and tax regimes should be tailored for cooperatives and other SSE entities, and should be distinct from those for traditional corporations.

Platform Cooperativism: A Labor-Centered Alternative

One of the most promising strategies to transform the platform economy is through platform cooperativism – the promotion of cooperatively owned and governed digital platforms. Platform cooperatives directly address many of the power imbalances inherent in the dominant gig economy model. Rather than being controlled by distant investors or shareholders, a platform cooperative is owned and democratically governed by its members, typically the workers (and sometimes users) themselves. This ownership structure inherently aligns the platform’s operations with the interests of those who depend on it for their livelihoods, creating a built-in check against exploitative practices. The principles of platform cooperativism reflect the values of the broader cooperative movement (as articulated in the International Cooperative Alliance’s principles) but applied to the online platform context. These enterprises adhere to democratic decision-making principles (one member, one vote), an equitable distribution of income, and a commitment to the community. In practice, this means that workers on a cooperative platform can collectively decide policies such as fare levels, commission rates, how to share profits or surpluses, and the design of algorithms that assign work. For example, instead of a black-box algorithm optimizing only for the company’s revenue, a platform co-op might implement an algorithm. Additionally, platform co-ops have demonstrated resilience – members are more likely to support one another in times of crisis (for example, pooling funds for a sick coworker), and the businesses are less prone to the abrupt exits that have plagued some venture-capital-backed platforms. To mainstream platform cooperativism, policy support is essential. Despite their benefits, platform co-ops often struggle to compete against well-funded multinational platforms that benefit from regulatory ambiguity and economies of scale. We urge policymakers at all levels to adopt measures that level the playing field for platform cooperatives and actively support their development. This includes implementing public procurement policies that prioritize cooperative digital enterprises, enacting legislation that affords platform co-ops parity with shareholder-backed tech startups, and undertaking long-overdue reforms of cooperative law to reflect the structural and operational realities of the digital economy. These recommendations align with the detailed proposals outlined by the Platform Cooperativism Consortium in its comprehensive policy framework. This includes recognizing platform cooperatives in digital platform regulations and national cooperative laws, providing access to start-up capital (through public funding, cooperative banks, or social impact investment), and ensuring that competition laws or platform regulations do not unintentionally disadvantage cooperative models. For example, public procurement processes could prioritize platform businesses that are worker-owned or that meet high labor standards, thus giving co-ops a market advantage in delivering public services. Local governments can also foster



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platform co-ops by partnering with them (such as cities contracting a delivery co-op for municipal needs or integrating a cooperative ride-hail service into public transit networks).

International organizations also play a role. We call on the International Labour Organization (ILO) and cooperative development agencies to launch dedicated initiatives on platform cooperatives, building on the ILO's century-long work in supporting cooperatives (ILO Recommendation 193) and the recent recognition of SSE at the ILO. Technical assistance, exchange of best practices, and global networking can help nascent platform co-ops to scale and federate. Notably, platform cooperativism aligns with the ILO's focus on "decent work in the digital economy," and we echo the proposal made by worker organizations to develop an international standard to ensure fair conditions on digital labor platforms.

Flexibility with Security: No Trade-off Between Autonomy and Protection

Platform companies often promote "flexibility" as the defining benefit of gig work. Indeed, many workers are drawn to platform jobs by the promise of choosing their own hours, being their own boss, or supplementing their income on their terms. Flexibility can be valuable, especially for those who need to juggle work with caregiving responsibilities or other commitments. However, flexibility must not come at the expense of fundamental worker protections. Too often, the notion of flexibility has been used as a *pretext* for denying gig workers their rights and benefits. We reject the premise that workers must trade off security for autonomy. It is entirely possible to design work arrangements that offer genuine flexibility while also providing social protection, fair income, and a voice at work. As the experience of many gig workers shows, the current flexibility is often more illusory than real. When pay rates are low and work is assigned by an algorithm, workers frequently have no real choice but to work extremely long hours to make ends meet, effectively reducing any flexibility in practice. Flexibility and security can and should go hand in hand. We advocate for regulatory models that ensure gig workers have access to full labor protections regardless of their work arrangements. This begins with extending social protection to all workers in the platform economy, regardless of whether they are labeled as employees or not. As recommended by the ILO, social protection systems should evolve to cover "platform workers and other self-employed" through innovative mechanisms, such as allowing platform workers to enroll in existing social security schemes with contributions from platforms.

Additionally, labor laws must be updated to guarantee fundamental rights for platform workers, including those who are genuinely independent. Every worker has the right to a safe workplace, to reasonable hours, to be free from discrimination and harassment, and to have access to dispute resolution. We urge countries to review and amend their labor codes to cover platform workers under occupational safety and health regulations, working time standards, and minimum wage laws (or guarantees of equitable remuneration). Some jurisdictions have introduced an intermediate legal category of "dependent contractor" for gig workers, granting some protections even if full employee status is not recognized. While the nomenclature may differ, the principle is that no worker should fall completely outside the framework of labor rights. *Freedom of association and collective bargaining, in particular, must be guaranteed for all*



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workers, including self-employed and gig workers. This requires removing legal barriers that currently prevent “independent” workers from unionizing or bargaining (for example, competition laws or archaic definitions of “employee”). We call for the institutionalization of the enabling rights to organize and bargain collectively for platform workers. Concretely, that means amending labor relations laws to explicitly cover non-traditional workers and protecting them from retaliation when they form unions or cooperatives. Such changes are vital for platform workers to have a collective voice to negotiate fairer terms – flexibility should never mean isolation and voicelessness.

Innovative policy solutions can reconcile flexibility with security. One idea gaining traction is “portable benefits” for gig workers – benefits that follow the worker regardless of how many platforms or gigs they work on. This could include accounts where multiple platform companies contribute to a worker’s benefit fund in proportion to that worker’s earnings, which the worker can then use for health insurance, paid leave, or retirement savings. Another approach is to establish a sectoral collective agreement in industries such as ride-hailing or food delivery, which sets minimum standards (including pay per task, insurance, etc.) applicable to all platform companies, while allowing workers to choose when and for whom to work. Such collective standards can effectively put a floor under competition, preventing a race to the bottom on wages and conditions while preserving worker autonomy on scheduling. For example, in some cities, drivers’ unions have successfully lobbied for minimum per-mile pay rates for ride-hail work, ensuring that even as drivers maintain flexible schedules, they are guaranteed a baseline income for their time.

It is also essential to address the information and power asymmetries that currently disadvantage workers. We support calls for algorithmic transparency and data rights for platform workers. Workers should have the right to know how job assignments and evaluations are determined by algorithms, and to contest automated decisions that affect their livelihood (such as account deactivations). Transparency does not hinder flexibility; rather, it empowers workers to make informed choices and ensures they are not subject to arbitrary control. In addition, rating and reputation systems – a core element of many platforms – should be designed to be fair and not trap workers in a cycle of insecurity. For instance, workers could have the ability to transfer their ratings between platforms (portability of reputation), which would prevent them from losing “digital capital” if they switch to a new platform and would reduce the dependence on any single app. In short, the gig economy must evolve into a model of “flexicurity” – a balance of flexibility and security. This is entirely achievable: it simply requires political will to set fair rules of the game. We echo this conclusion emphatically. It is time to dispel the myth that the only way to have on-demand services is by accepting worker precarity. On the contrary, by integrating social protection, rights, and collective representation into platform work, we can harness the benefits of flexible work arrangements while eliminating their most harmful aspects.

Bridging the Divide: Integrating Platform Workers into Broader Labor Protection and Social Dialogue

As mentioned above, the emergence of platform work has at times created tensions between traditional workers and platform workers, largely due to inconsistent regulations and perceived unfair advantages.



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Traditional businesses and workers (e.g., licensed taxis, regulated delivery services, brick-and-mortar retailers) often operate under stricter labor standards or taxes. In contrast, platform companies have operated in regulatory grey areas. This can breed understandable resentment: from the viewpoint of a taxi driver who has invested in permits and follows labor laws, an unregulated ride-hailing driver represents *unfair competition*. Similarly, formally employed couriers may see app-based couriers as undercutting wages by accepting low pay without benefits, not out of preference, but out of desperation, which can then pressure all wages downward. The solution is not to scapegoat platform workers, but to bring all workers up to the same high standard of protection. We urge trade unions, worker associations, and policymakers to avoid a zero-sum framing of this issue. Platform workers are workers, and they deserve the same rights and solidarity as any other. The goal should be to close regulatory gaps so that platform companies cannot bypass labor regulations to gain a cost advantage. This requires governments to clarify the legal status of platform work in labor legislation, taxation, and business licensing. *Where platform workers truly operate like employees, they should be recognized as such and granted full employee rights.* Where they have some independence, a protected contractor status could be defined, but one that still mandates essential protections and benefits. In contexts where the legal framework remains murky, governments should issue interim guidelines or regulations to protect workers' basic rights. We support these calls – they reflect a broader principle: labor protections should follow the evolution of work, not be constrained by outdated definitions of the employer-employee relationship.

Social dialogue is key to bridging the divide between traditional and platform workers. We recommend the creation of inclusive dialogue platforms – at both national and sectoral levels – that bring together representatives of platform workers, traditional trade unions, employers (including platform firms), and the government. Through dialogue, misconceptions can be addressed and common ground found. Traditional worker organizations can extend solidarity to platform workers, rather than viewing them as competitors. In fact, in several countries, we are seeing positive signs: mainstream unions are beginning to organize and include gig workers, and alliances are forming. For example, in South Africa and Nigeria, transport unions have opened membership to Uber/Bolt drivers, recognizing them as part of the broader workforce. Such inclusion helps unify workers' voices in demanding fair regulation for all. We further call on governments to design collective bargaining frameworks that are inclusive of platform workers. This might involve adapting bargaining units or creating new multi-employer bargaining arrangements. For instance, sector-wide agreements could be reached for all ride-hailing drivers in a city or country, covering both app-based and traditional drivers, thus preventing competition on labor costs. Governments can facilitate this by mandating platforms to recognize representative worker bodies or by extending the coverage of existing collective agreements to platforms.

The ILO's supervisory bodies have emphasized that *all workers, regardless of status, have the right to collective bargaining*. Countries should therefore remove any legal obstacles that prevent platform workers from unionizing due to antitrust or "cartel" considerations – worker cooperation must not be conflated with business price-fixing. It is also important to address any tensions through public awareness. In many



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cases, platform workers and traditional informal workers (like street vendors, taxi drivers, etc.) share common struggles: low incomes, lack of security, and exclusion from formal systems. Highlighting these shared challenges can foster a sense of solidarity. Ultimately, by integrating platform workers into the broader labor movement and policy framework, we can avoid a fragmented workforce and instead ensure that digital transformation benefits all workers.

Fairwork and Platform Cooperativism: Guiding Principles for Fair Platforms

In building a fairer platform economy, we are not starting from scratch. There are existing frameworks and initiatives that articulate clear principles and criteria for what constitutes “*fair work*” in the platform economy. Two important sources of guidance are the Fairwork initiative, the Fairwork project at the University of Oxford, and the Platform Cooperativism Consortium at The New School (which we have discussed). We advocate that policymakers and platform businesses alike adopt these principles as baseline standards. Fairwork has developed a set of Five Principles of Fair Work for platforms. It annually rates platforms in dozens of countries against these criteria. The principles are: Fair Pay, Fair Conditions, Fair Contracts, Fair Management, and Fair Representation. In brief, *Fair Pay* means workers receive at least a living wage after costs; *Fair Conditions* means platforms actively protect workers from risks and improve their working environment; *Fair Contracts* means terms are transparent, explained, and do not impose unfair liability on workers; *Fair Management* means there is due process in disciplinary decisions, no discrimination, and transparency in algorithmic management; and *Fair Representation* means workers have the right to organize and collectively voice concerns, and platforms recognize and negotiate with those bodies.

Platform Cooperativism adopts all seven cooperative principles, namely, Voluntary and Open Membership, Democratic Member Control, Member Economic Participation, Autonomy and Independence, Education, Training, and Information, Cooperation among Cooperatives, Concern for Community, into the Platform Economy.

These principles align with SSE values and international labor standards. We recommend that governments use the Fairwork principles as a toolkit to evaluate and regulate platforms. For instance, when drafting platform work legislation or codes of conduct, lawmakers can require that platforms ensure fair pay (perhaps by stipulating an hourly earnings floor) and implement channels for worker representation (such as consultative committees or collective bargaining agreements). Public authorities could also incentivize compliance by giving preferential treatment to platforms that score higher on Fairwork ratings – for example, cities could choose to license or partner with only those ride-hailing apps that meet Fairwork’s basic standards of fairness. We likewise encourage workers and consumers to use Fairwork scores (where available) to hold platforms accountable and support better platforms. In some Global South countries, Fairwork ratings have spurred dialogue – platforms have made changes (like introducing accident insurance or clearer contracts) in response to low scores. This shows the power of naming and shaming, combined with constructive guidance. The Fairwork framework essentially operationalizes the principle that



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digital innovation should not come at the cost of worker dignity. We assert that *any platform economy reforms should, at a minimum, ensure compliance with these five pillars of fair work*. This is a matter of basic justice and aligns with the notion that new forms of work are still subject to fundamental human and labor rights.

In addition to Fairwork, the broader Platform Cooperativism Consortium (academics, activists, and practitioners) has put forth values and recommendations that should inform policy. One key idea is that data and technology infrastructure can be owned as a commons or cooperative, preventing monopolies. Another is the importance of open-source technology for platforms, which can empower local or smaller players to adapt and use platform software without incurring huge capital costs. Furthermore, platform co-op advocates emphasize education and capacity building for workers. Many gig workers may be interested in forming co-ops or demanding change, but lack knowledge of the cooperative model or the necessary legal expertise. Governments and NGOs can facilitate training in digital platform management, cooperative entrepreneurship, and governance so that workers can take charge of building alternatives. The values of participation, transparency, and accountability are common to both Fairwork and Platform Cooperativism frameworks. We insist that any initiative to regulate the platform economy uphold these values. For example, algorithmic accountability – workers should have input into how algorithms are designed and a way to appeal algorithmic decisions (as noted under Fair Management). Similarly, transparency in fees and data platforms should clearly disclose how prices are set, how commissions are deducted, and give workers access to data about their own performance and customers. These measures empower workers and reduce information asymmetry, contributing to fairer outcomes.

From a rights-based perspective, it is also important to integrate international labor standards into the platform economy. The core ILO Conventions (on freedom of association, non-discrimination, forced labor, and child labor) apply to *all workers* and thus must be enforced in platform work as well. Beyond that, instruments like ILO Recommendation 204 on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy provide guidance that is highly relevant to platform work, which in many ways is a new form of informal work. R204 calls for extending legal and social protections to all and respecting workers' organizing efforts in informal settings. We echo R204's principle that "*all workers should have equal opportunities and rights*" – digital workers are no exception. Additionally, the ILO's Centenary Declaration (2019) asserted that workers in "new forms of work" should enjoy adequate protections. We urge ILO constituents to take this up at venues like the International Labour Conference: a general discussion in 2025 on the platform economy could lead to new international norms, as already suggested by worker organizations.

Finally, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms must be strengthened. Rights and standards on paper mean little if they are not enforced. Given the often transnational nature of platform companies, national enforcement needs to be supplemented by international cooperation. We support the idea of international regulatory cooperation to tackle issues like cross-border online labor platforms and to prevent a regulatory race to the bottom. For example, countries could agree on minimum standards for ride-hailing or food



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delivery platforms, so that companies cannot exploit weaker rules in one country to undercut another. By drawing on these frameworks, policymakers can move from diagnosing the problem to implementing concrete solutions.

A diagnosis of the fundamental power asymmetries between tech giants (with the colossal wealth and market power they have accumulated through the extractivist rentier model of using platform technologies) and these infinitely less resourced bottom-up alternatives might ultimately call for data and technology infrastructure to be owned as a “global commons”, governed through these SSE-based cooperativism frameworks by way of a binding international agreement.

A Fair and Inclusive Digital Future

The platform economy is at a crossroads. It has proven the viability of new modes of connecting workers with income opportunities, but it has also exposed millions to precarious conditions reminiscent of the worst aspects of the informal economy. This positioning paper has outlined how integrating Social and Solidarity Economy principles into the digital economy, through platform cooperativism, rights-based regulation, and solidarity-driven policies, can transform the narrative. Digital innovation can go hand in hand with social innovation: by reorganizing platform work on the foundations of democracy, equity, and collective well-being, we can ensure that the future of work is not a race to the bottom, but a journey toward decent work for all. RIPESS and its member networks across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America stand committed to this vision. We believe that all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, protection, and voice in the digital age, just as in the traditional economy. The Social and Solidarity Economy offers not only a set of values but a proven set of practices for realizing this vision – practices that humanity has developed over two centuries of cooperative and labor movements, now reinvigorated for the 21st century. We call on governments, international organizations, and all stakeholders to join us in building a platform economy that truly serves people. The time for piecemeal solutions and half-measures is over. What is needed now is a bold, comprehensive approach that brings platform work into the formal labor governance system, one that empowers workers through collective organization and ownership, and ensures that flexibility does not mean precarity. The principle of “no one left behind” must apply to gig workers as much as to anyone – they are full members of our society and workforce, and their well-being is integral to our shared sustainable development goals (from SDG 8 on decent work to SDG 10 on reducing inequalities).

In closing, we emphasize that integrating SSE into the platform economy is not only about protecting workers – it is about reimagining the platform economy itself as a force for good. By harnessing the power of cooperation, community, and solidarity, digital labor platforms can be transformed from tools of exploitation into tools of empowerment. The platform economy of tomorrow can be one where workers are protagonists, not just inputs – where they co-own the platforms, share in the prosperity they create, and enjoy the security and dignity of formal work. Achieving this will require political courage, innovative policies, and the collective action of workers and allies. It is a challenging path, but as the successes of the



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SSE worldwide have shown, when people organize and assert their rights, *even entrenched systems can be changed*. We envision a global digital economy that upholds the mantra of “Nothing about us without us” for platform workers, meaning no decisions on the future of work will be made without the voice and leadership of the workers themselves. By integrating social and solidarity principles at every level of the platform economy, we can ensure that the future of work is not a digital dystopia, but a cornerstone of inclusive and sustainable development. Let us commit to this cause with urgency and unity. The rights and livelihoods of millions of workers – and the integrity of our economies – depend on it.

RIPESS Position Paper at the 113th International Labour Conference



Reclaiming the Platform Economy through Social Solidarity

The Social Solidarity Economy offers a rights-based alternative to digital capitalism—prioritizing people and the planet over profit.





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