

LUCKNOW

PLATFORMING PRECARITY:

Data narratives of
workers sustaining
urban platform services

2024



Centre
for Internet
& Society

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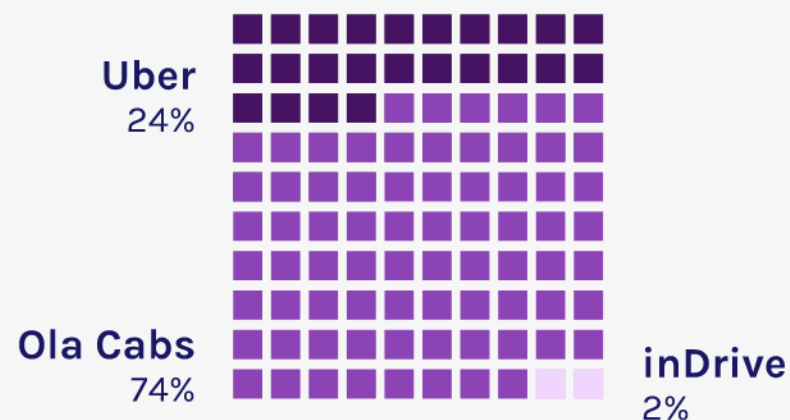
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Delivery and taxi platform services in Lucknow

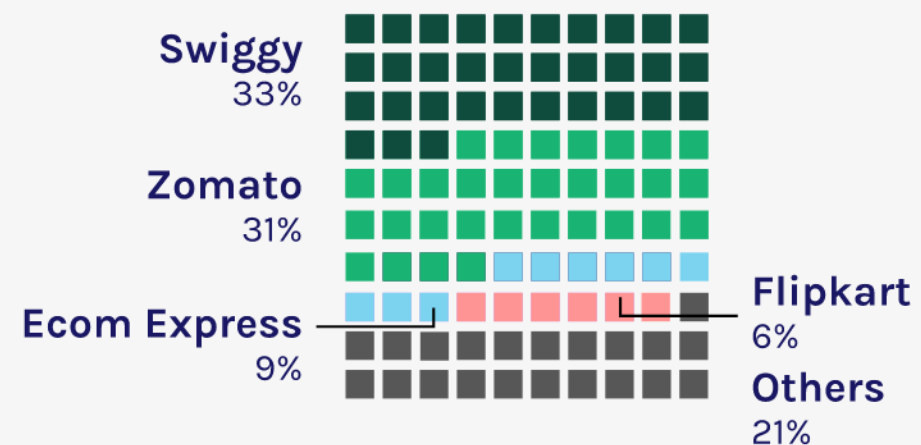
This city brief draws from surveys with 100 workers in the taxi services sector and 108 workers in the delivery services sector.

Pan-India platforms dominated both sectors. Ola and Uber were the dominant companies in the taxi services sector, and a small proportion of workers worked for inDrive. App-based food delivery services were dominated by Swiggy and Zomato, while e-commerce delivery services were dominated by Ecom Express and Flipkart.

App-based taxi services



App-based delivery services



1. Surveys with workers in delivery and taxi services were conducted between December 2021 and January 2022. Details on the survey design and data collection can be found in the overall methodology note, accompanying the city briefs.

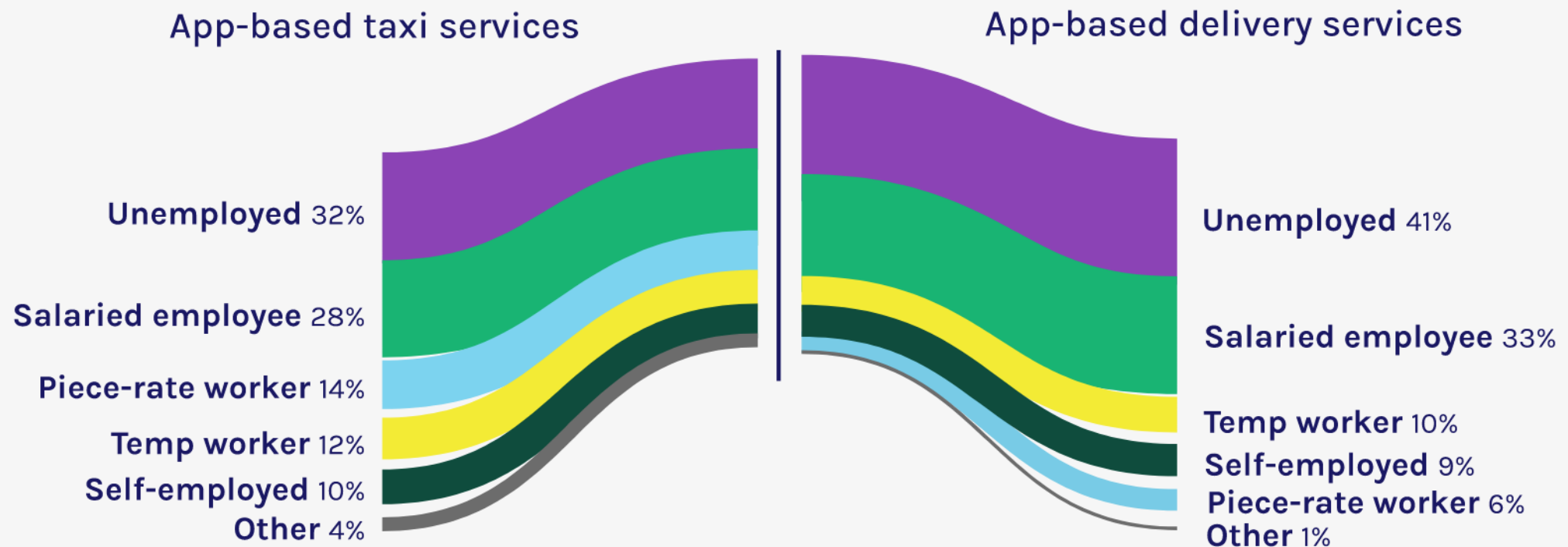
2. Percentages are based on the main platform that respondents work for within each sector.

3. 'Others' in delivery services include Amazon, Big Basket, and Fast food (Domino's, KFC, and Pizza Hut.).

Prior employment and entry into platform work

In Lucknow, the platform workforce was heterogeneous, comprising workers transitioning from varied employment contexts and levels of economic precarity. Around 30% of the workers were in salaried employment in their previous job. Conversely, 41% of workers in delivery services and 32% of workers in taxi services were previously unemployed before they joined platform work.

This staggering proportion of previously unemployed workers joined platform work as a distress form of employment. Pandemic-driven unemployment was a key pathway to platform work for them. This was especially the case for workers in the delivery services sector. Before the pandemic hit, 28 year old Arun was working in a salaried job at a garments shop. He was let go during the lockdown. Even after the lockdown was lifted, Arun was refused his job back by the owners.



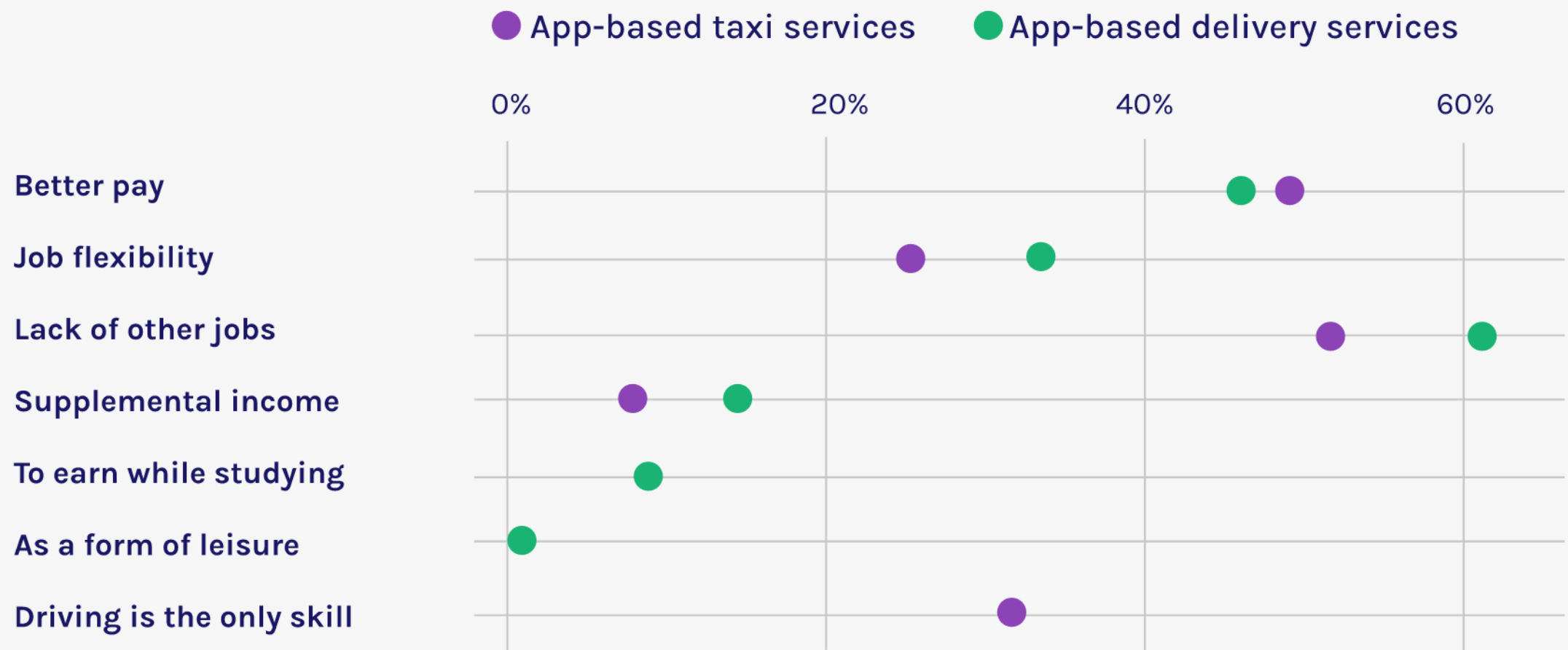
4. "Salaried employee" refers to workers who worked for a monthly wage. The category includes those workers who had a written employment contract, as well as those who were working without a contract.

5. All names in this city brief are pseudonyms.

Key motivators to join platform work

For over half of the workers in the delivery services and taxi services sectors in Lucknow, the lack of alternative jobs was a major reason to join platform work. Joseph, a 40 year old taxi worker for Ola joined the platform after his previous job of taking coaching classes stopped during the pandemic, following which he was unable to find other employment opportunities.

Driven by necessity, better pay and flexibility were relatively less important factors prompting the shift to platform work.



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



Workers incur costs for registration and vehicle down payment and costs

Statutory costs



Workers incur costs for permits, licences, vehicle insurance, fitness fees, and road tax

Annual operational costs



Workers incur costs for fuel, vehicle maintenance, vehicle repairs, and phone bills

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

Workers in Lucknow incur considerable expenses for platform work. The average monthly expenses for workers on taxi platforms was INR 30,092 and for those on delivery platforms was INR 5,767.

High joining and operational costs have created a variety of informal subcontracting and financing arrangements. Around 35% of taxi workers in the city were renting the vehicle they were driving, paying a commission to a vehicle owner, or were paid a fixed salary by a vehicle owner.

For workers in rental arrangements, the average rental expenses was INR 15,471. While they didn't typically incur statutory costs, their average monthly operational costs was INR 21,804, of which fuel expenses were INR 17,950. For workers in salaried arrangements, all costs were borne by respective vehicle owners, and they were paid a fixed salary on a weekly or monthly basis.

For owner-workers, the average cost for vehicle costs and downpayment was INR 5,86,815. Of them, 81% needed to incur debt to purchase their work vehicle, and the average loan repayment cost was INR 11,326 per month. Owner-workers incurred average operational costs of INR 22,669 a month, of which 79% comprised fuel costs. They incurred a further INR 44,907 towards statutory costs to start working for a taxi platform and procuring an operating permit, special licences, vehicle insurance, and fitness fee.

Workers here also incurred commissions charged by platforms. inDrive did not charge a commission. The range for those driving on Uber and Ola Cabs varied from 20% to 30% of the trip fare.

High operational and statutory costs, debt, and falling incomes placed owner-workers at heightened risks of falling into debt traps. Manish worked for Uber. He took out a loan to purchase a car, in the hope that his income from platform work would help pay for the EMIs. However, with income falling over time, he struggled with paying off his EMIs, and was not hopeful about completing the payments.

Most workers on delivery platforms owned their vehicles. Their costs involved those around uniforms, registration with platforms, and fuel. The average joining cost for workers in the delivery services sector was INR 80,075 and average monthly expenditure on fuel was INR 5,404.

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.

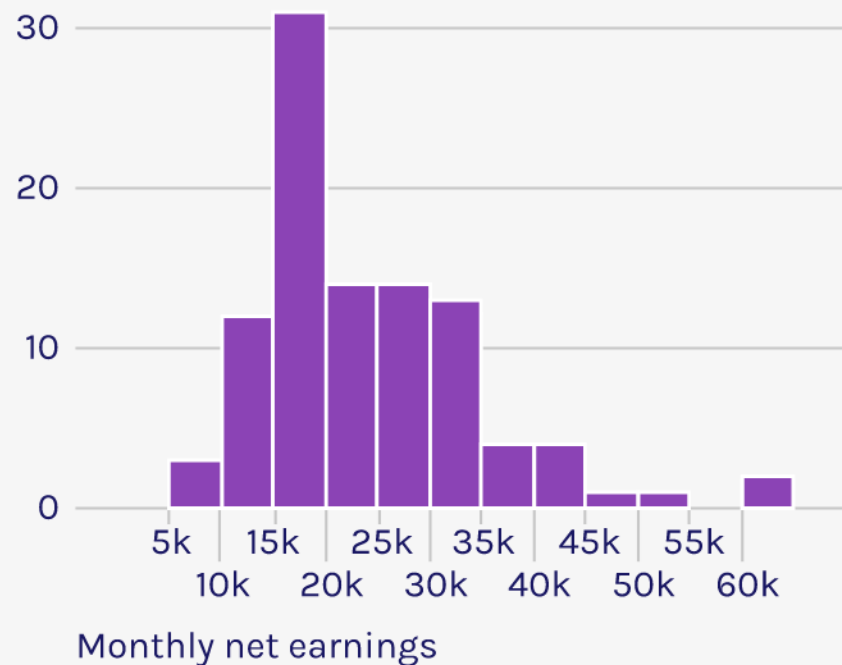
Insufficient incomes and economic vulnerabilities

Most workers in Lucknow lead economically unstable lives. Existing economic vulnerabilities are further compounded by the control of platforms and other actors on their earnings, and inconsistent earnings in platform work.

Monthly net earnings for workers across both sectors varied widely—the lowest being INR 3,248 (for a worker engaged in part time delivery work) and the highest being around INR 64,950 (for a worker driving for Ola Cabs). In taxi services, non-owner workers had a lower median income (INR 17,320), than owner-workers (INR 22,516).

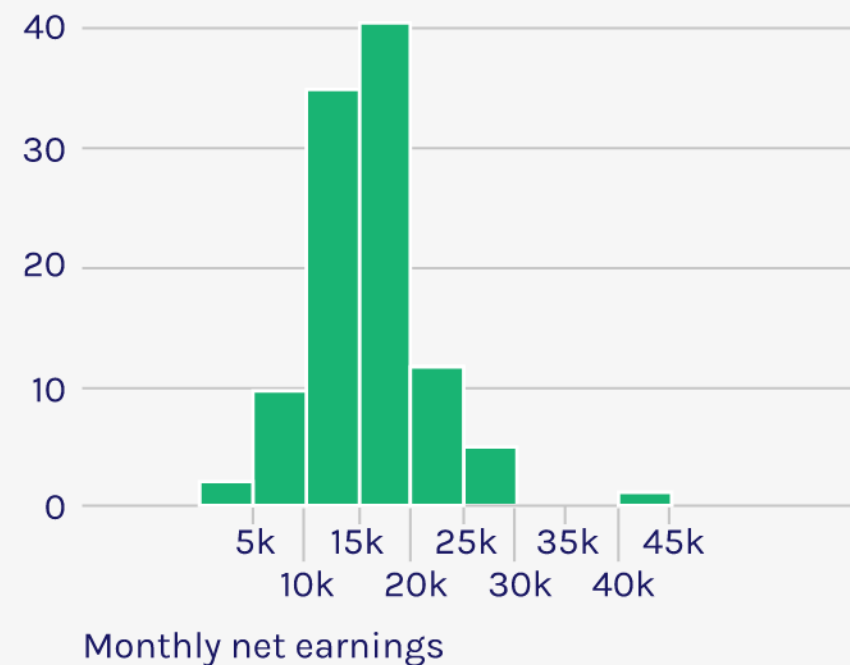
App-based taxi services

Number of respondents



App-based delivery services

Number of respondents



10. 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.

11. 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 97% 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>96% 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>43% of workers find their current earnings are not sufficient to cover household and financial obligations.</p>	<p>Workers financially support a median of 3 people.</p> <p>44% of workers find their current earnings are not sufficient to cover household and financial obligations.</p>
Impact of ratings on income	<p>81% of workers find ratings affect the amount of work they receive, and 66% find it impacts the type of work they receive.</p>	<p>83% 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>73% of workers find acceptance rate impacts the amount of work they receive. 64% of workers find they can refuse work without repercussions.</p>	<p>74% of workers find acceptance rate impacts the amount of work they receive. 56% of workers find they can refuse work without repercussions.</p>

The median monthly income adjusted for 48 working hours per week for workers in delivery services was INR 10,243, and INR 13,535 for workers in taxi services.

36% of workers in the taxi services sector and 50% of workers in the delivery services sector earned less than the occupational minimum wage of INR 10,102 in Uttar Pradesh. Worse, 51% of workers in the taxi sector and 76% of workers in the delivery sector earned lower than the estimated living wage of INR 13,764.

Workers in both sectors found that increased work hours, constrained flexibility and work schedules, high task acceptance rates, and high ratings were among the host of factors that impacted their earnings on the platform.

One worker, tellingly, narrated that one may even have to disregard food and water, and spend the maximum amount of time logged on to the app in order to have sufficient earnings.

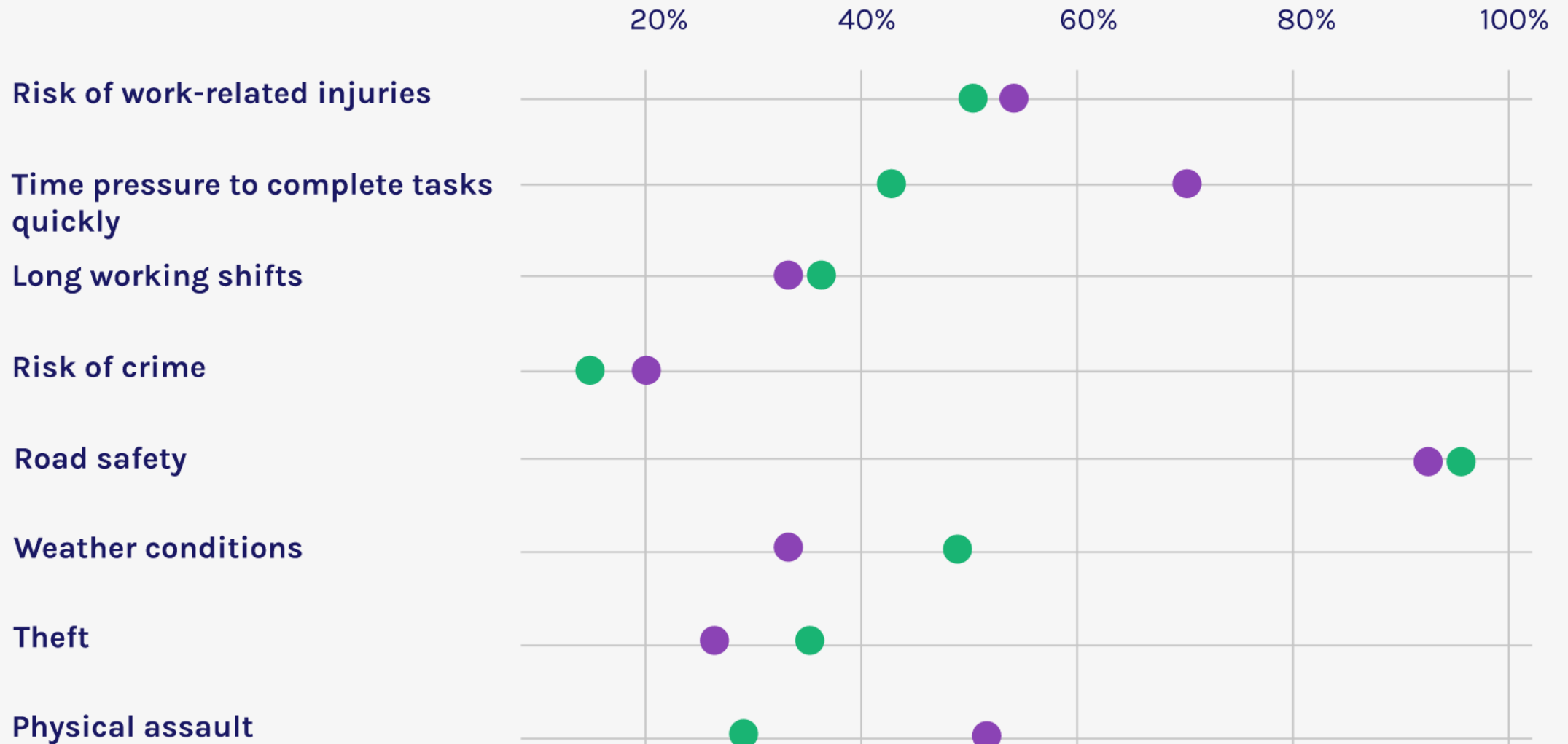
For Prateek, working for Ola Cabs, experiences with platform work worsened his existing economic vulnerabilities. He earned INR 8,660 per month, and worked 18 hours for the platform every day. He had also enrolled under Ola Cabs' Prime programme for the increased earnings promised. Despite this, sufficient income commensurate with the effort expended remained elusive for Prateek.

Several workers faced similar challenges as Prateek. 43% of workers in the taxi services sector and 45% in the delivery services sector, found that their income was insufficient to cater to basic household expenses and financial obligations.

Workplace safety risks

● App-based taxi services

● App-based delivery services



13. 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.

Platform work in Lucknow is an unsafe and stressful endeavour.

78% of taxi workers had unsafe workplaces; they had to navigate physical assault, unsafe road conditions, and deteriorating weather conditions. 81% of delivery workers had similarly unsafe workplaces. Workers across both sectors also spent long hours working for platforms—a median of 65 weekly hours in delivery services and 84 weekly hours in the taxi services sector.

Platforms do little to ensure a safe workplace. 21% of taxi workers experienced violence and harassment at work. 62% of taxi workers and 49% of delivery workers had raised grievances against the platform. Of these, 23% of taxi workers and 26% of delivery workers did not receive a resolution.

Prateek was already contending with insufficient income and long working hours. A workplace accident rendered him unable to return to work for a month. During this period, Prateek received no help from Ola Cabs. The costs of repair and maintenance of his car that he drove for Ola Cabs were an additional burden, for which he had to resort to borrowing money from friends and family.

App-based taxi services

App-based delivery services

Does the platform take steps to improve working conditions?

Only **10%** workers say their platform employer takes steps to improve their working conditions.

Only **6%** 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?

80% workers are aware that there is a formal process to complain.

87% workers are aware that there is a formal process to complain.

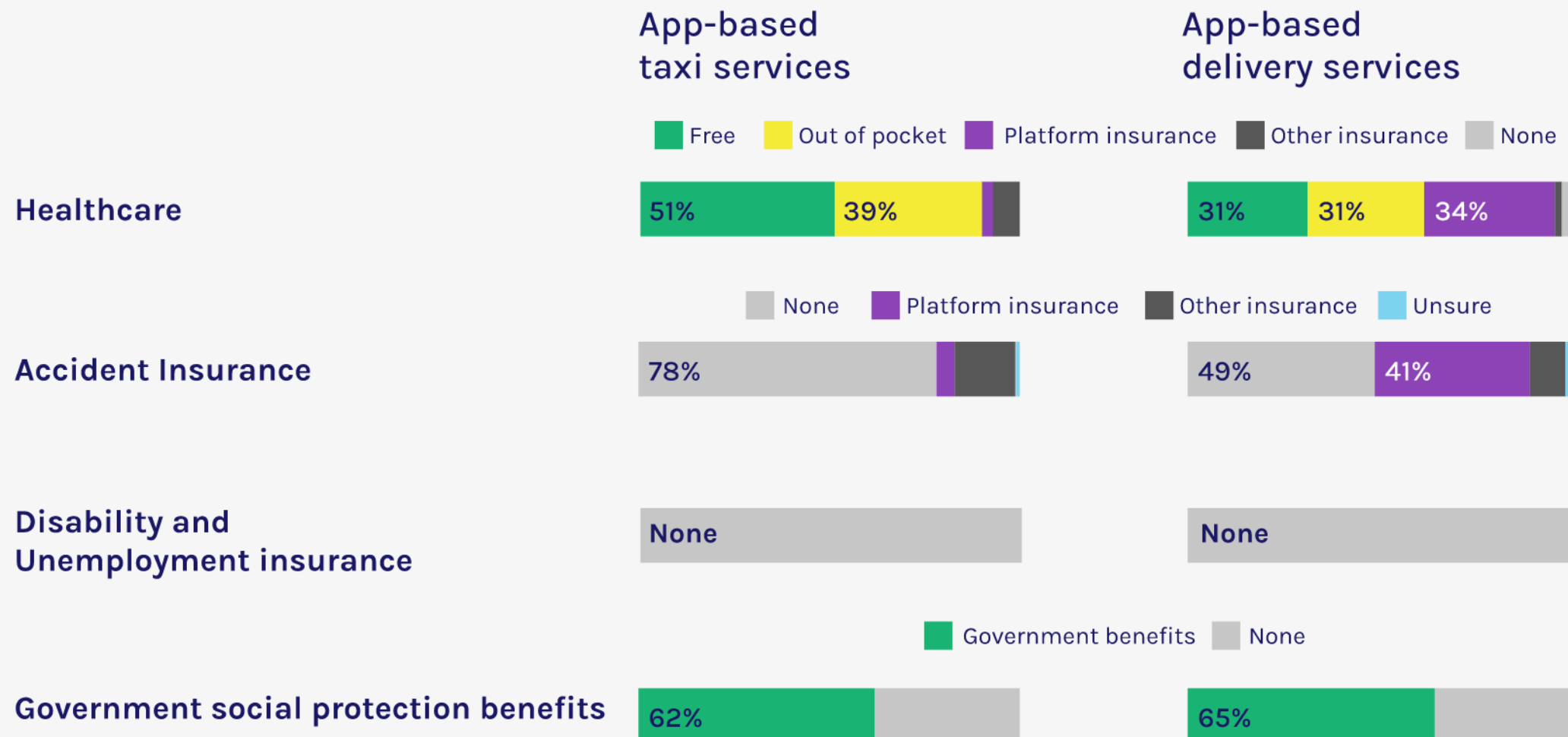
87% workers rely on the app to complain, whereas **10%** of workers contact the management/team leader.

38% workers contact the management, whereas **53%** of workers rely on the app to complain.

Social protection

Workers in Lucknow face significant gaps in social protection and insurance coverage.

Nearly two thirds of delivery workers and 90% of taxi workers relied on government services or had to bear out-of-pocket expenses. Insufficient incomes from platform work rendered private healthcare out of reach. Moreover, none of the workers had access to any type of unemployment or disability insurance.



The absence of insurance coverage provided by platforms was particularly glaring in the taxi services sector where less than 5% of workers received any form of insurance from platforms.

Workers working for major platforms like Ola Cabs and Uber expressed frustration over the lack of insurance against workplace hazards. Dev, a longtime Ola Cabs driver, heard from other workers about accessing insurance on Ola Cabs and Uber, but was not provided any information by the platforms. He eventually resorted to paying for an insurance policy against potential risks at the workplace.

In the delivery services sector, while some workers could access insurance through platforms, issues persisted. These included poor awareness of schemes, inadequate coverage, lack of platform support, and complex claims processes. This left more than half of the workers without any form of insurance protection from platforms.

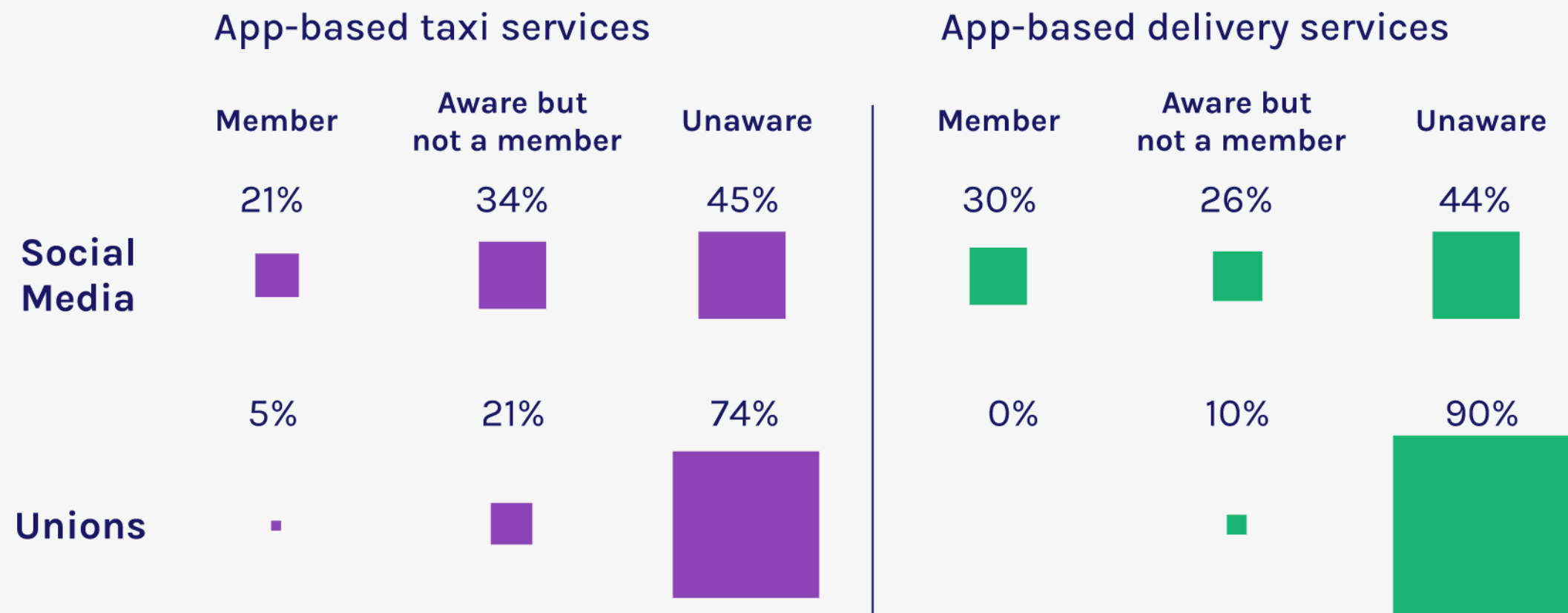
Workers could not rely on publicly provided social security coverage either. Over a third of workers in both sectors were excluded from state social security benefits, with over 60% of workers receiving food security support.

14. 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

Workers in both sectors in Lucknow were more often part of informal networks with other workers like social media groups, than in formal structures like unions.

Around a quarter of workers in both sectors were a part of social media groups. However, only workers in the taxi services sector (5%) were part of unions. A number of workers' organisations have been active in the taxi services sector and involved in organising efforts, including the Independent App-based Cab and Drivers' Association, Lucknow, 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: 21 – 57 years	median: 29 years range: 20 – 57 years
Marital status	single: 20% married: 78% divorced or separated: 1% widowed: 1%	single: 36% married: 63% divorced or separated: 1%
Caste	scheduled castes: 12% scheduled tribes: 2% other backward classes: 41% general: 45%	scheduled castes: 11% scheduled tribes: 1% other backward classes: 38% general: 48% prefer not to say: 2%
Religion	hindu: 81% muslim: 16% christian: 3%	hindu: 94% muslim: 6%
Migrant status	migrants: 58% non migrants: 42% major source locations: Barabanki, Sitapur, Hardoi (Uttar Pradesh)	migrants: 41% non migrants: 59% major source locations: Sitapur, Hardoi, Barabanki, Lakhimpur (Uttar Pradesh)

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