

DELHI-NCR

PLATFORMING PRECARITY:

Data narratives of
workers sustaining
urban platform services

2024



Centre
for Internet
& Society

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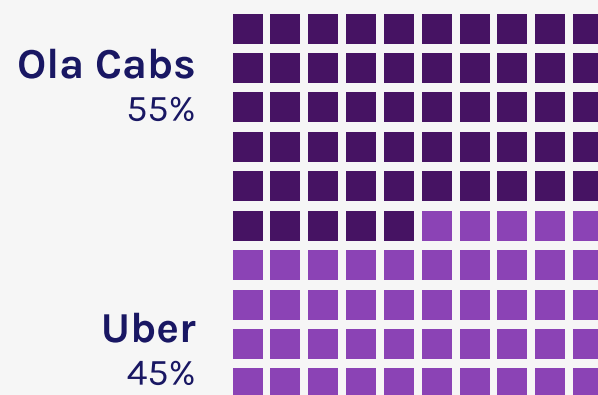
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Delivery and taxi platform services in Delhi-NCR

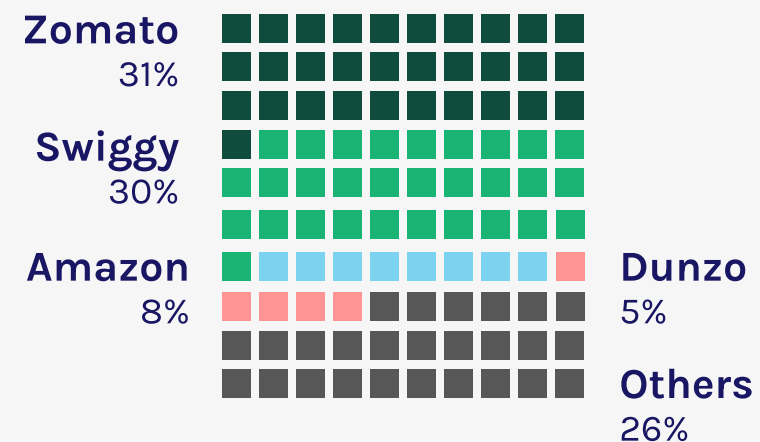
This city brief draws from surveys with 53 workers in the taxi services sector and 106 workers in the delivery services sector in Delhi-NCR. Ola and Uber have dominated in the taxi services sector with a near equal preference by workers for either platform.

Food delivery services in the app-based delivery sector was dominated by Zomato and Swiggy, while e-commerce delivery was dominated by Amazon, Dunzo and Flipkart. There were a considerable number of smaller delivery platforms accounting for around a quarter of the platforms where workers were employed.

App-based taxi services



App-based delivery services



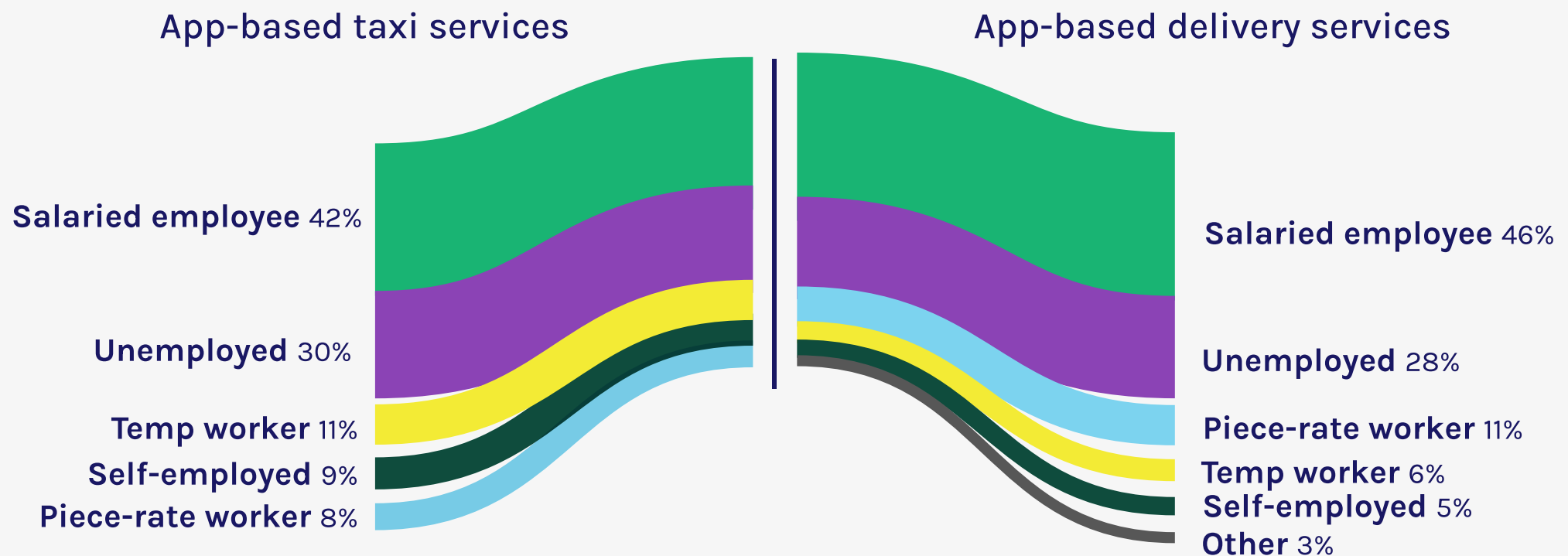
1. Surveys with workers in delivery and taxi services were conducted between December 2021 and April 2022. Details on the survey design and data collection can be found in the overall methodology note, accompanying the city briefs.
2. 79 workers were initially surveyed in the taxi services sector. Of them, 26 workers had exited platform work. 53 workers answered the full survey questionnaire, and formed the final sample on which analysis is based. 141 workers were initially surveyed in the delivery services sector. Of them, 35 workers had exited platform work. 106 workers answered the full survey questionnaire, and formed the final sample on which analysis is based.
3. Percentages are based on the main platform that respondents work for within each sector.
4. 'Others' in delivery services include Flipkart, Grofers, and E-kart Logistics.

Prior employment and entry into platform work

In Delhi-NCR, workers who transitioned to platform work had varying employment arrangements in their previous work. A substantial proportion—over 40%—were salaried employees before they switched to inherently insecure platform work. In the taxi services sector, workers were previously involved in allied transport sector work. In comparison, workers in the delivery sector came from more diverse employment backgrounds, including marketing and sales, litigation, engineering, and information technology.

Across both sectors, entry into platform work was distress-driven, owing to low incomes in workers' previous employment. For instance, Prashanth worked as a sales-person before joining as a delivery worker on Zomato. He earned INR 10,000 in his previous job, which wasn't enough to manage everyday expenses.

Unemployment was also a key driver. Around 30% of workers across both sectors were unemployed prior to joining platform work.



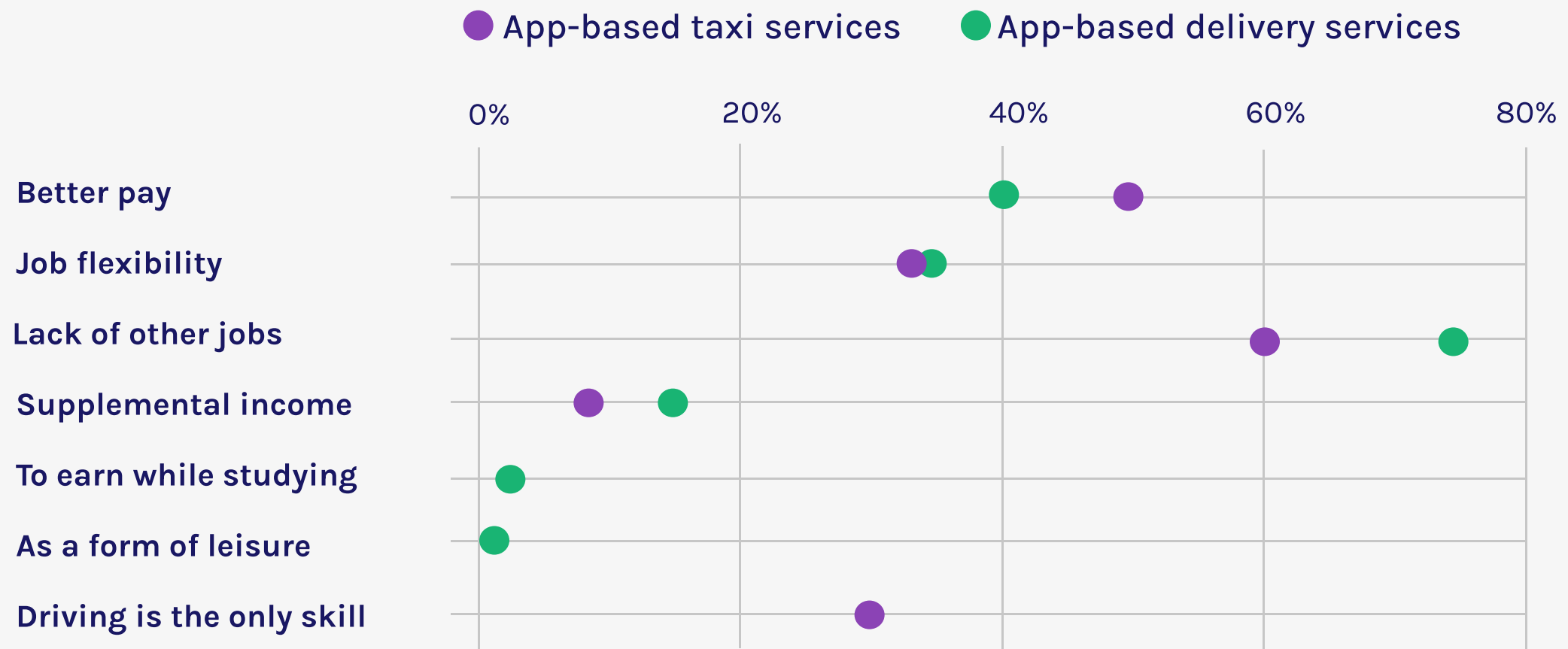
5. "Salaried employee" refers to workers who worked for a monthly wage. The category includes those workers who had a written employment contract, as well as those who were working without a contract.

6. All names in this city brief are pseudonyms.

Key motivators to join platform work

In Delhi-NCR, the lack of better alternative employment opportunities and the anticipation of better pay were significant factors driving the adoption of platform work.

A substantial proportion of workers—over 40%—entered platform work with the expectation of better pay. However, reality largely deviated from these expectations. Initial earnings were promising, as seen in the case of Naresh, who experienced good income in his early days working for taxi platforms. Over time, Naresh's earnings declined due to increasing costs, dwindling bonuses and rising platform fees. At the time of the survey, Naresh's earnings were reduced to around INR 6,000 per week driving for Ola.

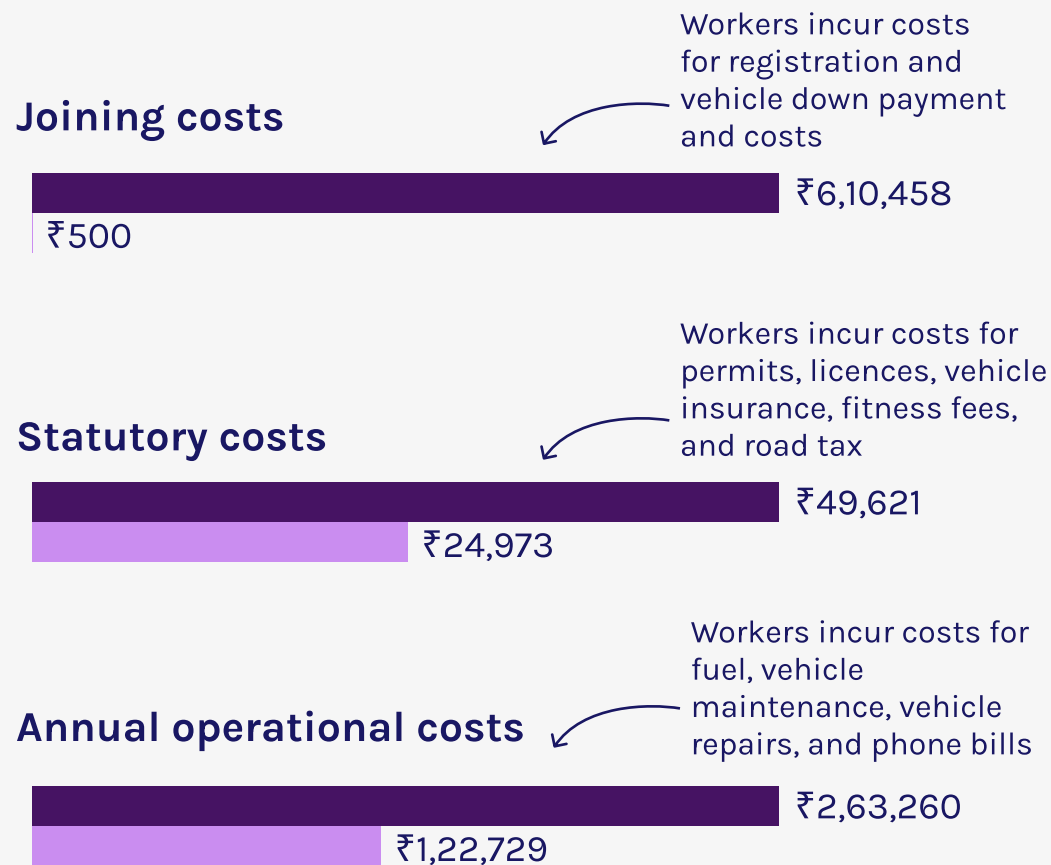


7. Survey respondents were asked to select all applicable motivators for joining platform work from a multiple-choice question. As a result, the sum of percentages of all motivators within a sector exceeds 100 percent.

Externalised joining, statutory, and operational costs

App-based taxi services

Owner Non-owner



App-based delivery services

Joining costs



Annual operational costs



8. Costs displayed in the visuals above are estimated expenses incurred for joining, statutory, and operational costs. These estimates were calculated for each category of costs as a sum of average sub-costs reported by survey respondents.

9. All costs displayed in the visuals above are estimated expenses incurred in the first calendar year of joining platform work. These annual were calculated as weekly average costs * 4.33 * 12

In Delhi-NCR, the high costs of doing platform work reveal the economic vulnerabilities inherent within platform work. The average monthly expenses for taxi workers in Delhi-NCR were INR 32,782 and INR 6,763 for delivery workers.

One of the key challenges for taxi workers was the high cost of entry into platform work. Workers had to pay an average of INR 6,10,083 in vehicle costs and downpayments in order to join platforms. Among workers who took vehicle loans, the average EMI amount was INR 12,368. For many of these workers, the triple financial impact of a depreciating asset, high and rising expenses, and decreasing earnings led them into a debt trap. Ajit, who had been working for taxi platforms since 2019, secured a vehicle loan to join platform work. He made a down payment of INR 1,70,000 at the time. Years later, he is still paying a monthly EMI of INR 14,000, all while working 13 hour days. Taxi work on platforms became a way of servicing debt rather than generating income, effectively preventing workers from leaving platform work owing to severe financial consequences.

To cope with these high entry costs, workers resorted to informal rental or commission-based arrangements with vehicle owners. 8% of workers had rental agreements and 15% were in commission-based arrangements. However, the informality of these arrangements made platform work even more precarious. In Mayur's case, for instance, the informal nature of the agreement—splitting expenses with the vehicle owner—did not provide the worker with any formal contractual protections, and shifted significant operational risks onto the worker.

Across owner, rental, and commission-based arrangements, taxi workers incurred routine operational costs including fuel, vehicle maintenance, and vehicle repairs. Fuel was the primary routine expense for both taxi and delivery workers. Taxi workers spent an average of INR 13,774 on fuel a month, comprising 75% of all operational costs. Delivery workers spent an average of INR 6,356 a month on fuel expenses.

Additionally, platforms imposed commissions that were between 15% and 35% of the fare, further eroding workers' incomes. Commissions were usually opaque, changed arbitrarily, and further imbalanced an already skewed worker-platform relationship; workers had to bear the most financial risk, while platforms extracted from workers directly through commission and indirectly through the offloading of risk.

10. Non-owner work arrangements in the taxi services sector included those where workers were engaged in informal and formal salaried, rental, commission-based, and leasing arrangements.

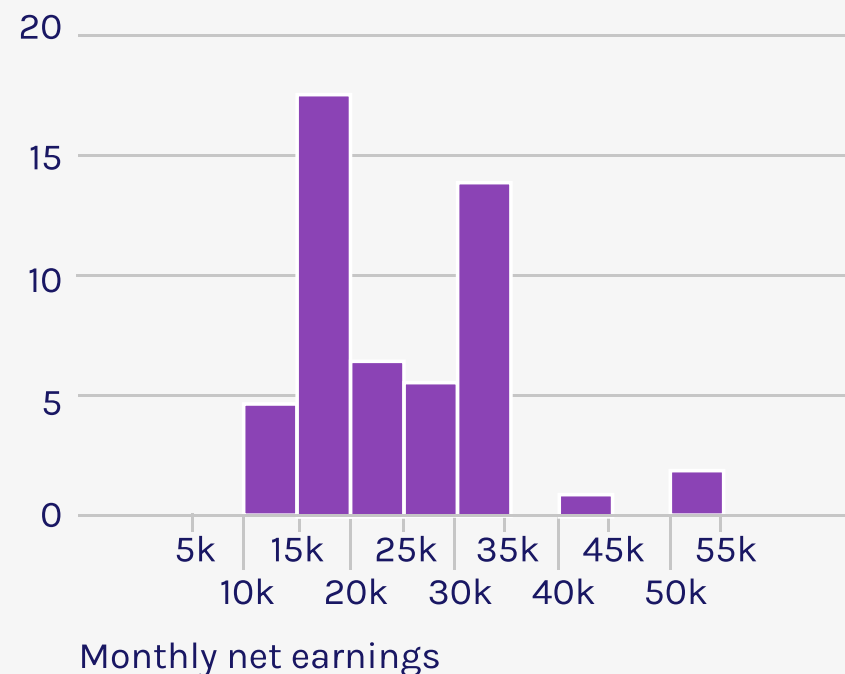
Insufficient incomes and economic vulnerabilities

In Delhi-NCR, a significant percentage (33%) of workers in the taxi services sector and 26% of workers in the delivery services sector had exited platform work, driven primarily by low and declining earnings.

This trend has long-term implications for the sustainability of the platform workforce. The inability to provide stable and adequate earnings will continue to drive attrition, forcing workers to seek alternative employment.

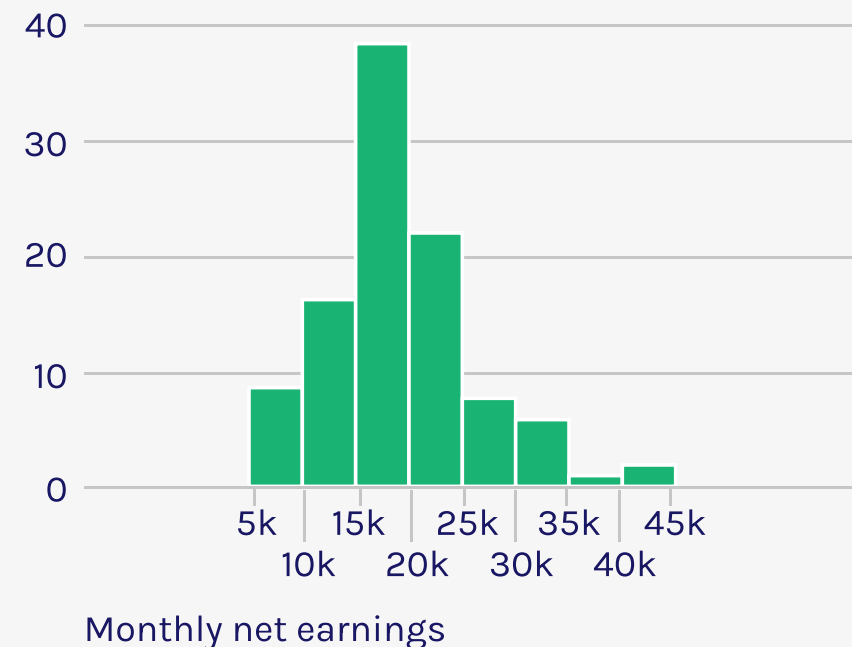
App-based taxi services

Number of respondents



App-based delivery services

Number of respondents



11. All earnings shown are net/take-home earnings after deducting applicable work-related expenses such as fuel, vehicle rent, equated monthly instalments (EMIs), toll, insurance, etc and so on.

12. Monthly earnings have been calculated as weekly earnings * 4.33

Insufficient incomes and economic vulnerabilities

	App-based taxi services	App-based delivery services
Primary sources of income	<p>For 98% of workers, platform work is their primary source of income.</p> <p>98% do not have other jobs or other income sources.</p>	<p>For 96% of workers, platform work is their primary source of income.</p> <p>94% do not have other jobs or other income sources.</p>
Dependence on income from platform work	<p>Workers financially support a median of 4 people.</p> <p>49% of workers find their current earnings are not sufficient to cover household and financial obligations.</p>	<p>Workers financially support a median of 4 people.</p> <p>54% of workers find their current earnings are not sufficient to cover household and financial obligations.</p>
Impact of ratings on income	<p>80% of workers find ratings affect the amount of work they receive, and 41% find it impacts the type of work they receive.</p>	<p>78% of workers receiving ratings find that it affects the amount of work they receive, and 47% find it impacts the type of work they receive.</p>
Impact of metrics on income	<p>80% of workers find acceptance rate impacts the amount of work they receive. 53% workers find they can refuse work without repercussions.</p>	<p>59% of workers find acceptance rate impacts the amount of work they receive. 58% workers find they can refuse work without repercussions.</p>

Monthly net earnings for workers in both sectors in Delhi-NCR showed large disparities and an uneven distribution.

The lowest earnings ranged from INR 5,196 (for a worker engaged in part-time work on delivery platforms) to INR 51,960 for a worker on taxi platforms who is engaged as an individual owner.

However, platform work was insufficient in meeting most workers' essential living needs.

69% of workers in the taxi services sector and 87% of workers in the delivery services sector earned less than the minimum wage of INR 18,187 in Delhi. Moreover, 92% of workers in the taxi sector and 97% of workers in the delivery sector earned lower than the estimated living wage of INR 24,100.

Several factors contributed to this insufficiency and uncertainty in workers' earnings: stringent platform requirements around high acceptance rates, and ratings, which were important determinants, long work hours, decreased flexibility, and high offloaded work-related expenses.

Consider the case of Shekhar, a worker in the taxi services sector. He worked 60 hours every week, yet his monthly earnings remained low at INR 12,990. Shekhar's experiences resonated with several workers in Delhi-NCR, whether engaged in taxi or delivery work.

Uncertain and depleting earnings was a key factor worsening income insecurity, and this also impacted workers' dependents and overall standard of living. 68% of workers in the taxi sector and 54% in the delivery sector, found that their income from platform work was insufficient to cover basic household and financial obligations. This increased financial insecurity faced by workers also deepened their vulnerability to economic shocks.

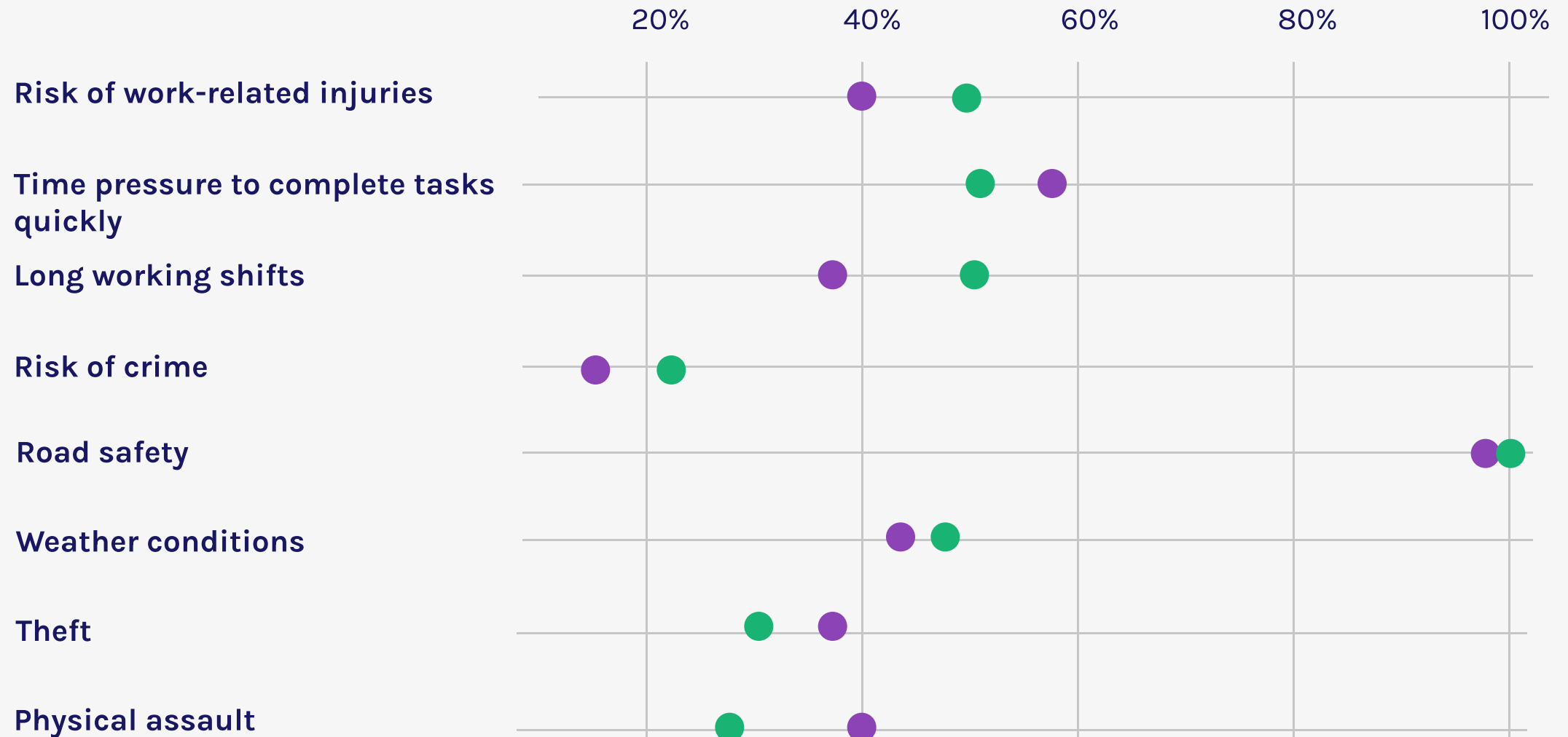
13. Calculations for state-wise minimum wage and living wage are presented in the overall methodology note, accompanying the city briefs.

14. 79 workers were initially surveyed in the taxi services sector. Of them, 26 workers had exited platform work. 53 workers answered the full survey questionnaire, and formed the final sample on which analysis is based. 141 workers were initially surveyed in the delivery services sector. Of them, 35 workers had exited platform work. 106 workers answered the full survey questionnaire, and formed the final sample on which analysis is based.

Workplace safety risks

● App-based taxi services

● App-based delivery services



15. Survey respondents were asked to select all applicable factors of workplace stress and safety risks from multiple-choice questions. As a result, the sum of percentages of all factors within a sector exceeds 100 percent.

Workers across both sectors in Delhi-NCR face risks to workplace health and safety. They spent long hours working for platforms—a median of 84 weekly hours in the taxi services sector and a median of 60 weekly hours in the delivery services sector. These hours far exceed working hour thresholds that are considered safe for workers’ health. **Over 84% of workers faced other serious risks while engaging in platform work including risks of physical assault, theft, and poor road safety.**

Platforms remained unaccountable for their failure to guarantee safe working conditions. Sanjay, a delivery worker working for Amazon, experienced this apathy from the platform during one such incident. His delivery backpack was stolen along with several items to be delivered. Despite contacting the platform and explaining his situation, Sanjay was not provided any support. On the contrary, Sanjay paid close to INR 20,000 to Amazon as compensation for the stolen bag and items.

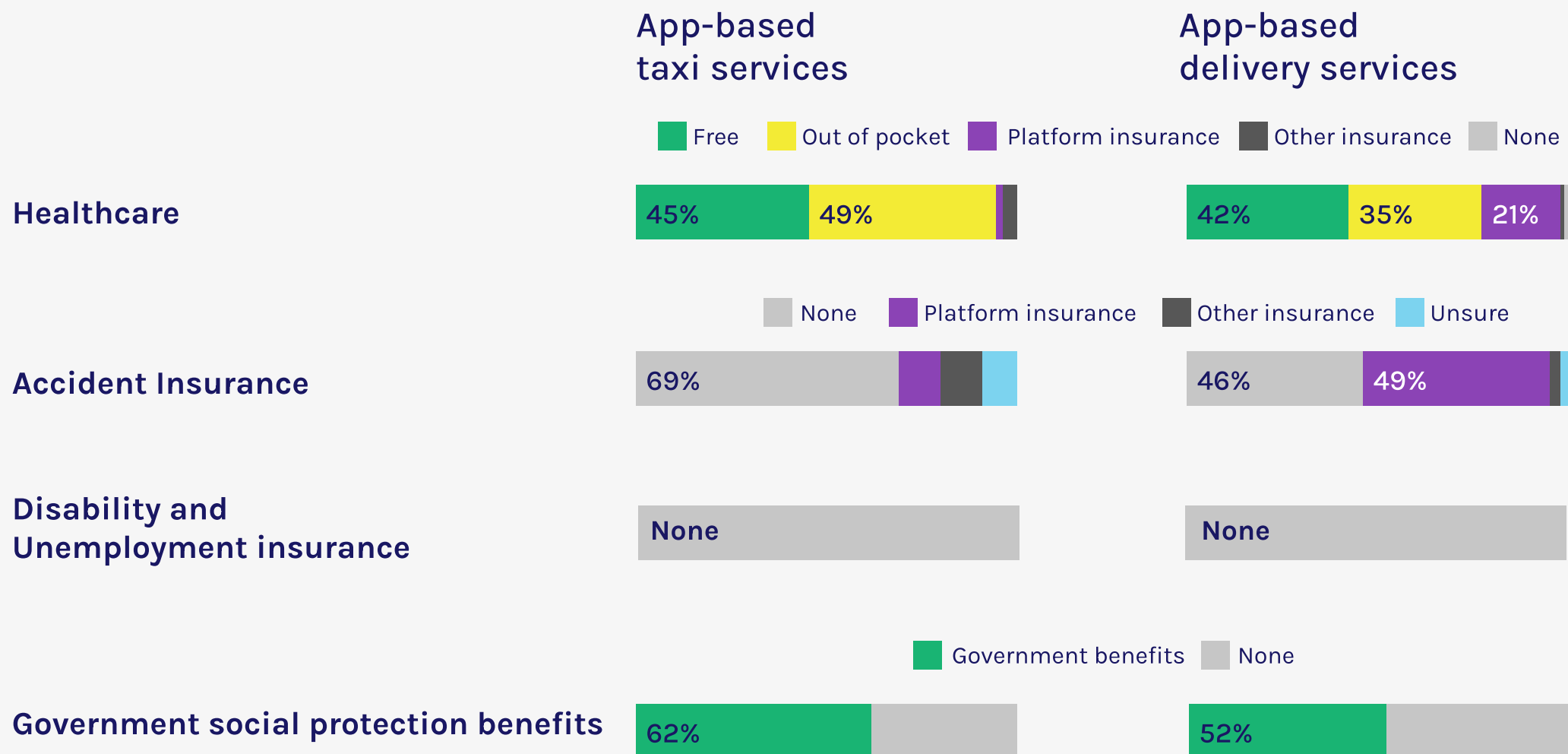
Workers’ overall experience with platform grievance redressal mechanisms was mixed. With taxi workers, 60% had registered complaints, and 50% received a satisfactory resolution. 58% of delivery workers had registered complaints with their platforms, and 19% of them did not receive a resolution. The disparity between registered complaints and resolved issues points to an imbalance of power in the platform economy. **Workers have limited recourse when their grievances go unanswered. Platforms, however, wield significant control over terms of work, making it difficult for workers to challenge unfair decisions.**

	App-based taxi services	App-based delivery services
Does the platform take steps to improve working conditions?	Only 4% workers say their platform employer takes steps to improve their working conditions.	Only 8% workers say their platform employer takes steps to improve their working conditions.
Is there a formal process for workers to complain? If so, what is the process?	91% workers are aware that there is a formal process to complain. 89% workers rely on the app to complain, whereas 2% of workers go to an office to complain.	91% workers are aware that there is a formal process to complain. 49% workers contact the management, whereas 39% of workers rely on the app to complain.

Social protection

Across both sectors, a large proportion of workers in Delhi-NCR are left outside social insurance coverage from platforms.

In terms of access to healthcare services, for instance, more than a third of workers spent out-of-pocket on services (almost half in the taxi sector), and more than 40% relied on free government services. Coverage by platforms was slightly better for delivery workers, where 21% of workers had access to health insurance, and more than 49% had access to accident insurance.



Workers on taxi platforms in Delhi-NCR faced critically low levels of support from platforms in terms of social insurance coverage. Around 2% of these workers had access to health insurance, and only 11% were covered by accident insurance. This lack of protection is concerning, given the economic vulnerabilities these workers and their dependents face. Vipin, a worker driving for Uber stressed how basic insurance is a necessity for workers on platforms owing to these vulnerabilities and the need for economic security for their families, even if the insurance comes at the cost of greater commission deductions by the platform.

In comparison, delivery workers had slightly better access to accident insurance, but significant challenges remain. Even though 49% of delivery workers were covered by accident insurance, claiming benefits was often an unreliable and time-consuming process. Workers who attempt to access benefits face several obstacles, including poor awareness of available schemes, inadequate coverage, and little to no platform support in navigating complex claims procedures.

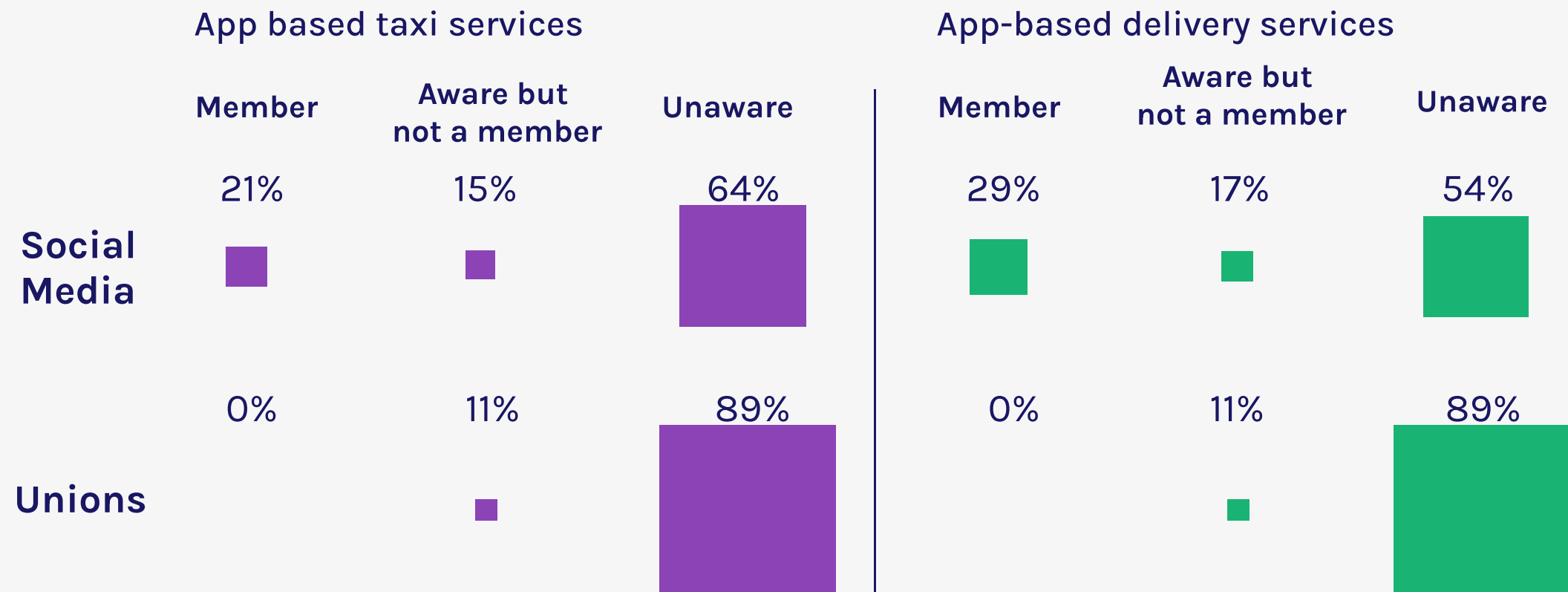
The inadequacy of platform-provided insurance was exacerbated by the exclusion of many workers from government social security benefits. Over a third of taxi workers and nearly half of delivery workers in Delhi-NCR were not covered by any form of social security from the government. This left them doubly vulnerable—without access to either platform-based or government-provided protections.

16. Read more about eligibility, coverage, and implementation barriers relating to social security benefits covered by platforms here: <https://themorningcontext.com/chaos/food-delivery-partners-run-the-risk-but-cant-count-on-cover>; <https://cis-india.org/raw/cis-itfc-e-shram-issue-brief-dec-21-pdf>

Workers' collective action and solidarity networks

Worker participation in both formal and informal groups remains relatively low across taxi and delivery sectors in Delhi-NCR. However, Informal communities on social media platforms emerged as a more accessible form of collective interaction among workers. Over a third of the workers were aware of such groups, and around a quarter actively participated in them.

In contrast, nearly 90% of workers were unaware of formal unions operating in their sectors. Despite challenges, workers' organisations such as the Delhi NCR unit of the All India Gig Workers' Union have continued mobilisation efforts in the delivery sector. A number of unions have been active in the taxi sector as well, including Sarvodaya Drivers Association of Delhi, Expert Driver Solution Association, and a larger federation of unions—the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers.



Socio-economic profiles of workers

	App-based taxi services	App-based delivery services
Gender	men: 100%	men: 100%
Age	median: 34 years range: 24 – 50 years	median: 30 years range: 21 – 53 years
Marital status	single: 17% married: 83%	single: 23% married: 75% divorced or separated: 1% widowed: 1%
Caste	scheduled castes: 9% scheduled tribes: 2% other backward classes: 32% general: 55% prefer not to say: 2%	scheduled castes: 17% scheduled tribes: 3% other backward classes: 37% general: 42% prefer not to say: 1%
Religion	hindu: 79% muslim: 19% sikh: 2%	hindu: 92% muslim: 7% christian: 1%
Migrant status	migrants: 51% non migrants: 49% major source locations: Jaunpur, Firozabad, Muzaffarnagar, Pratapgarh, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh); Chapra, Baksar (Bihar)	migrants: 53% non migrants: 47% major source locations: Azamgarh Jaunpur, Firozabad, Mirzapur, Hardoi (Uttar Pradesh); Katihar, Samastipur, Motihari (Bihar)

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