

# GUWAHATI

## PLATFORMING PRECARITY:

Data narratives of  
workers sustaining  
urban platform services

2024



Centre  
for Internet  
& Society

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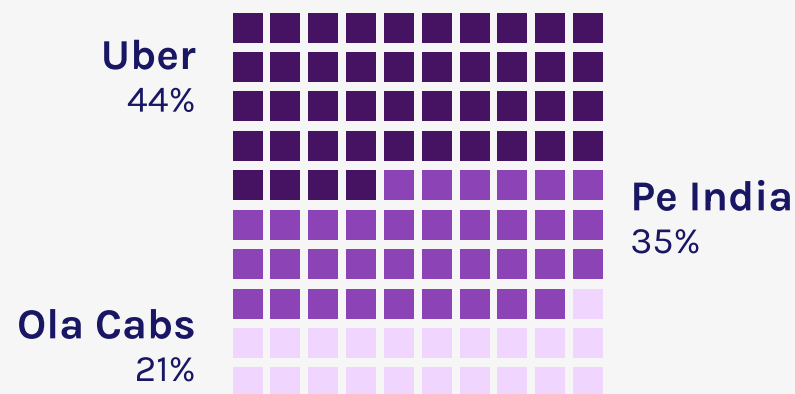
# Delivery and taxi platform services in Guwahati

The city brief for Guwahati draws from surveys with 111 workers in the taxi services sector and 107 workers in the delivery services sector.

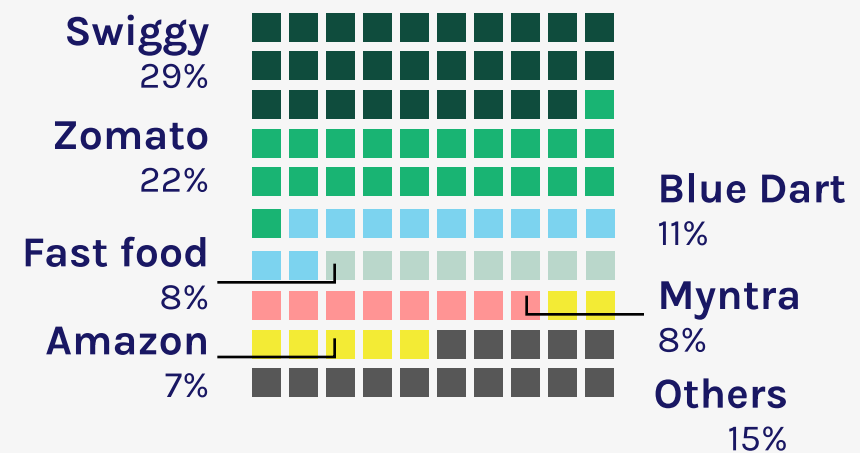
Delivery services in the city had a concentration of pan-India platforms, while the taxi services sector had both pan-India and local platforms.

In the taxi services sector, three platforms dominated—Ola, Uber, and their local rival, PeIndia. In the delivery services sector, food delivery was dominated by Swiggy and Zomato, and e-commerce delivery by BlueDart and Myntra.

## App-based taxi services



## App-based delivery services



1. Surveys with workers in delivery and taxi services were conducted in December 2021. Details on the survey design and data collection can be found in the overall methodology note, accompanying the city briefs.

2. Percentages are based on the main platform that respondents work for within each sector.

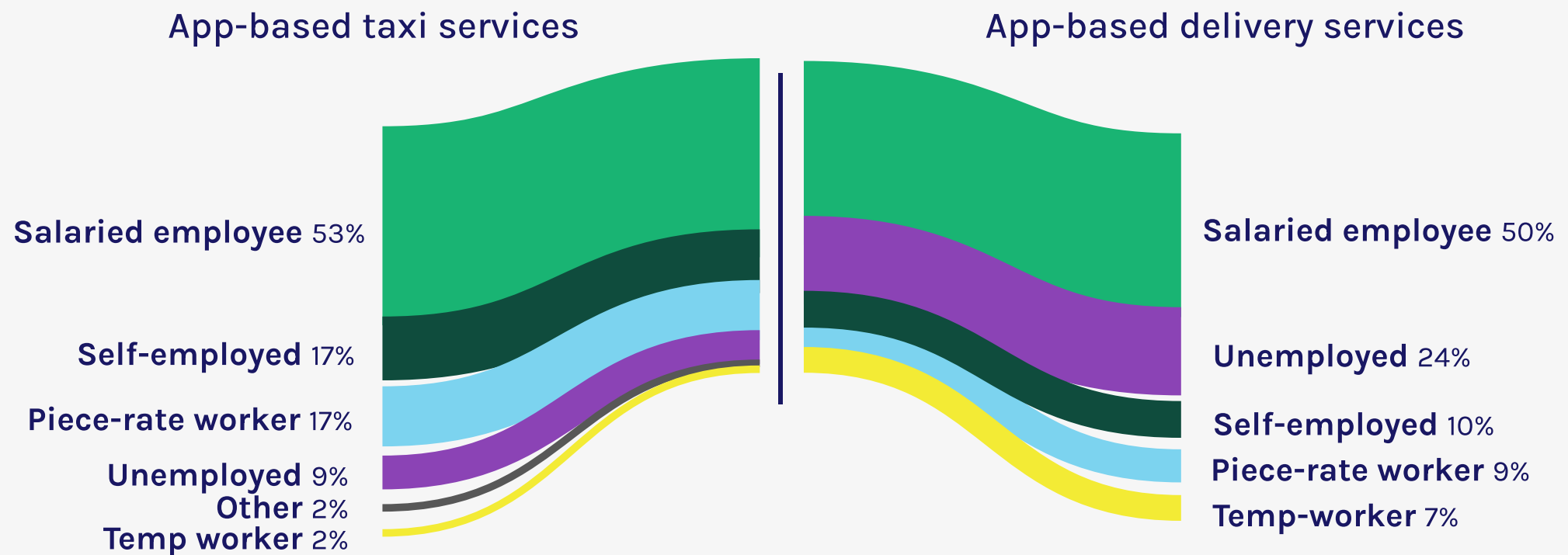
3. 'Fast food' refers to Domino's, KFC, and Pizza Hut. 'Others' in delivery services include Jio mart, QI food, and Flipkart.

# Prior employment and entry into platform work

**Platform work is representing a pathway into more precarious working conditions.** Before starting platform work, over 50% of all workers were in salaried employment. Several of these workers were previously in relatively stable employment relationships, which included legally guaranteed entitlements like overtime pay.

**At the same time, the growth of platform work has also been distress-driven.** Some were previously unemployed immediately before joining platform work, and some other workers joined as they were compelled to stop their previous work.

This was the case for Abhinav, a 50 year old app-based taxi worker who was self-employed prior to starting platform work. Before this, he had a jewellery shop which he had to close down after getting robbed twice. Since then Abhinav took up driving for various platforms including Ola and PeIndia.



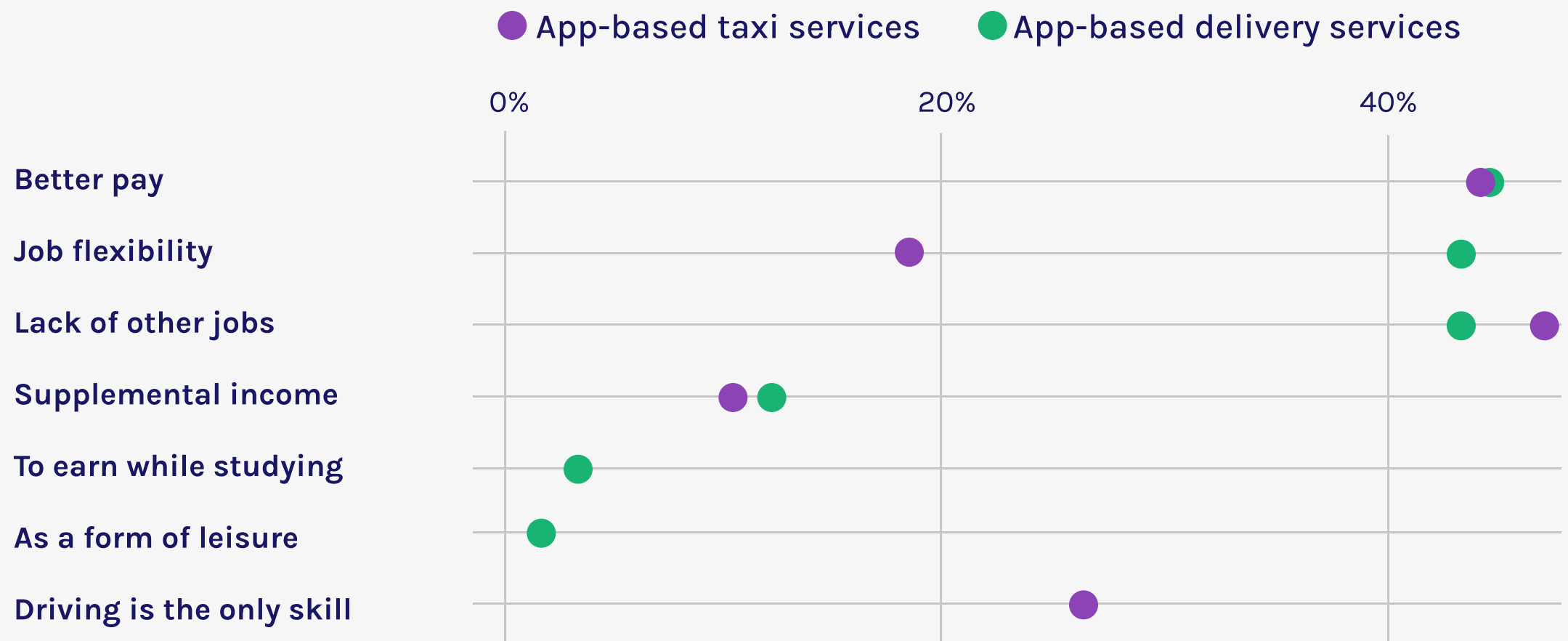
4. “Salaried employee” refers to workers who worked for a monthly wage. The category includes those workers who had a written employment contract, as well as those who were working without a contract.

5. All names in this city brief are pseudonyms.

# Key motivators to join platform work

In Guwahati, platform work is attractive due to a lack of other employment opportunities and the possibility of better pay. In the delivery services sector, in particular, the expectation of flexible work arrangements was also a key motivator to join platforms.

However, these expectations remained unmet. For instance, Karthik, a delivery worker in Jio Mart, joined platform work as he couldn't find any alternative choices for employment. Yet, after joining he earned only around INR 13,000 per month, despite working over 75 hours a week.



6. 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

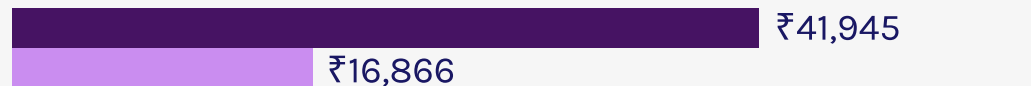
## App-based taxi services

Owner Non-owner

### Joining costs



### Statutory costs



### Annual operational costs

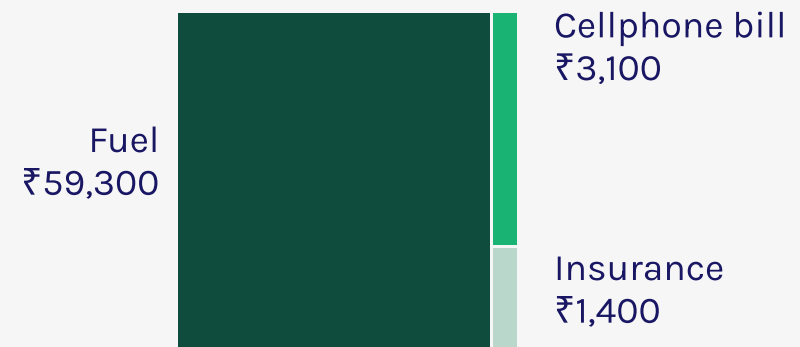


## App-based delivery services

### Joining costs



### Annual operational costs



7. 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.

8. 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 Guwahati, working for platforms was expensive. The average monthly expenses for workers on taxi services platforms was INR 36,967 and on delivery services platforms was INR 5,314.

**Significant cost barriers shape access to platform work, especially in the taxi services sector. Apart from vehicle investments, workers also incurred high statutory costs such as vehicle insurance and permits.** In Guwahati, the average statutory cost to start working for a taxi platform was INR 39,128. For workers who owned their car, the average joining cost including vehicle costs and downpayment was INR 4,58,955.

**Platforms' offloading of these costs to workers have resulted in workers' having to rely on informal leasing and debt arrangements.** Ankit and Ashish's experiences illustrate how these arrangements were structured. Ankit was paying his uncle a monthly rent of INR 10,000 to drive for PeIndia. On the same platform, Ashish was paying off his uncle's EMI of INR 12,000, with an understanding that the vehicle's ownership would be transferred to Ashish once all EMIs are paid off.

**For workers who manage to overcome entry costs, recurring operational costs remain—fluctuating fuel prices, vehicle repairs, and maintenance costs.** Fuel costs formed the largest portion of operational expenses with a monthly average cost of INR 21,041 for taxi workers (79% of operational costs) and INR 4,943 for delivery workers (93% of operational costs).

Compounding these costs, platforms in the taxi services sectors also charge commissions unevenly and in varying fee structures. PeIndia charged fixed commissions of INR 118 per day on daily earnings above INR 500, while Uber and Ola charged commissions ranging from 20% to 35%. **It is important to note that the Assam Motor Vehicle Aggregator Rules, 2022 cap commissions at 20%.**

9. 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.

10. Access the Assam Motor Vehicle Aggregator Rules, 2022 here: [https://transport.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/public\\_utility/notification-\\_amv\\_aggregator\\_rules\\_2022\\_final-1.pdf](https://transport.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/public_utility/notification-_amv_aggregator_rules_2022_final-1.pdf)

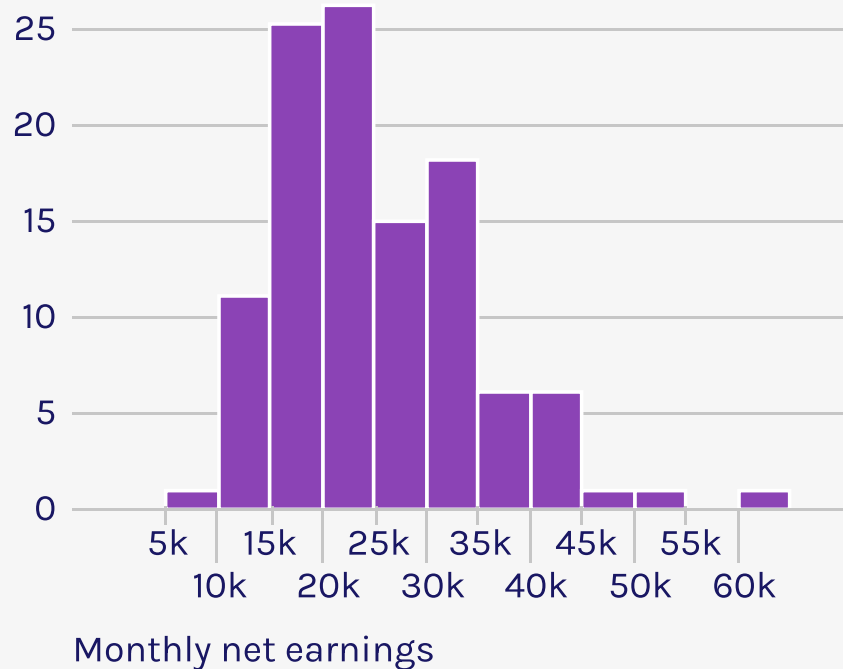
# Insufficient incomes and economic vulnerabilities

## Sufficient income and safety nets were elusive for workers in Guwahati.

Adil, unmarried and living alone, worked 13 hour days, and earned around INR 26,000 a month. He relied solely on his income from driving for platforms to support 12 of his family members in a nearby town. With platform work as his sole source of income, Adil could only spare INR 2,000 per month to support his family members.

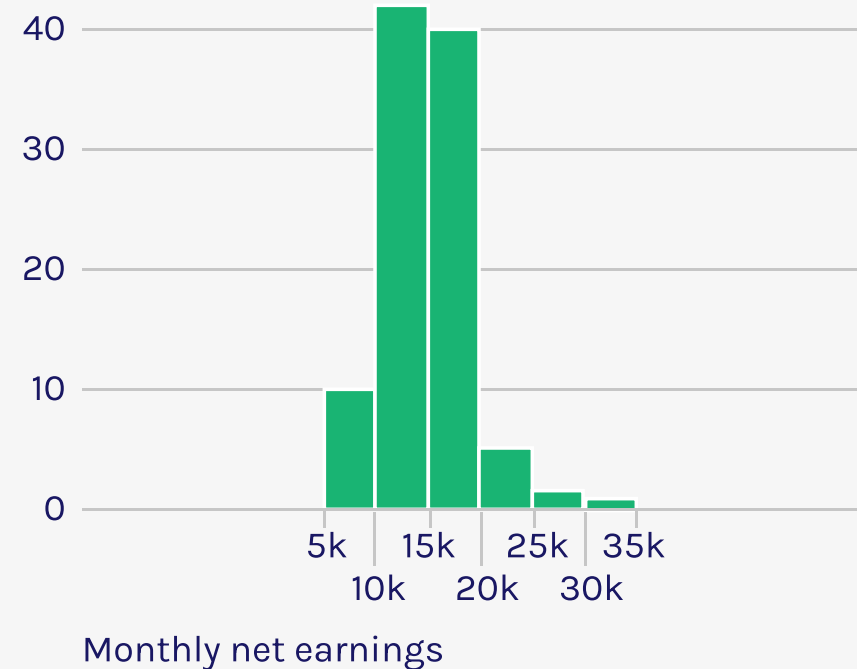
### App-based taxi services

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
<b>Primary sources of income</b>	<p>For <b>97%</b> of workers, platform work is their primary source of income.</p> <p><b>None</b> of them have other jobs or other income sources.</p>	<p>For <b>94%</b> of workers, platform work is their primary source of income.</p> <p><b>98%</b> do not have other jobs or other income sources.</p>
<b>Dependence on income from platform work</b>	<p>Workers financially support a median of <b>3</b> people.</p> <p><b>65%</b> of workers find their current earnings are not sufficient to cover household and financial obligations.</p>	<p>Workers financially support a median of <b>2</b> people.</p> <p><b>58%</b> of workers find their current earnings are not sufficient to cover household and financial obligations.</p>
<b>Impact of ratings on income</b>	<p><b>73%</b> of workers find ratings affect the amount of work they receive, and <b>40%</b> find it impacts the type of work they receive.</p>	<p><b>69%</b> of workers receiving ratings find that it affects the amount of work they receive, and <b>44%</b> find it impacts the type of work they receive.</p>
<b>Impact of metrics on income</b>	<p><b>71%</b> of workers find acceptance rate impacts the amount of work they receive. Only <b>36%</b> of workers find they can refuse work without repercussions.</p>	<p><b>71%</b> of workers find acceptance rate impacts the amount of work they receive. Only <b>25%</b> of workers find they can refuse work without repercussions.</p>

Monthly net earnings across both sectors varied widely—starting at INR 8,660, and reaching almost INR 65,000. The earnings for a majority of workers, however, were at the lower end of the range. When adjusted for standard weekly hours (48 hours), workers' earnings ranged between INR 4,568 and INR 46,816.

**48% of workers in the taxi services sector, and 89% of workers in the delivery services sector earned less than the estimated living wage of INR 14,639 in Assam. Moreover, 23% of workers in the taxi sector and 63% of workers in the delivery sector earned lower than even the minimum wage of INR 10,744.**

These variations had little to do with time spent working for platforms. Two workers who were working for the same platform in the city (Uber) and working similar hours per day (around 12 hours) had vastly different outcomes. A difference of over INR 50,000 separated their monthly earnings. Similarly, in the delivery services sector, the highest earner made INR 30,310 a month, while the lowest earner made INR 8,660, despite working 84 hours a week.

**Platform's built-in metrics determined these differential outcomes. At least 63% of workers across sectors experienced that task acceptance and refusal rates, and customer-provided ratings were crucial in shaping their incomes.**

Like Adil, a majority of workers in the city had dependents to financially support. For 69% of workers in delivery services and 54% in taxi services sectors, this burden was borne entirely by them. Worsening these burdens, over 55% of workers in both sectors found that their income was insufficient to cover basic household and financial obligations.

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

# Workplace safety risks

● App-based taxi services

● App-based delivery services



14. 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 in Guwahati faced prolonged risks to health and safety during their everyday work for platforms.

**Working a median of 64 weekly hours in delivery services and 84 weekly hours in the taxi services sector, almost 90% of workers in both sectors faced heightened risks relating to their safety at work including poor road safety and harsh weather conditions.** These were compounded by intensive time pressures imposed by platforms. A significant proportion of workers also faced grievous risks of theft and physical assault.

Despite these risks, platforms remained largely unaccountable to workers. 48% of workers in the taxi services sector had sought redressal for issues such as payments, technical issues with the app, and cancelled orders. However, 38% of them found that their issues were not resolved effectively. A similarly large proportion of workers in the delivery services sector also had to deal with ineffective redressal systems—58% had lodged complaints, of which 27% did not receive a satisfactory resolution.

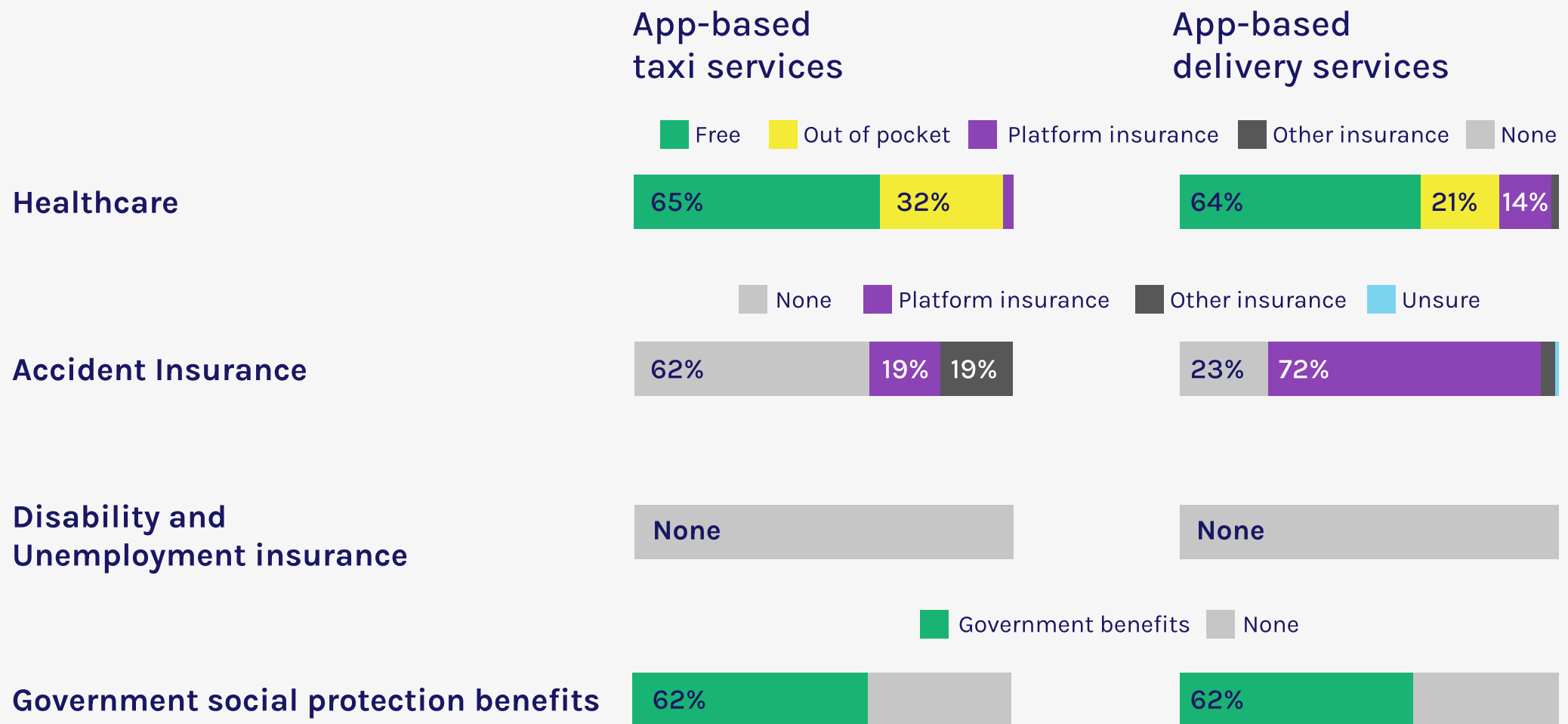
Mohan's experience is illustrative of platforms' apathy towards workers' safety and wellbeing. A delivery worker working for Jiomart, Mohan was hurt and had his order stolen. Not only did the platform not provide support, he was made to pay INR 930 from his own pocket for the order. Mohan highlighted how that platforms' grievance redressal systems were designed solely for customers, not workers.

	App-based taxi services	App-based delivery services
<b>Does the platform take steps to improve working conditions?</b>	Only <b>2%</b> workers say their platform employer takes steps to improve their working conditions.	Only <b>3%</b> workers say platform employer takes steps to improve their working conditions.
<b>Is there a formal process for workers to complain? If so, what is the process?</b>	<b>70%</b> workers are aware that there is a formal process to complain. <b>88%</b> workers rely on the app to complain, whereas <b>8%</b> of workers go to an office to complain.	<b>78%</b> workers are aware that there is a formal process to complain. <b>59%</b> workers contact the management, whereas <b>37%</b> of workers rely on the app to complain.

# Social protection

Workers in Guwahati had limited and variegated social protection coverage.

Workers access social protection through private sources like platforms, and public sources through the government. For social security covered by platforms—typically as healthcare or accident insurance—workers reported poor information about these schemes, inadequate coverage amounts, absence of platform support, and complex claims processes.



**A higher percentage of workers in the delivery services sector received insurance from platforms, when compared to workers in the taxi services sector.**

Sumit had been working at Swiggy since 2021. He had access to health insurance from the platform, yet preferred obtaining free health services at government healthcare establishments, in case of any health contingencies. The insurance from Swiggy covered a claim of INR 5 lakhs; however, Sumit resisted using this facility because the claims process was too arduous and unreliable even for small claims.

Apart from access to healthcare insurance, Sumit did not receive disability or unemployment insurance like all workers across both sectors in Guwahati. He also did not receive accident insurance, unlike a majority of Swiggy workers in the city.

The absence of accident insurance was especially crucial since poor road safety was one of the main concerns around workplace safety for Sumit and several delivery workers in the city. **It is important to note that this gap exists despite the Assam Motor Vehicle Aggregator Rules, 2022 mandating provision of health insurance and term insurance from platforms.**

Over 35% of workers in both sectors were left outside of social protection mechanisms from governments as well. Out of all government benefits that workers received in Guwahati, around 60% of workers received food security benefits.

**These benefits, however, were not accessible for workers within the city, and several workers were required to travel to their hometowns in order to avail ration for their households.**

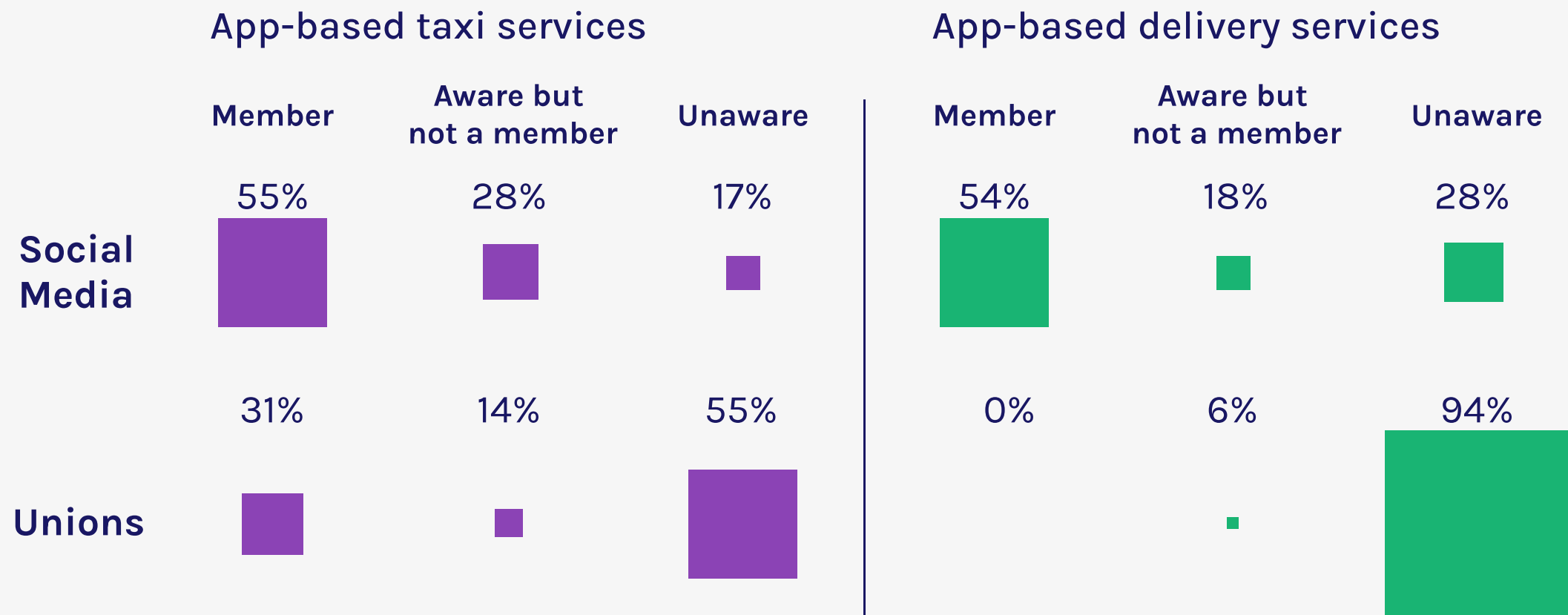
15. Read more about eligibility, coverage, and implementation barriers relating to social security benefits covered by platforms here: <https://themorningcontext.com/chaos/food-delivery-partners-run-the-risk-but-cant-count-on-cover>; <https://cis-india.org/raw/cis-itfc-e-shram-issue-brief-dec-21-pdf>

16. Access the Assam Motor Vehicle Aggregator Rules, 2022 here: [https://transport.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/public\\_utility/notification-\\_amv\\_aggregator\\_rules\\_2022\\_final-1.pdf](https://transport.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/public_utility/notification-_amv_aggregator_rules_2022_final-1.pdf)

# Workers' collective action and solidarity networks

Union coverage in Guwahati is limited. While one in three workers of taxi platforms were union members, none of the workers in the delivery services sector were members.

A number of workers' organisations have been active in the taxi services sector in the city and involved in organising efforts, including the All Assam Cab Operators' Association and Guwahati Cab Drivers Association. In both sectors, more common than formal collective structures were informal solidarity networks, most commonly as social media groups. Over 50% of workers in both sectors were on social media groups with their other workers of platforms.





# Socio-economic profiles of workers

	App-based taxi services	App-based delivery services
<b>Gender</b>	men: <b>99%</b> non-binary: <b>1%</b>	men: <b>99%</b> women: <b>1%</b>
<b>Age</b>	median: <b>36 years</b> range: <b>23 – 56 years</b>	median: <b>27 years</b> range: <b>19 – 55 years</b>
<b>Marital status</b>	single: <b>16%</b> married: <b>84%</b>	single: <b>49.5%</b> married: <b>49.5%</b> widowed: <b>1%</b>
<b>Caste</b>	scheduled castes: <b>9%</b> scheduled tribes: <b>14%</b> other backward classes: <b>26%</b> general: <b>51%</b>	scheduled castes: <b>16%</b> scheduled tribes: <b>2%</b> other backward classes: <b>22%</b> general: <b>60%</b>
<b>Religion</b>	hindu: <b>71%</b> muslim: <b>29%</b>	hindu: <b>79%</b> muslim: <b>20%</b> christian: <b>1%</b>
<b>Migrant status</b>	migrants: <b>64%</b> non-migrants: <b>36%</b> major source locations: <b>Nalbari, Barpeta, Darrang (Assam)</b>	migrants: <b>44%</b> non-migrants: <b>56%</b> major source locations: <b>Nalbari, Barpeta, Morigaon (Assam); Vaishali (Bihar)</b>

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