



Locking Down the Impact of COVID-19

Appraising State and Private Measures for App-based Transport and Delivery Workers

Prepared by the **Indian Federation of App-based Transport workers (IFAT)** in collaboration with the **International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)**, New Delhi Office



About

The **Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT)** is a worker's organisation representing app-based transport and delivery workers. It has affiliate unions from 10 cities across India with a membership of more than 20,000. It was founded in December 2019 in Mumbai. IFAT is working extensively to champion the labour rights of workers driving and riding for companies like Ola, Uber, Swiggy, Zomato etc. IFAT is committed to work for the interest of app-based transport and delivery workers through organizing, collectivizing, campaigning and collaborating with unions and other civil society organisations aiming for decent work conditions, policy formulation and regulation through advocacy and labour activism.

The **International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) in Asia Pacific** represents over 2 million paid membership of transport workers through its affiliates—the largest transport union membership outside of Europe. The Asia Pacific region covers 30 countries and has a number of regional teams working to strengthen transport workers' rights. ITF's Delhi Office is primarily responsible for affiliates in South Asia and is working to increase trade union membership, improve union capacities through education and skills building, and promote solidarity.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the responses to the outbreak of Covid-19 by digital platform based companies, trade unions, and governments to help out workers for digital platform based companies (hereafter app-based workers) during the lockdown. The research work in this article is a characterization of the struggles of app-based workers during the global pandemic and how it has affected and changed the world of work for workers. The surveys were conducted amongst the workforce working for app-based companies like Ola, Uber, Swiggy, Zomato etc.

The aforementioned actors are being evaluated by their actions or apathy to the concerns of workers in this crisis. The crisis and their responses have been analyzed through a set of surveys that have been conducted before, during and after the easing of the national lockdown, to scrutinize the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on the lives of the workforce. The survey consequently also helps to check on how app-based companies, unions and the government have reacted to the problems of the workforce and the measures they have taken to alleviate the problems. Indian Federation of App-based Transport workers (IFAT), who have spearheaded this exercise, have also used the data generated by the surveys for designing campaign activities and to inform policy intervention for the app-based workers during this lockdown.

The **first survey** was conducted between July and November 2019. Its focus was on determining what the occupational health and safety standards of Ola and Uber drivers are and what influences their decisions in terms of investing in healthcare for themselves. With the Covid-19 outbreak it became necessary to identify and assess the problems plaguing them at that point. The report titled “Protecting Workers in the Digital Platform Economy: Investigating Ola and Uber Drivers’ Occupational Health and Safety’, prepared by the Indian Federation of App-based Transport workers (IFAT) in collaboration with the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), New Delhi Office, was developed on the basis of the first survey.¹ The key findings were on the health concerns the drivers developed due to their work (back aches, constipation, liver issues, waist pain, and neck pain are the five

¹ IFAT and ITF. (2020). Ola And Uber Drivers Occupational Health and Safety: A Look into The Lives and Livelihood of App-based Transport Workers. The Centre for Internet and Society. <https://cis-india.org/raw/ifat-itf-protecting-workers-in-digital-platform-economy-ola-uber-occupational-health-safety>

most common health ailments), and issues of sleep deprivation, addiction, mental health etc. as consequences of their long working hours and hostile work environment.

A **second survey** was carried out in March 2020 highlighting the immediate concerns of the drivers in regard to impending loan repayments and EMI. This survey was prompted by the first national lockdown that came into effect on 25 March, to address the apprehension of the workforce with regards to loss of business due to the lockdown and the possibility of the banks and credit institutions still hounding them for EMIs. The survey found that 51% of respondents had taken vehicle loans from 19 national public sector banks with average monthly EMIs ranging between Rs. 10,000 - 20,000. A petition was then filed based on these findings to the Finance Ministry and Prime Minister's Office to address the critical issues of loan repayment and relief.

A **third survey** executed in April 2020 was done in order to assess the financial condition of the workforce immediately preceding and during the pandemic. The results were then used to suggest possible measures from companies to aid workers and address their concerns. From the survey it was observed that prior to the lockdown the average weekly income of the drivers was between Rs. 0 to 2250 after working 50 hours a week. This prompted IFAT to push for campaigns illustrating the tribulations of the drivers and urging the companies and the state governments to provide financial aid and relief materials for them.

A **fourth survey** dealt with the issue of accessibility and availability of funds and ration during the pandemic. The company's liability was assessed by questioning if the relief material being advertised by them was made available to all workers or select few. From the data collected it could be observed that 90% of the respondents have claimed that they did not receive any ration kits or food relief items from the companies, while 85% of them reported to have not received any financial aid. The details that emerge from the survey brings the claims of the app-based companies under scrutiny, due to differences between what they have advertised and the ground reality. In this time of need and urgency, IFAT affiliate unions through their own efforts and resources were helping the workers out with food, ration and emergency funds. IFAT unions were in turn also joined by the International Transport workers Federation (ITF) affiliated railway men's union in relief work across various cities.

Finally, a **fifth survey** was conducted in June 2020 to check on how the transition back to work is coming through for the workforce, and whether the company was taking any responsibility for the health and safety of the drivers/driver partners in order to restart work. With lockdowns being eased across the country and reopening of businesses and cities 70% of the respondents had reported they made “zero earnings” in the first week of the opening of cities.

In this report it is also being highlighted that the data generated from each survey was utilized for events and campaigns for voicing the issues of the workers affected by the pandemic through exercises beyond the usual public demonstration or gatherings. This also shows how unions are also adapting to Covid-19 and evolving for a post Covid-19 world. Unions are reinventing themselves, utilizing the newest technologies to connect with workers and collaborating with independent researchers and knowledge-based research organisations. These steps bring in larger participation irrespective of affiliation and sector or even the type of organisation the individuals may be part of. Progressive trade unions are transforming to adapt to the newest work environments and organizing tools. The new world of work urges the traditional and well-established trade unions to reassess their position and vision for change.



This pandemic has toppled the argument of the companies that drivers and delivery workers are independent contractors/free agents and need not be brought under the ambit of social security.

INTRODUCTION

The severe predicament faced by the app-based workers in this global pandemic with the enforcement of frequent statewide lockdowns was largely due to the absence of any form of social protection such as life and medical insurance being available or accessible to them. Although the state recognized them as “essential services” workers, the app-based companies haven’t been as forthcoming. The companies refrain from calling them an employee, and at the same time to allay their fear with regards to their own health and safety, are building up inaccessible “global funds”.²

With the easing of lockdowns there has been a renewed push by the companies in further exploiting workers. The workers have been thrust to the very edges of poverty and need due to the lockdowns.

Drivers and delivery workers across the country have rejoined work with minimum to no safety or personal protective equipment being provided to them by the companies. Although on social media and various platforms the companies have touted stringent measures being placed in order to ensure the safety of the customer and the rider/drivers,³ the ground reality shows otherwise.

For trade unions and civil societies to intervene an understanding of how the workers have reached such a precipitous position needs to be established first.

App-based transport companies like Ola and Uber had an unprecedented growth in the last few years, having shaken the very core of logistics and public transport systems across the globe.⁴ Companies like Ola and Uber have had deep-seated demographic, societal and economic impact and have fueled fundamental changes with increasing automation and connectivity of vehicles, smart communication technologies, multimodal transit services, and urban design.

² Preetika Rana. (2020). Uber, DoorDash and Others Discuss Fund for Drivers Affected by Coronavirus. The Wall Street Journal.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/uber-doordash-and-others-discuss-fund-for-sick-drivers-11583641022>.

³ Ankita Chakravarti. (2020). Ola and Uber start services, here are rules you will have to follow to use them. India Today.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/technology/news/story/lockdown-4-ola-and-uber-start-services-here-are-rules-you-will-have-to-follow-to-use-them-1679481-2020-05-19>.

⁴ Gereon Meyer & Susan Shaheen. (2017). Disrupting Mobility - Impacts of The Sharing Economy and Innovative Transportation on Cities. Springer. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319516011>.

The exploitation of the workers engaged with app-based companies is also a reality that needs to be acknowledged. This pandemic has toppled the argument of the companies that drivers and delivery workers are independent contractors/free agents and need not be brought under the ambit of social security and protection a company is obligated to provide for their employees. This has also become a tipping point and workers across the globe have questioned the indifference of the companies to their pain and suffering in this pandemic while being infuriated and incensed with the government not holding the companies accountable for the wellbeing of its workers.

Indian Federation of App-based Transport workers (IFAT) supported by International Transport workers Federation (ITF) Delhi Office has conducted a series of surveys during the lockdown to document the plight of the app-based transport and food delivery personnel in India. These surveys are preceded by an initial survey conducted in 2019 to find out the health and safety issues faced by the app-based workers on the field.

The surveys during the regular lockdowns and the restrictions that came into force along with them have broken the backs of the Indian workforce. The migrant workforce were the most severely affected section.⁵ What we don't see as enraging or may be as appalling as the arduous journey of the migrant workers is the slow descent of app-based transport and delivery personnel to starvation and poverty.

These surveys try to shine a light on the real issues and real help the workers have received or have not received yet; the organisations or institutions that have helped them in these distressing times and how the government has acted across states in alleviating some of the pain of the workforce. The data and information that has been collected is an attempt to cut through the smokes and mirror shows put forward by the capitalist system still profiteering off the exploitation of the app-based workers during this pandemic.

⁵ PTI. (2020). Lockdown in India has impacted 40 million internal migrants: World Bank. The Economic Times.
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/lockdown-in-india-has-impacted-40-million-internal-migrants-world-bank/articleshow/75311966.cms>.



The findings from the survey provided a narrative on which **campaigns were built to address the immediate problems faced by app-based workers.**

RATIONALE

There was an immediate need for questions to be asked to the workers working for the app-based companies during the lockdowns in relation to their livelihood, life concerns and survival. App-based workers were left stranded without work as the lockdown set in, which meant they didn't have any earnings in the initial phases of the lockdown. IFAT while communicating with its affiliates and members across the country was hearing about the dire straits the workers were stuck in. With financial resources dwindling with each passing day, they needed immediate rescue and relief.

Workers informed us that in addition to essential expenditure such as ration and rent, crippling burden was imposed through banks and the credit firms and institutions nudging workers to continue repayment of their loans and EMIs with the interest compounded.

Even when, in the subsequent phases of the lockdown, the government deemed food delivery personnel as essential services,⁶ it did not mitigate the financial woes of a large section of workers. Companies also extended transport and logistics support to the government for medical assistance and services.⁷ Majority of the drivers were not part of this initiative and could not earn a living due to the discretion the companies exercised while deciding on the eligibility of the drivers who could be part of the aforesaid initiative.

Philanthropic and at times humane initiatives on the part of the app-based companies tend to obscure their own exploitative actions against the workforce they deny they employ but still engage them to generate business and profit for their organisation. The impact of the lockdown and loss of earnings was gradually becoming insufferable for the workforce. This report attempts to chronicle not only the surveys that were conducted during this extended lockdown in the country but also the relief efforts of IFAT and the affiliate unions of ITF for the app-based

⁶ Biswarup Gooptu & Aditi Shrivastava. (2020). Swiggy, Zomato, others reach out to governments, offer last mile delivery assistance. The Economic Times. <https://m.economictimes.com/small-biz/startups/newsbuzz/startups-step-forward-reach-out-to-govts-offering-all-assistance/articleshow/74881026.cms>.

⁷ Ola Cabs. (2020). Ola bolsters Delhi's Ambulance Network; partners with State Government to extend free emergency mobility. <https://www.olacabs.com/media/in/press/ola-bolsters-delhis-ambulance-network-workers-with-state-government-to-extend-free-emergency-mobility>.

transport workers. This is being done to contrast the reality on the ground. Additionally, various steps taken by the government both state and central have also been evaluated. The impact of the state and central government directives also needs to be analyzed. A comparison of the responses of companies, unions and the government is necessary to capture the roles and contributions of the stakeholders in this crisis. This report expects to fuel the discourse on how policy development relating to labour rights of the app-based workforce—with a focus on social security and protection—is the immediate need of the hour. Also, app-based companies need to be held accountable and liable for the health and safety of the workers they engage, even if they refuse to acknowledge them as employees.

An essential aspect that this report is expecting to focus on is to showcase how the organizing practices and activities have changed due to this pandemic. The traditional approach to organizing through public gatherings can't be utilized as social distancing norms and safety guidelines need to be followed to stem the spread of the coronavirus. Trade unions need to adapt to the present situation and continue with the union building efforts in a different space—the virtual space. Collaboration and alliances need to be forged with civil societies and research organisations to highlight the issues and concerns of the workers. Participation in “webinars”, conducting meetings and training through video calls are some of the newer organizing tools. IFAT has embraced these changes wholeheartedly, and is working with research organisations like the Centre for Internet and Society (India),⁸ Internet Freedom Foundation,⁹ Tandem Research,¹⁰ Praxis¹¹ and several independent researchers. IFAT has also created its own social media handles along with a YouTube channel for effective online campaigning.

The untethered expansion of the “gig economy” has rendered it expedient for workers across sectors to band together to fight the digital divide that discriminates against workers and the worker movement. All workers of the world need to unite!

⁸ "The Centre for Internet and Society." <https://cis-india.org/>. Undertakes interdisciplinary research on internet and digital technologies from policy and academic perspectives.

⁹ "Internet Freedom Foundation." <https://internetfreedom.in/>. Legal experts with focus on digital freedom.

¹⁰ "Tandem Research." <https://www.tandemresearch.org/>. An interdisciplinary research collective.

¹¹ "Praxis: Institute for Participatory Practices." <https://www.praxisindia.org/>. Knowledge organisation.



Access and availability of these relief measures was next to impossible as benefit schemes and programmes were firmly strapped in administrative and regulatory red tape. Questions also get raised on issues of transparency in utilization of the promised funds and relief packages.

CONTEXT TO THE SURVEYS

The premise for surveys conducted during the lockdown was already in place due to earlier work.¹² ITF and IFAT had investigated the health issues that the app-based transport and delivery workers suffer due to their work and their inability to access social protection or security measures (such as health insurance, accidental insurance, Mediclaim etc.). A survey was conducted in 2019 in order to identify the health issues being faced by app-based transport workers due to their work for Ola and Uber.

The survey also inquired into the various expenses the drivers had to bear in order to be operational on the streets, and harassment they faced from numerous fronts in order to keep on working. The survey findings established the hypotheses that drivers working for app-based transport companies are engaged in precarious jobs, are plagued with health issues and a hostile work environment, and are unable to secure any form of health insurance. It was in this backdrop that the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Workers were neither prepared nor would have been able to set up any safeguard given their financial insecurities and liabilities. All this coupled with the disinterest on the part of the companies to provide them with any social security or protection just aggravated the situation further.

To find out the actual impact of the pandemic on the workforce, four consecutive surveys were conducted in the months of March, April, May and June 2020, during the various lockdowns imposed in India in response to the outbreak of Covid-19, and also during the subsequent days marked by relaxations in the lockdown.

The first survey was designed to understand the loan repayment obligations that encumber drivers working for app-based transport companies such as the amount, type of financial institutions involved etc.. The second survey focused on a fixed period—one week before the first national lockdown that was imposed from March 24, 2020—to ascertain the working hours and earnings of app-based transport and delivery workers in that period. The third was conducted to assess the ground reality

¹² IFAT and ITF. (2020). Ola And Uber Drivers Occupational Health and Safety: A Look into The Lives and Livelihood of App-based Transport Workers. The Centre for Internet and Society. <https://cis-india.org/raw/ifat-itf-protecting-workers-in-digital-platform-economy-ola-uber-occupational-health-safety>

of the aid and relief received by the workers in relation to the promised or advertised quantum of relief claimed by the app-based companies. The final survey was conducted to interrogate the earnings of drivers/delivery workers as the lockdown restrictions were being lifted, and the safety measures and social security options that were available for them to start working safely. It was also a call for peaceful protest to voice their issues and highlight the hardships they have faced in this extended lockdown due to the apathy of app-based companies and the state alike.

An analysis of the data that has been collected in these surveys, although disparate, provides us with an insight on the issues plaguing the workers—it is beyond the usual loss of livelihood, it hinges on their survival itself. It is expected that a correlation can be observed on how workers ignore health issues to compensate for expenses to keep their vehicles on road for daily earnings. The necessity of identifying financial institutions the driver/delivery workers engage with to enter into this industry and then questioning the role and intentions of these institutions. Highlighting the concern of the workers in terms of how much their livelihood has been affected by the pandemic in terms of loss of earnings even after engaging for longer hours in work. And the most important aspect of this research was in trying to emphasize on the apathetic nature of the principal employer (which in this case are the app-based companies) and the bare minimum they publicize and proclaim to do to seem not so morally corrupt or inhumane to uphold the veneer of being a socially sensitive and empathetic organisation.



Moratorium on the principal amount of EMI doesn't waive off the interest component but keeps on piling as "compound interest" over the period it remains unpaid. **This is just exacerbating the financial distress the drivers are already under."**

METHODOLOGICAL INFORMATION

The data collected in these 5 surveys do not correspond to each other directly. The data for each survey has been collected in different time frames, the set of respondents have also been different in each survey, and the parameters that guide each questionnaire used in the survey are also independent of each other. There are also some shortcomings/research gaps, due to constraints with regards to time and how some questions had to be excluded due to the resistance of the respondents and restrictions with regards to time and general state of panic and hierarchy of needs in these troubled times. Although the 5 surveys may seem disparate and standalone in their execution their intersections are significant as the respondents may be of different sets but they are all app-based workers working with logistic app-based companies providing transportation and delivery. Furthermore, the analysis of the data shows important correlations on how the income and expenditure borne by these workers has severely impacted their decisions on seeking healthcare/protection and “if they should continue with their work”.

Survey 1

Evaluating the health and safety issues for Ola/Uber drivers in Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi NCR, Hyderabad, Jaipur and Lucknow

The 1st survey was conducted in 2019, between July and November. There were 2128 respondents, from 6 cities. The largest number of respondents were from Bengaluru (1159). The overarching aim of the survey was to ascertain what are the health ailments that afflict the driver workers and their occupational linkages. The survey also focused on their expenses and savings, harassment faced on road, occupational safety and security, and the mental health impact of their work.

Survey 2

An appeal to the Government of India for Ola, Uber and IT companies' owner-cum-drivers' loan waiver for 2 to 3 months

The 2nd survey was conducted when it became evident that the pandemic and the policy responses to it would have a long-term effect on the earnings and livelihood of the app-based workers. The survey was conducted in March, 2020, and sought to identify the banks and NBFCs that app-based workers have taken loans from and how much at an average do they owe to these institutions. The survey had 5964 respondents, from 55 cities and 16 states. The survey was kept concise to focus on the essential details.

Surveys 3 and 4

A request to the Finance Minister, Chief Ministers, PMO India for immediate financial relief for the drivers across India, & to find the support provided by app-based companies to workers

The 3rd and the 4th survey were carried out in April 2020, when the second phase of the national lockdown was imposed. We sought to gauge the impact that the lockdown had on the lives of the drivers/delivery workers due to the loss of business and savings. The time period that the survey related to was the last week of the first phase of the national lockdown i.e. between 15th and 22nd April. Workers' earnings and hours of work for the week were sought to be identified. The surveys also focused on representing from the ground how much aid or support was received, or was accessible to the drivers/delivery workers. In other words, the survey sought to interrogate the effectiveness of the global funding and crowdfunded initiatives as advertised by app-based companies. These funding campaigns promoted by the app-based companies are essentially for obfuscating their own responsibilities towards these workers and virtue signaling the customers and public to donate for these campaigns offloading their own liability and moral duty onto others.¹³ For both surveys, there were 1630 respondents, from 59 cities and 16 states. This survey was also kept brief with limited questions concentrating on the key issues only.

¹³ According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, "An attempt to show other people that you are a good person, for example by expressing an opinion that would be acceptable to them, especially on social media".

Survey 5

Call for a Peaceful Protest on 8th June, 2020 across India for app-based driver & delivery workers

The 5th survey was conducted to mark the week in which across the country there was an ease on the restrictions and gradual lifting up of the lockdown across cities. There were 2716 responses from 19 states across India. The survey was launched on 5th of June to check on how much earnings the drivers/delivery workers were able to pocket in the last week of May (between 22nd and 29th May). The amenities and social protection, if any was provided to them by the companies they work for, was to start their work.

This was also marked with a call by the IFAT for a peaceful protest across cities in India on 8th June, to highlight the demands the app-based workers had for the government and the companies given how much they have suffered in this pandemic due to the indifference of the state and companies to their plight.



If platforms were to access data from the Aarogya Setu app, it would make them privy to workers' location data around the clock, **thereby entrenching control over workers even during non-working hours.**

SURVEY FINDINGS AND CAMPAIGNS

It should be noted that the surveys were not being conducted for the sole purpose of data collection. The findings from the survey provided a narrative on which campaigns were built to address the immediate problems faced by app-based workers. The subsequent surveys also marked significant goals achieved over time which the unions and workers have coveted at this point during the pandemic. The victories might have been influenced by numerous other factors but the efforts of the workers and unions under the aegis of IFAT and ITF need to be acknowledged. In the following sections it is being elaborated what the survey was targeted for and what they accomplished and achieved.

Survey 1 (July-November, 2019)

Findings from the first survey provide demographic, income and health details with regard to the working conditions of the workers of app-based companies. The survey also covers aspects in relation to the harassment faced by the driver workers from customers, police and the companies as well. The data that was collected also established links between working hours and tobacco consumption, and surfaced mental health concerns resulting from an isolated work environment filled with hostile interactions.

The findings from the survey highlight the cost of working for app-based companies: workers tend to sideline health related decisions and expenses, instead utilizing funds for direct work related expenditure.

Expenses with regards to EMIs, vehicle insurance, license renewal, penalties, road tax etc. comprise a large chunk to which drivers' earnings are apportioned. An extensive report¹⁴ has been developed on this survey. The report also provides a baseline for future research.

Event following Survey 1

This also contributed in some way to the groundwork for bringing together 12 unions of app-based transport and delivery workers coming under a single umbrella

¹⁴ IFAT and ITF. (2020). Ola And Uber Drivers Occupational Health and Safety: A Look into The Lives and Livelihood of App-based Transport Workers. The Centre for Internet and Society. <https://cis-india.org/raw/ifat-itf-protecting-workers-in-digital-platform-economy-ola-uber-occupational-health-safety>

of Indian Federation of App-based Transport workers (IFAT). This was possible due to the tireless efforts of the ITF Delhi Office, and with the mentoring and guidance of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance. At a conference in December 2019, in Mumbai, Maharashtra, unions from Bengaluru, Chennai, Cochin, Delhi NCR, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Lucknow and Maharashtra came together to form IFAT. The event was followed by the adoption of the constitution of IFAT and election of its office bearers.



Image 1: Union members of IFAT on foundation of IFAT in Mumbai. December 2019.

Surveys 2 and 3 (March-April, 2020)

Surveys 2 and 3 were conducted to better understand the magnitude of the scale and impact of the Covid-19 induced lockdowns on workers working for app-based companies. The 2 surveys were conducted in the months of March and April, 2020 to document the issues faced by the workers due to the lockdown and its repercussions thereafter on their livelihood and survival. The issues of immediate concern that came up frequently in various discussions with app-based workers, included impending EMI payments, vehicle insurance, ration and expenses to survive the pandemic.

Respondents were from 55 cities (all major Tier 1 & 2 cities) and 16 states (all major states). We received approximately 6500 responses for the 2 surveys conducted. The key findings from the survey are:

- Public sector banks are the largest lenders for drivers who are driving for app-based companies. 51% of the respondents had taken vehicle loans from 19 national public sector banks. Among these, State Bank of India had provided loans to 23% of the respondents.
- Among private players catering to the demand for financing of leased vehicles, Cholamandalam Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank, and Mahindra and Mahindra Financial Services (Mahindra Finance) are the largest stakeholders that have emerged from the data collected from the survey. Altogether they provide financing to 13% of the total number of respondents, with the biggest private lender being Mahindra Finance.
- **The average monthly EMI of the respondents come between Rs. 10,000 - 20,000.** The maximum amount reported was Rs. 25,000 for an SUV.

For the last week of the first phase of the national lockdown, details of the drivers' weekly business was also sought. The key findings from the survey were

- **The average income of the drivers for the week commencing April 15 2020 was less than Rs. 2500. 57% of the respondents claimed that they earned between 0 to Rs. 2250.**

- 30.3% of total respondents said that they worked between 40-50 hours in the week prior to the lockdown.

This can also be shown graphically. During the week (15 - 23 March, 2020) before the 1st lockdown this is how much the drivers/delivery workers earned while working for app-based companies (the amount is in rupees) and the responses are their earnings for the whole week.

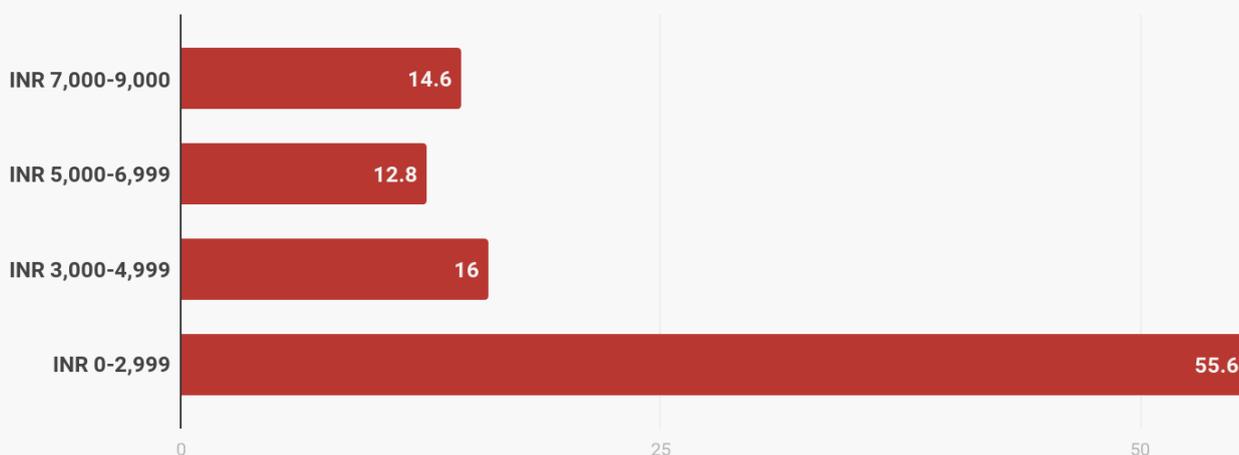


Chart 1: Percentage of workers according to monthly earning ranges. March 2020.

The number of hours they have worked during this period, for the whole week, to earn the said amount can be depicted in this chart (the time is in hours).

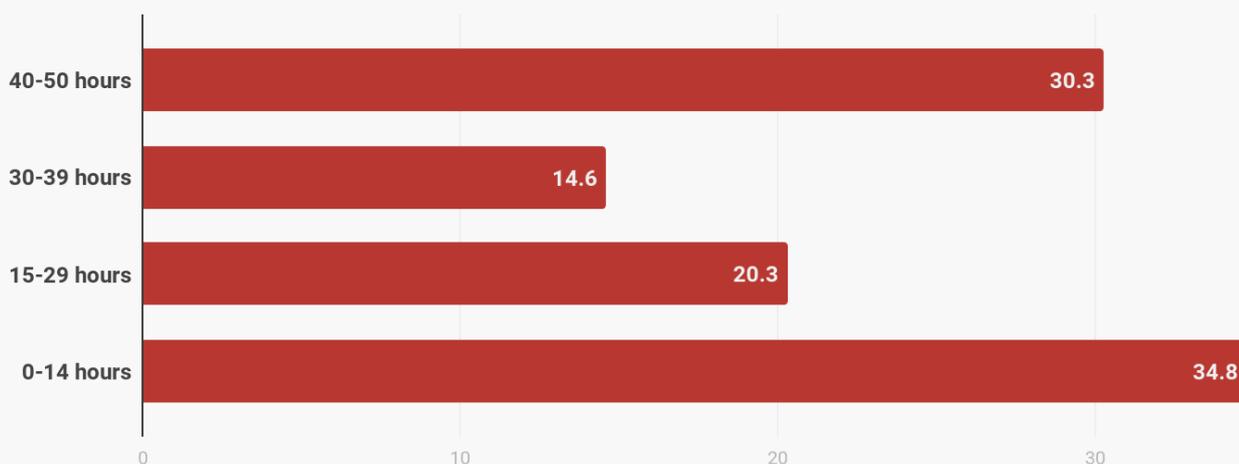


Chart 2: Percentage of workers according to weekly working hour ranges. May 2020.

This data has been collected from 664 respondents from 55 cities in 15 states. From the surveys it's clear that the drivers were under severe financial strain and they

would need economic assistance from both the state and the app-based companies they work for in order to make sure that their jobs are still economically viable after the lockdown.

Outcome and Campaign following Survey 2

As we have seen from the survey results, repayment of loans was a major concern, especially with no source of income to pay the monthly instalments. Armed with the data collected from the survey, IFAT drafted letters and along with its affiliates sent these to the Finance Minister, the Prime Minister's Office and several state authorities requesting an intervention on this matter. On March 21, 2020, a copy was also sent from each of the cities where IFAT's affiliates were organizing and collectivizing.

On March 27, 2020, an RBI circular notifying a moratorium on loan repayments was issued.¹⁵ This has now been extended.¹⁶ While this may have been a coincidence, our affiliate unions appreciated that IFAT pursued this matter and that such a directive was issued by the government. IFAT then discussed this circular with independent labour experts and researchers, and conducted meetings with its members to elaborate the implication of the deferment of EMI payment. Shaik Salauddin, General Secretary of IFAT, also addressed the affiliate unions and members on how to proceed after the RBI circular came into action. Subsequently, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highway come up with their own circular on extension of the validity of the driving license,¹⁷ permits and registration documents/papers. These relaxations, too, have been extended.¹⁸

¹⁵ Reserve Bank of India. (2020). RBI/2019-20/186, Circular on COVID-19 – Regulatory Package. https://m.rbi.org.in/scripts/BS_CircularIndexDisplay.aspx?Id=11835.

¹⁶ ET Online. (2020). RBI extends EMI moratorium for another three months on term loans. Here's what it means for borrowers. The Economic Times. <https://m.economictimes.com/wealth/borrow/rbi-extends-emi-moratorium-for-another-three-months-on-term-loans-heres-what-it-means-for-borrowers/articleshow/75883777.cms>.

¹⁷ ET Online. (2020). Expired driving licenses to remain valid till June 30, 2020. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/wealth/personal-finance-news/expired-driving-licenses-to-remain-valid-till-june-30-2020/articleshow/74909133.cms>.

¹⁸ ET Now Digital. (2020). Good news for motorists! Validity of driving licence, motor vehicle documents further extended. Times Now News. <https://www.timesnownews.com/business-economy/industry/article/good-news-for-motorists-validity-of-driving-licence-motor-vehicle-documents-further-extended/603853>.

Outcome and Campaign following Survey 3

Survey 3 was done when the second lockdown was in progress. A few state governments had announced some form of monetary relief for the transport workers,¹⁹ while others had announced ration and food distribution drives.

However, access and availability of these relief measures was next to impossible as these schemes and programmes were firmly strapped in administrative and regulatory red tape.

This made it very difficult for a large section of the workforce to access these benefits, less than a third have availed of these funds and resources. It was at this point that IFAT leadership focused on assessing what are the funds available to the workforce and how could IFAT help the workforce. With this survey it was being determined how many hours did the workers work in a week and what were the earnings, prior to lockdown, this was used as a premise for approaching the Finance Ministry and PM Office to regulate the commission rates of the companies like Ola and Uber so that the drivers/driver workers can at least earn enough to survive whenever the lockdown was to be lifted. IFAT also pushed for the payment of a state minimum sustenance allowance for the app-based delivery workers till the pandemic was brought under control. Also, with the survey conducted, a standardized request letter for deferment of loan payment keeping in line with the RBI guidelines was also attached with the questionnaires so that the respondents could avail of the opportunity if they wanted to do so.

In a follow up to this survey it was realized that the companies had abdicated any and all responsibility towards their driver and delivery workers. Ola was waiving off the lease rentals and asking the drivers/driver workers to return their leased vehicles.²⁰ This might seem as a positive step where the driver/driver workers who were under economic distress could offload a bit of their burden.

¹⁹ News18. (2020). Public Vehicle Drivers to be Given Rs 5,000 Assistance Amid COVID-19 Lockdown, Says Arvind Kejriwal.

<https://www.news18.com/news/india/public-vehicle-drivers-to-be-given-rs-5000-assistance-amid-covid-19-lockdown-says-arvind-kejriwal-2575053.html>.

²⁰ Aditi Shrivastava. (2020). Ola driver rentals: Ola waives lease rentals for drivers amid Covid-19 outbreak. The Economic Times.

<https://tech.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/mobile/ola-waives-lease-rentals-for-drivers-amid-covid-19-outbreak/74792946>.

But the caveat with such a generous move was there was no proper plan in place on how an individual would repossess their leased vehicle as and when the lockdown is lifted.

A strategy was being developed for a campaign. After discussing with IFAT members and ITF coordinators it was decided that drivers and delivery workers would take pictures with posters questioning the inaction of Ola, Uber, Swiggy, Zomato etc. and demand for relief and funds for the workers.



Images 2: Union members from Hyderabad and Jaipur part of the photo campaign of IFAT. April 2020.



Images 3: Zomato and Swiggy Riders from Rajasthan questioning the companies. April 2020.

Survey 4 (May, 2020)

This survey was undertaken after the third phase of the national lockdown. By this time, app-based companies had announced various initiatives touted to help the workers, as millions of migrant workers—a demographic which also comprises app-based platforms workers—rushed home in extremely precarious circumstances. Advertisements for these initiatives were splashed across various news outlets and social media platforms. Major companies like Ola, Uber, Swiggy, Zomato, and Dunzo had started fundraising campaigns to solicit public donations as an income support measure for their workers.²¹ To assess how much on the ground these announcements really helped the drivers/riders, and if they had an impact on the relief received and accessed by app-based workers, a survey was undertaken. The reality was quite different than what was being projected.

Of 1,299 responses from 55 cities in 15 states, a significant majority of the workforce had not received any aid during the lockdown period from the app-based companies. Concerns with regards to the collection and disbursement of funds were raised by several respondents. On further enquiry, specific concerns regarding the transparency of eligibility criteria for recipients of income support resources were raised.

²¹ Co-Vid & Social Protection for Gig Workers / Tandem Research: PUBLIC, Tandem Research, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Px71UnTUUoAXb3S-C3I1UPF3O4aiu_Rs63r-Kn5C0UM/edit#gid=0

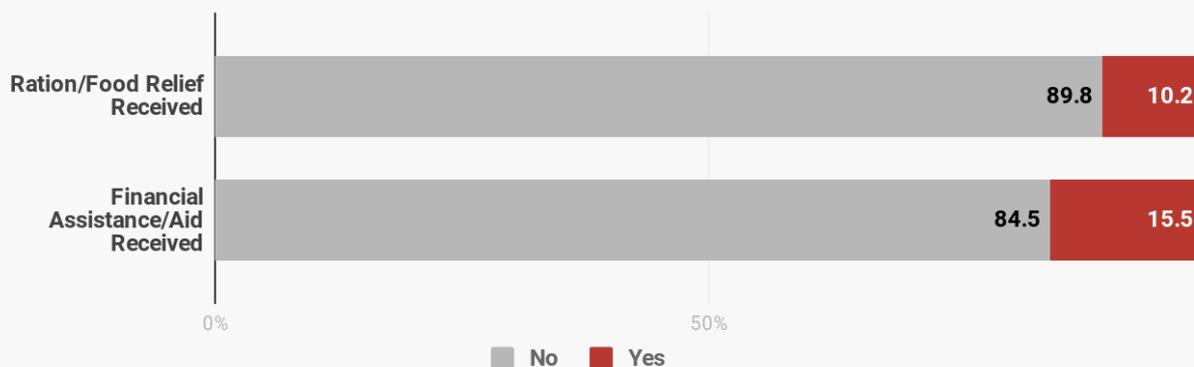


Chart 3: Percentage of workers who received relief from companies and the government. May 2020.

Outcome, Event and Campaign following Survey 4

With the 3rd phase of the lockdown in place, the situation became more dire for workers of app-based companies. By then, workers had exhausted their savings and were at their wits' end. IFAT ramped up its efforts, videos were prepared for circulation through IFAT's social media handles (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) questioning not only the companies but also the government on the steps being taken by them to support app-based transport and delivery workers' livelihood needs. During this period, IFAT was at the forefront representing app-based transport and delivery workers of the country. IFAT had caught the attention of not only the national press but also the international news outlets²². There were a number of news articles that were quoting IFAT leadership.

This period was also remarkable as it showcased workers' unity and the role that unions could play in especially dire circumstances to support workers through their hardships. ITF affiliated railwaymen's unions reached out to help app-based transport workers in various cities of the country by providing them with ration and relief kits. In Delhi NCR they also provided monetary assistance to women drivers.

²² Shubham Agarwal. (2020). Uber Ola Offers Lockdown Charity To Few Drivers, Most Want Proper Safety Nets. Huffington Post.
https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/uber-ola-hyped-relief-fund_in_5eb40f7ac5b652c56473c954.



Images 4: (left) NFIR distributing ration kits in Hyderabad, and (right) AIRF providing ration kits to IFAT leader in New Delhi. May 2020.

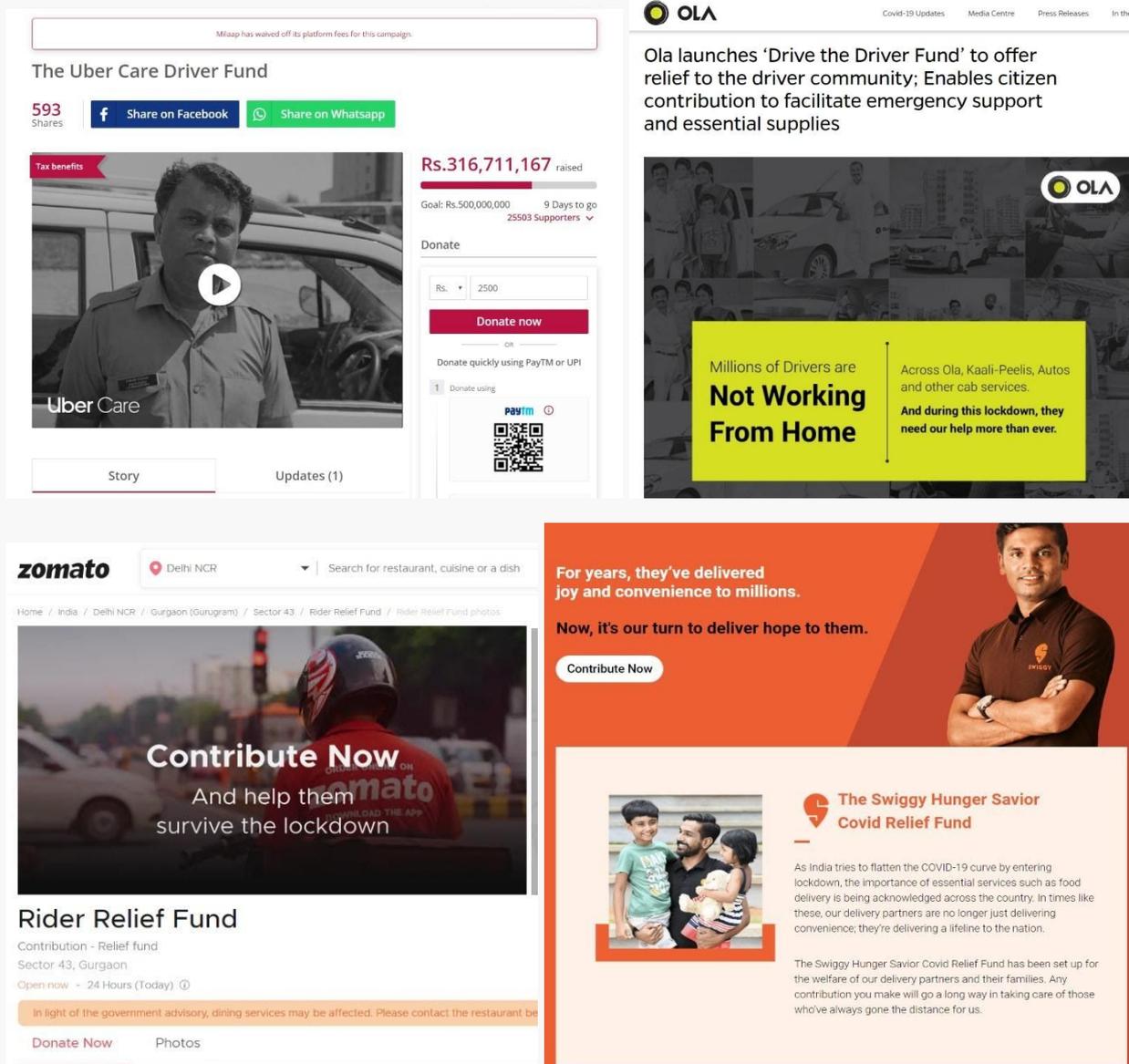


Images 5: (left) IDLO distributing ration kits in collaboration with NFIR in Rajasthan, and (right) Indian AC Cab Trade Union distributing ration kits received from AIRF in Lucknow. May 2020.

This was a great example for how cross-sectoral relief and solidarity efforts can result in positive outcomes. In the near future, exchange of ideas, organizing strategies and resources is being expected as in a globalized world if economies intersect workers and unions also need to cooperate with each other. With transnational organisations taking over industries and the gig economy/platform economy rising, existing trade unions need to reinvent themselves and reach out to newer unions across sectors. because we must forego our differences and uphold that “unity is strength” and “union power is worker power”.

During this period, it was not only the trade unions that extended help and relief aid. Several civil society and nonprofit organisations came forward to help out the

app-based drivers and delivery workers across the country. What was also observed that app-based companies had created funds in order to help their workforce. The company heads, chief representatives of India contribute a sizable amount and then they have pushed for the funds to be supported through crowdfunding, in a typical virtue signaling fashion, a hallmark business practice of app-based companies.



Images 6: Covid-19 relief funds for drivers set up by companies.

Advertisements plastered across various social media platforms asking people to contribute to these funds so that the workers who are being exploited by the companies are provided some relief through funds collected from the public, while the companies continue to reap profits from their work.

Questions also get raised on issues of transparency in utilization of the said funds and relief packages. Ola and Uber have collected the funds under various programmes but whether the funds collected have been distributed to the workers in an unbiased and egalitarian manner could not be verified. From the accounts of the drivers it was observed that Ola and Uber have their own eligibility criteria based on which they are selecting the drivers/driver workers who shall receive the relief funds.

Zomato had pledged that it would reimburse the cost of grocery, ration and other essentials a rider/delivery partner purchases, but the bills need to be GST compliant. For a Zomato driver who earns less than Rs. 15,000 per month it's preposterous to expect that they shop their daily essentials from shops that print GST compliant bills. Even when workers may have been eligible, the procedure to access any benefits from the company was so convoluted that only a handful of individuals could actually secure them.

The government also had its own agenda during this stretch of the lockdown. The government was pushing for the installation of a contact tracing app named "Aarogya Setu"²³. There were serious privacy concerns with regards to the usage of the application. IFAT raised these issues during meetings and discussion with independent researchers, legal experts and activists. This also gained much traction, with cases being filed in courts. Subsequently, the mandatory usage of the application was diluted, and left to user discretion and company policy. The misuse of data and possibility of harassment of individuals based on the data that may get leaked raised quite a few red flags for IFAT leadership. Further discussions and research on these concerns is currently underway at IFAT.

Survey 5 (June, 2020)

The last survey which was launched on 5th June 2020 was done to ascertain the earning opportunity that the drivers and delivery workers had with the easing of lockdowns in some states. The survey was also designed as a call for solidarity in the wake of continuing government and company apathy that the drivers and delivery workers were suffering. This survey was sent out to 19 states across the country. A

²³ Aarogya Setu is a contact tracing app deployed by the Government of India to combat Covid-19. It collects extensive data on the user. More information here: <https://aarogyaasetu.gov.in/>

call to protest was answered by hundreds of protestors for a peaceful demonstration on 8th June, 2020 highlighting their concerns and demands.

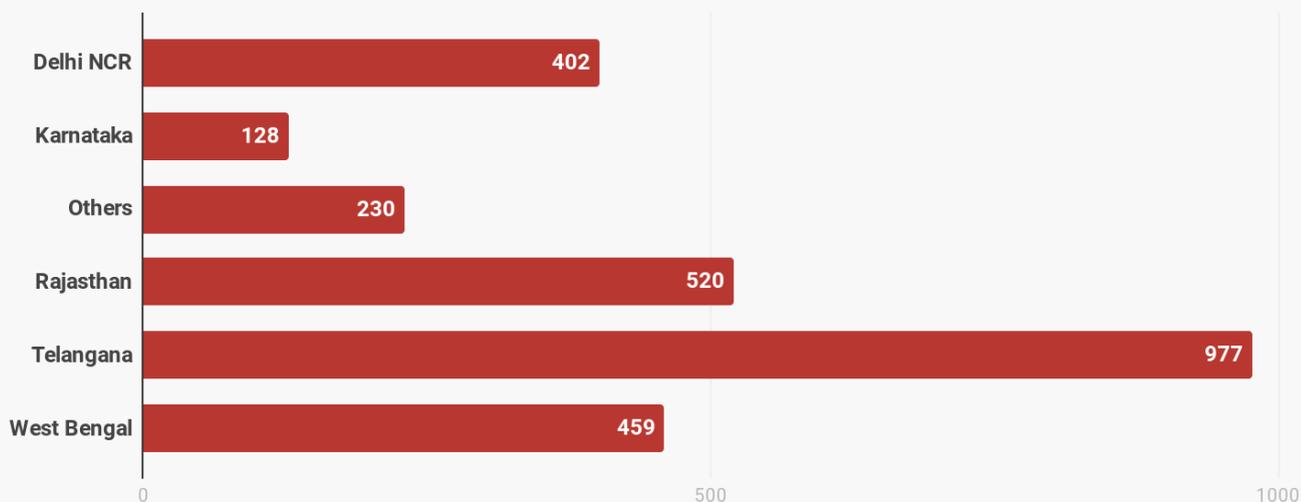


Chart 4: Number of worker respondents across states/UTs. Survey 5. June 2020.

2716 respondents from 19 states articulated their support for a peaceful demonstration. These included workers from all of the major app-based transport and delivery providers.

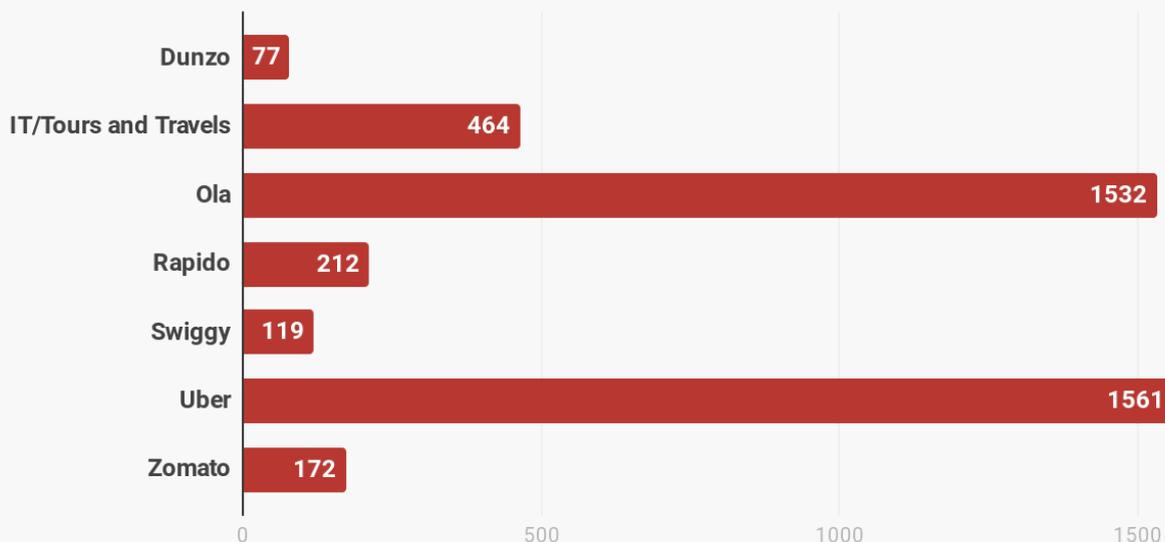


Chart 5: Distribution of workers surveyed across companies. Survey 5. June 2020.

The subsequent question pertains to the part of earnings, as the time was fixed by the government the standard operating time for app-based drivers and delivery workers was 12 hours each day. Data was sought for how much did the drivers and

delivery workers are left with after paying for their fuel expenses, EMI and commission for a week (22nd to 29th May, 2020).

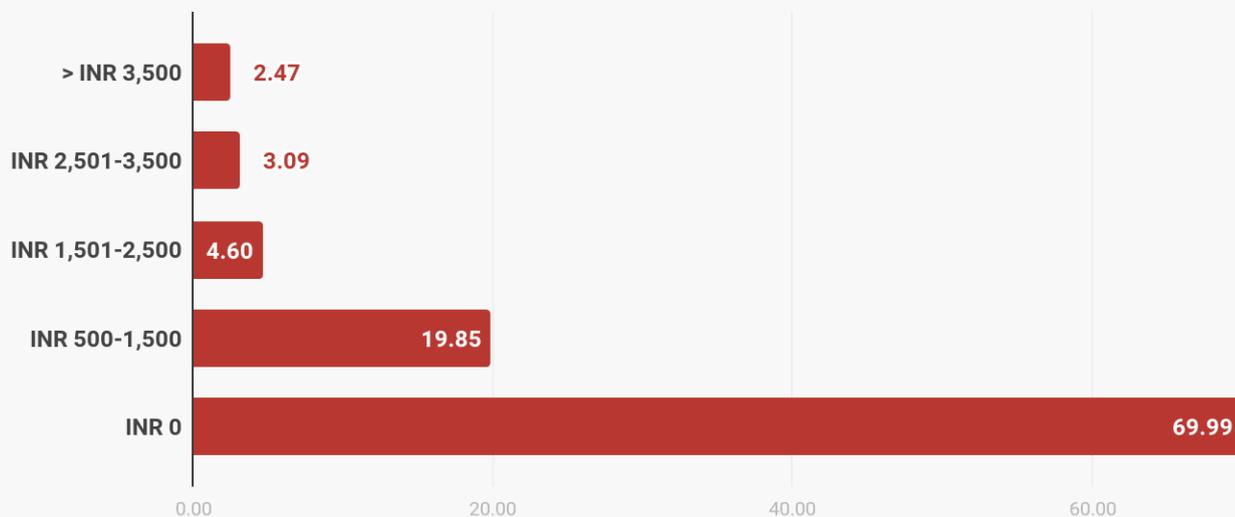


Chart 6: Percentage of workers across net daily income ranges. Survey 5. May 2020.

It can be observed from the figure that 69.7% of the respondents reported no earnings over the said week and only 20% of the respondents earned between 500 to 1500 rupees in a week. This marked a very worrisome return for the app-based transport and delivery workers for their work.

Event and Campaign following Survey 5

There was a call for a silent and peaceful protest from an affiliate in Rajasthan. A virtual Zoom meeting was called amongst the IFAT leadership. During the lockdown due to the increased visibility of IFAT and its participation on various forums and discussions, unions from West Bengal, Pune and Bhopal reached out to IFAT to take part in IFAT's campaigning. In the meeting held on May 28, 2020, the proposal for the protest was put forward and was unanimously approved. The survey was then conducted to gauge the support of the drivers and delivery workers across the country. The protest was successful, hundreds of app-based workers joined from across India. Some prominent demands were for:

- Companies to **provide proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**, sanitizers, disinfectants etc. and also plastic screens/shields between the

driver and passenger in the vehicle as had been developed for leased vehicles;

- **An increase in fares for app-based cabs** in view of increase in petrol and diesel prices to offset drivers' additional expenses;
- **A reduction in the commission amount from 20% to 5%** so that the financially straddled drivers can partly mitigate their economic miseries heaped over the last 70 days;
- Governments to advise app-based companies to provide **adequate health insurance** coverage to all its drivers/riders;
- State governments to issue **proper guidelines to police and other administrative agencies** on the permission available for workers of app-based transport and delivery companies, so that they may operate without workers being harassed.

With large sections of the country being opened up, app-based companies have started their business in earnest. To mollify the drivers/driver partner's fears and encourage them to rejoin work, app-based companies are pulling out all stops. There have been announcements from app-based companies regarding the safety of resuming operations. These announcements relate to safety measures such as the availability of PPE for drivers and delivery workers, and weekly fumigation of the vehicle for complete sanitization. Assurances of reimbursement of costs of self-procuring PPE have also been made. The implementation of these commitments is required to be verified.



Images 7: (left) IFAT members protesting in Rajasthan, and (right) IFAT members protesting in Delhi NCR. June 2020.



Images 8: (left) IFAT members protesting in Pune, and (right) protestors in Jaipur. June 2020.



Image 9: Protestors in Kolkata. June 2020.



Image 10: IFAT General Secretary Shaikh Salauddin with other drivers in Hyderabad. June 2020.



Image 11: Standing in solidarity with IFAT from Ludhiana. June 2020.

DISCUSSION

The most significant aspect of the first survey in 2019 was to highlight the health concerns of the app-based transport workers which they themselves seem to ignore. There is still quite a bit of work that can be pursued in this field with regards to mental health, substance abuse, work life balance etc. The survey conducted was extensive and additional relevant information can be evaluated from the data in correlation to other issues and concerns in near future.

There also has been some minor wins for the workers over the months, the extension on moratorium of loan announced by the RBI, extension on the validity of licenses, permits etc. by the Ministry of Roadways Transport and Highway until August, the solidarity response from various ITF affiliate railway unions in providing financial aid and ration kits for app-based transport workers in major cities of India. IFAT stayed connected through regular communication with research based organisations, advocacy groups, participating in webinars, and in the spotlight through press stories and articles which were also circulated to international labour groups and unions organizing app-based workers.

Workers Concerns During the Lockdown

As we pursued surveys, we also conducted discussion during the lockdown to find out the issues that the workers were facing and their immediate concerns with regards to the decisions and policy proposed and executed by the government and the companies. There were some very pertinent questions raised during these discussions with respect to the relief work undertaken by the app-based companies and the state. These issues that were raised can be detailed as:

- Ola through their “Ola Sahyog” fund said they provided monetary relief (Rs. 500, Rs. 750, Rs. 1,200 per week) to its driver workers, these amounts are then to be refunded back to Ola (after 45 days of receiving the funds). These are more in line as interest free loans for a stipulated period, with certain conditions in place. These practices seem quite offensive and downright preposterous, but the main complaint all the drivers have at this point is with regards to the **transparency of the fund allocation process of Ola and the criteria on which the beneficiaries are being selected.** The drivers informed that the amount being distributed vastly varies from driver to driver and state

to state. The drivers have questioned the discriminatory practices of the app-based companies in providing relief and their underlying intention.

- Although Uber has disbursed and credited quite a few driver accounts with no strings attached one-time fund of Rs. 3,000, the drivers have similar grievances as what they had with Ola. The lack of transparency and discriminatory policy for distribution of the said funds. In Bengaluru some of the app-based transport workers driving for Uber commented that the company might be using CIBIL scores to decide who needs to get the funds and fixating on the log-in hours of the drivers.
- The constituents have emphasized on the **need for accountability of the funds that are being raised in their names** by various app-based companies for driver/delivery workers. Where are these funds being utilized, who are the beneficiaries of the funds, and what is the process through which these funds are being disbursed? These questions need to be answered and verified audits should be in place to crosscheck the claims of the companies. Quality checks in the ration that are being distributed to them by these companies were also being requested. The distribution of substandard ration which in turn may affect the health of the drivers in lockdown is also a major concern for them.

The issues that the driver/delivery workers have with the state and government agencies and their operations:

- The issuing of indiscriminate challans and penalty for fictitious and outrageous traffic violations. **Drivers have complained that they have received e-challans for vehicles that have been idling for days due to the lockdown.** These reports have come from Delhi and the National Capital Region from app-based transport workers.
- With the moratorium being again extended for 3 months on EMI for leasing vehicles, the government initiative doesn't actually solve the financial complaint of the driver workers. As it can be observed from the earlier information from the survey a driver owes to banks or finance firms between Rs. 10,000 to 20,000 per month, **moratorium on the principal amount of EMI doesn't waive off the interest component but keeps on piling as**

“compound interest” over the period it remains unpaid. This is just exacerbating the financial distress the drivers are already under.

- The volunteers for driver/delivery workers who are engaged in ensuring that no worker's family go hungry have complained that politics is happening in terms of distribution of ration amongst the needy. Some individuals intercept their supplies and then rebrand it to showcase their image and then redistribute it to some other location than the intended one.

The constituents had some suggestions that they tabled in their discussion. For the state they had a few suggestions:

- **The “compound interest” on the EMI due to the moratorium for the extended period should be waived off.** The drivers should be only required to pay the actual EMI amount, this payment should be allowed to be extended till December 2020. As can be seen from the surveys, business earnings of the driver workers have been affected dramatically and conditions to become normal will take a significant amount of time. The government should direct RBI and national public sector banks to forego the compound interest component taking into consideration the hardships faced by the drivers. The drivers had a similar position on how the government should make sure that even private financial firms adhere to these suggestions and conditions.
- It was also suggested that the **vehicle insurance and validity of other vehicle related documents (license, registration etc.) for the app-based company workers be extended till the end of the year.** This was suggested by bringing in the fact that the earnings of both driver/delivery workers shall not return to normal for a while even after the lockdown ends. The security of insurance and validity of the relevant documents without the additional expense is of immense importance and significance for driver/delivery workers, so that they operate with a sense of relief to stabilize and normalize their lives. It was pointed out that agencies such as IRDAI and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways should intervene in these situations to alleviate the concerns and problems for the workers in these terrible times.
- The issue of state and municipal taxes for plying their vehicle on road for business was also raised. The participants in the discussion were of the

opinion that state **taxes for operating commercial vehicles after the lockdown should be waived off** so that the driver workers can ensure that they have adequate earnings to survive after the lockdown.

- The driver/delivery workers also had a common issue with regards to house rent. Many workers who lived in rented accommodations raised the concern with regards to how the state should intervene to direct landlords to forego or reduce the rent for the lockdown period so as to ensure that the workers have funds to buy essentials rather than deciding whether they need a roof or a few days meal to pay for.

For the private players/app-based companies, their proposals were:

- The driver/delivery workers want that after the lockdown whenever the business starts in earnest, **they should be paid on a daily basis**. They want whatever rides, trips, deliveries etc. they complete in a day, they should be compensated/reimbursed at the end of the day for the work they have done. They also had the additional request for **reduction in the commission amount** they need to provide to the companies against each ride.
- They also pointed out **the daily EMI that needs to be paid for running Ola leased vehicles should be reduced to Rs. 500 a day**. Given the fact that the business shall remain bleak for a while, the companies need to ensure that the workers can earn adequate amounts to run their household after the lockdown.

These are the issues and suggestions that have precipitated from the discussions and upon evaluation of the information that has been collected from the surveys that were conducted during the lockdown.

Privacy Rights of Workers over their Data

With this pandemic the need for state surveillance to keep the citizens safe also became an issue.

The push for mandatory use of “Aarogya Setu” app for contact tracing and self-assessment for monitoring Covid-19 infection led to serious debate on the state overreach and privacy dialogue across quarters.

For app-based workers it also became a bone of contention as in how invasive it would be for the app-based workers to be working with these apps in tow. Keeping in view a few concerns were also in place,

- Currently, platform companies collect workers' data for as long as they are using the app. Workers have the option to log off, limiting the platform's ability to collect personal data during non-working hours. However, if platforms were to access data from the Aarogya Setu app, **it would make them privy to workers' location data around the clock, thereby entrenching control over workers even during non-working hours.** An immediate possible risk is that an employee's unintentional movement in a containment zone can be punished or reprimanded, even if the employee has logged off the platform app.
- In addition to worker's pay, **availing benefits and protection schemes, offered by the platform companies, could also be tied to installing the Aarogya Setu app** and be predicated upon the result shown by the app. For example, a worker may be able to avail benefits only if the app indicates that he/she is COVID positive. Given that technology is susceptible to errors of various types, techno-solutionism to demand rights and entitlements may do more harm than good.
- The self-assessment tests may be undertaken by employees at varying frequencies and intervals, this may lead to companies formulating policies for common testing of all employees and sharing the same with customers.
- **App-based workers are already in a battle to assert rights over their data,** and the Aarogya Setu app enhances the quality of information available to platform companies, and provides them with information that was not available to them (for eg: health data). However, if any private companies/profiteers were allowed to access this data, or mandate that their workers download the app, it would result in datafication of a workforce that was hitherto outside its scope. **The phenomenon of private entities having access to troves of (personal) data about their workers would proliferate dramatically.**

- In the event that the State government contracts out medical/administrative work to a platform company, there is a possibility that the contract stipulates that any dispute under the contract will have to be litigated in a foreign jurisdiction. While there are arguments to say that the Indian Courts will retain jurisdiction, it is a point of contention that can be very problematic for any gig workers seeking to bring an action.

CONCLUSIONS

This report scrutinized the response of the critical stakeholders involved with app-based transport and delivery workers in this state-imposed lockdown. The companies focused on maximizing its profits while refusing to acknowledge or address any liability they did have towards an employee. The unions have evolved during this pandemic adapting to the changing environment and reaching out. The government initiatives have been inaccessible for most part and with lockdown guidelines trying to accommodate app-based workforce, the government needs to regulate the companies as soon as possible.

By analyzing the data and comparing it against its utilization for a campaign or an advocacy initiative, it is safe to say that unions have grasped the importance of a data driven and data backed activity. This pushes for a more scientific approach to policy development. Additionally, with the pandemic limiting human interaction and enforcing social distancing, it was also observed that the traditional methods of organizing need to be overhauled. Adaptability is the key to the survival of any labour movement or struggle. With that being said the long-established organizing tools and strategies should not be discarded, they should be redesigned to accommodate the current technology and platforms available for organizing and collectivizing.

Although the data collected during the pandemic may seem a bit event specific and the data points collected unique to this circumstance, it also points towards the disdain of the companies in recognizing the worker who works for them as an employee and the reluctance of the state to regulate the companies. Reports and studies of this nature identifies the stakeholders and documents the role they play in that specific event, this will help in holding them accountable for their actions or inactions. This report would also help in identifying the critical areas that would need immediate attention in case of a similar event and help in devising strategies and allocating resources for tackling the problem at hand. In a sense it would help in developing a handbook for addressing cataclysmic events, but more essentially will help in organizing and collectivizing the workforce in a post Covid-19 world.



Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers



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