

# Call for Proposals for Case Studies

## Social Protection for

## Platform Workers in Asia

*This call is issued by*



*the Asian Administrative Partner of the*



*An initiative funded by*



## Call for proposals

### Case studies: social protection for platform workers in Asia

**This call seeks empirically grounded, country-based case studies from Asia that examine how social protection for platform workers is being designed, interpreted, and implemented in practice**, with a focus on specific, ongoing or recently initiated policy, regulatory, or programme initiatives. These may involve the extension or adaptation of existing schemes, or the development of new arrangements, whether led by government, platforms, or through hybrid public–private approaches. The case studies should examine how key actors, including government agencies, platforms, and workers, understand vulnerabilities and navigate these initiatives in practice. The emphasis is on stakeholder experiences, institutional processes, and emerging implementation dynamics, including patterns of uptake, exclusion, and contestation, and lessons for strengthening social protection systems going forward. Given this focus, the case studies will draw on primary qualitative research, augmented by policy and regulatory analysis and high-level secondary quantitative data, where relevant.

**Budget:** USD 6000

**Deadline for application: 15 February 2026 | 2359 UTC+530**

**Online application form:** <https://forms.gle/dUWXTpctJFEnqPRS7>

## 1. About FutureWORKS Asia

**FutureWORKS Asia is a multidisciplinary research network** focused on understanding and responding to the policy challenges posed by the changing landscape of work across Asia. The network currently consists of 11 think tanks conducting research across the region and brings together researchers and policy actors to generate evidence, strengthen regional research capacity, and engage in public policy processes related to skills, labour markets, and decent work in the future of work.

**FutureWORKS Asia forms part of the broader FutureWORKS Collective, a global initiative funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.** IDRC supports and strengthens the capacity of researchers and institutions in the Global South to undertake research they identify as most urgent, while contributing to global advances in their fields. Alongside Asia, regional FutureWORKS networks are being established in Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, together forming the FutureWORKS Collective.

**FutureWORKS Asia is led by LIRNEasia**, which was selected in 2023 to serve as the Asian hub of the initiative. Over a five-year period, LIRNEasia is responsible for establishing and consolidating the regional network, supporting collaborative research, facilitating knowledge sharing, and fostering engagement with policymakers and other stakeholders across the region.

**LIRNEasia is a regional policy and regulation think tank** working primarily in the digital space, and on issues that intersect with the digital sector, including the future of work. Its mission is to catalyse policy change and practical solutions through research, using knowledge, information, and technology to improve the lives of people in the Asia and Pacific.

## 2. Background and Context

**The digital economy is rapidly reshaping the nature of work across the world with a significant rise in platform work.** [Datta & Chen \(2023\)](#) estimate that the share of online gig workers account for 4.4%-12.5% of the global labour force, majority of whom are from the developing world. Asia is no exception and has long been a large part of this story; China currently has 200 million workers depending on the gig economy ([The Economist, 2025](#)). Nearly 70% of workers undertaking freelance jobs on the five largest English-speaking online labour platforms were located in Asia ([World Employment Confederation, 2019](#)). The Online Labour Index (2020) estimates that three countries in particular – India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan – dominate the supply of gig workers, accounting for over 50% globally. Some estimate that work is growing too – the gig workforce in India is expected to rise to 23.5 million by 2029-30 ([Niti Ayog, 2022](#)).

**The extent of engagement of platform workers differs, with varying implications for job security and income volatility.** For some, it is a secondary ([ILO, 2018](#)) and part-time activity, used to supplement income rather than replace standard employment. Some rely on platform work as their primary or full-time job. Participation can be intermittent or temporary, with many workers moving in and out over time, while a smaller group remains long-term and economically dependent. Overall, platform work spans a continuum from occasional gig activity to sustained labour, rather than constituting a single, uniform form of work, which has different implications. They are subject to specific vulnerabilities – some forms of location-based work such as ride hailing and delivery are prone to traffic accidents, for example.

**Access to social protection is a key concern, with some groups being disproportionately impacted.** Migrant workers, for example, have been shown to engage in online gig work both outside Asia, such as in the EU ([Zwysen & Piasna, 2024](#)), and within the region, including in China ([Leilart and Sharma, 2025](#)) and Singapore ([Yow, 2025](#)). This raises questions about whether, and to what extent, migrant platform workers are covered by social protection schemes, particularly given their legal and employment status. Platform work is also frequently highlighted as a pathway to employment for women because it offers flexibility, especially in non-location-based and remote forms of work ([Churchill & Craig, 2019](#); ILO, 2023; [Zainudeen & Adhlee, 2022](#)). However, lower working hours and fragmented schedules associated with care responsibilities ([Pillai et al, 2022](#)), may limit women's access to social protection where eligibility is tied to minimum hours or contribution thresholds, potentially leading to their disproportionate exclusion ([Hall et al., 2016](#)).

**Platform work is debated as fitting earlier definitions of informal work or representing a formalization of work.** This is of relevance to many parts of the Global South including Asia given the large share of informal service workers and informal enterprises. The informal economy is a conceptual umbrella for economic activities that are not represented in legal contracts, in government registrations, lack social security that comes from employment, and often fall outside the purview of public policies and laws. While the nature, size and risks of informality vary across the vast continent, what is unique about Asia's platform economy is that workers have potential access to various forms of unprotected work.

**Countries within the continent have developed strategies that integrate improvements in regulation, standards, incentives for registration and extending social protection and strengthening supervision (ILO, 2023).** Since informality is a complex issue, many approaches to formalization have had to respond to the needs, characteristics, and circumstances of segments/groups of workers or economic units (ILO, 2023). There are social protection approaches that universalize healthcare access to all informal sector workers like in Thailand, that differ from universal citizenship-based healthcare access in Sri Lanka, Indonesia's BPJS Keshtan is spread across poor people whose work is overrepresented in the informal economy. This makes Asia's experience of negotiating the identity and representation of platform workers in social protection regulations a fruitful area of policy study.

**The platform economy offers new possibilities for extending social protection, while introducing new forms of complexity and risk.** The abundance of data generated provides more visibility on factors such as number hours worked on which information asymmetries existed in traditional informal economies(Heeks et al., 2020; Masiero & Das, 2019). This allows for identifying eligibility for social protection benefits. Because platform work is mediated by a relatively small number of identifiable firms, platforms can function as intermediaries for enforcement, potentially lowering compliance and enforcement costs. But new types of complexity also exist. The platforms, due to their scale, can exert a large degree of control on whether data is provided, and depending on the model, payments are made (Rani & Singh, 2019). Provision of protections for non-location-based work, where workers may not be in the same jurisdictions as the platforms they work on, largely remains a blind spot (ILO, ISSA & OECD, 2023).

**Several Asian countries have introduced laws and policies to extend social protection to platform workers.** Most, if not all, seem to move away from the European approach which centers extending protections through the rebuttable presumption of employment. Some Asian models opt for a "third category" or "status-quo-plus" approach. For example, Singapore's Platform Workers Act 2024 reclassifies platform workers as a distinct legal category, not employees, but mandates employee-like protections such as CPF social security contributions and work injury insurance. Malaysia's Gig Workers Act 2025 also reclassifies platform workers, but attempts to extend schemes for informal workers to platform workers, but uses data from the platform to enable registration and facilitate deductions for contributions from workers. The countries differ in who they cover, what protections are extended, how its funded, and how it's operationalized. The experiences of select countries in Asia are depicted in Table 1. Some countries have not passed dedicated laws, but have indicated their intended approach in policy and strategy documents; Sri Lanka is one such example.

*Table 1: Recent laws/regulations in select countries in Asia*

Country	New laws/regulations	Who is covered	What is covered	Notes
Singapore	<a href="#">Platform Workers Act 2024</a>	Platform workers; performing tasks in relation to the provision of delivery services and/or ride hailing services	<a href="#">Work injury, medical &amp; retirement cover (through contributions to pension or provident funds)</a>	Facilitates entry to flagship government run schemes; contributions from platforms, and workers; compulsory for those born after 1995, opt in for older workers

Malaysia	<a href="#">Gig Workers Act 2025; Self-Employment Social Security Act 2017</a>	Gig workers; performing services wherein the contracting entity is a platform provider, or any entity specified in the Schedule <sup>1</sup>	Medical benefit, temporary/ permanent disablement, funeral benefit & dependent's benefits	Facilitates entry to flagship government run schemes aimed at self-employed workers; contributions from workers
India	<a href="#">Code on Social Security (2020)<sup>2</sup></a>	Gig and platform workers (section 114)	Decided by National Social Security Board; life insurance, disability, accident, health and maternity benefits, creche & old age or any other benefits in scope	Contribution percentages by aggregators stated, however, central government notifications, and state government laws/regulations can expand the funding sources.
Sri Lanka	N/A – Section 3.5 of <a href="#">National Social Protection Strategy</a>	Emerging worker groups such as gig, freelance and self-employed workers	Unspecified	Platform partnerships being sought for enrolment, seeming extension of social insurance schemes for informal workers, focusing on worker contributions

**Much of the analytical work seems to focus on legal analysis where dedicated laws exist, and coverage gaps where laws do not exist (or prior to them existing).** For example, Singapore's Platform Workers Act 2024 was backed by longitudinal government surveys ([ILO, 2025](#)) and the foundational recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Platform Workers ([Ministry of Manpower, 2024](#)), which established the framework for CPF parity and work injury compensation. Then in Malaysia, research conducted by the Khazanah Research Institute ([Sazali & Gen, 2019](#)) documents pre-law conditions and the high degree of informality within the sector.

**There is limited research studies examining on their rollout, including uptake, stakeholder perceptions, and implementation barriers.** Several countries have programmes that have reached their enforcement dates. For example, Singapore's Platform Workers Act and India's Code on Social Security in 2025; several of India's state laws predate this. However, there is

<sup>1</sup> Acting, filming activities, music-related activities, aesthetic, translation, journalism, prenatal and postnatal care or treatment, palliative, elderly and rehabilitation care, & photography and videography

<sup>2</sup> Multiple state level acts exist; including Rajasthan 2023, Karnataka 2025

limited evidence implementation is taking place, or challenges faced along the way. While indicators such as Central Provident Fund registrations are tracked by the Ministry of Manpower in Singapore ([Ministry of Manpower, 2024](#)), independent impact evaluations and rigorous academic studies of the law's effects on platform operating costs and worker take-home pay are still forthcoming. In Malaysia, although the Gig Workers Bill was passed in 2025 following extensive debate, empirical studies on the real-world consequences of its implementation remain limited if not absent.

### 3. Call priorities

#### 3.1 Geographic scope

**FutureWORKS Asia is looking to commission a series of case studies to better understand lessons from Asian contexts.** Each case study should focus on a single country in Asia. While previous calls have focused exclusively on low and lower middle income country (L-LMICs) in Asia<sup>3</sup>, this extends the scope to upper middle income countries and high income countries in the region. In federal or decentralized systems, case studies may focus on one or more sub-national jurisdictions, provided the scope is clearly justified.

**The case studies should be able to encompass stakeholder responses to policies and programs and where applicable implementation overview.** The case studies are expected to feed into an open-access report (regional mapping study) published by LIRNEasia, which will then be disseminated to policy audiences.

#### 3.2 Key definitions

A variety of organizations define terms differently, which have implications on the scope of work. Key definitions used for the purpose of this call are

**Platform work:** This call draws on the definitional basis created by the International Labour Organisation for [digital labour platforms](#), which defines the specificities of platform work through the technology mediating work, and its sub-sets of location-based work, and non-location-based work<sup>4</sup>. The case studies can draw on the specific definitions used in its national/sub-national contexts, provided it fits within this broad definition.

**Social protection:** In this call, we use the ILO's definition of [social protection](#), which is used interchangeably with the term social security to define the broad scope of the work. As such we focus on social insurance (contributory) and social assistance programmes (non-contributory) programmes address the nine branches defined in the [Social Security \(Minimum Standards\) Convention, 1952](#) (No 102). These nine branches (in line with the [more recent terms used by the ILO](#)) are: (1) health protection, (2) sickness benefits (earnings replacement), (3) unemployment benefits, (4) old-age pensions, (5) employment injury benefits, (6) family and child benefits, (7) parental (including maternity) benefits, (8) disability benefits, and (9) survivors' benefits. Case studies may include a subset of these, as per the country's policy priorities.

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<sup>3</sup> Countries defined as East Asia, Central and West Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia by the ADB: <https://www.adb.org/where-we-work>

<sup>4</sup> Public policy approaches vary across different countries in seeing platform work as a legal category for statistical enumeration, recognition in policies; and as it interacts with historical categories such as the occupational categories that are involved in platform work. Such as, ride hailing drivers are transport workers while also platform workers; similarly, those engaged in home services platforms are also tradesmen in occupational definitions (carpenter etc.), domestic workers have global and country-specific conventions and laws that guide their sector.

### 3.3 Research Questions

This section identifies the key research questions to be identified in the case studies. A variety of questions have been defined, which can be applied based on whether specific legal provisions exist for platform workers (as described in Table 1), or whether policy conversations are at a more nascent stage. Several common regulatory patterns for platform workers observed on the continent include: 1) platform workers access universal programs available to all workers or citizens 2) platform workers are covered by existing laws on work in the formal or informal economy, sectoral or occupational legislation; 3) governments create new regulations specifically designed for platform workers, addressing their rights, social security and employment status. In contexts where implementation is recent or limited, case studies may focus on early rollout experiences, institutional preparedness, stakeholder expectations, and anticipated implementation challenges. The case studies should address at least one of the following research questions:

#### **1. Platform roles, data, and compliance**

- 1.1. What roles do platforms play in implementing social protection arrangements, and how do these shape compliance and enforcement?
- 1.2 What data-related challenges arise in practice, including for non-location-based platform work where this is covered in law or policy?

#### **2. Worker experiences, incentives, and behaviour**

- 2.1 How do platform workers perceive and experience new or proposed social protection measures?
- 2.2 How do incentives, trade-offs, and experiences differ across worker sub-groups?

#### **3. Coverage, uptake, and exclusion**

- 3.1 Who is effectively covered in practice by proposed or implemented measures, and who is left out?
- 3.2 What barriers to access or uptake emerge, and are particular groups systematically excluded?

#### **4. Dispute resolution and regulatory frictions**

- 4.1 What forms of conflict or regulatory friction emerge during rollout?
- 4.2 How are disputes between workers, platforms, and the state addressed in practice?

### 3.4 Research methods and ethics

**Given the focus on understanding stakeholder perspectives, the case studies will draw on primary, qualitative research.** This may include key informant interviews, in depth interviews, focus group discussions, among other research methods. The stakeholders may include (depending on the research question chosen) government officials, platform companies, workers/worker groups, and researchers/academics. Case studies should include a concise, applied overview of relevant **policy and regulatory** arrangements only where necessary to contextualise empirical findings. Legal or policy analysis should not be undertaken as a

standalone exercise. Where feasible, case studies should also draw on **high-level secondary quantitative data** (e.g. estimates of the platform workforce, enrolment figures, or programme coverage).

Ethical conduct in research and recognition of the data privacy and transmission laws of the study area, including but not limited to obtaining informed consent for conducting the interviews and recording, is also paramount. We expect consultants to comply with regulatory requirements in their respective countries, upholding the highest ethical standards throughout their activities.

#### 4. Deliverables and indicative timeline

**The final deliverables are expected to be a case study of ~5000 words (excluding references) and a slide set.** Interim outputs will include draft case studies, and detailed field notes from the primary research.

The deliverables and indicative timeline are outlined in Table 2.

*Table 2: Deliverables and indicative timelines*

Deliverable	Weeks after contract signing
1. Draft case study	12 weeks
2. Detailed, anonymized field notes from primary research	
3. Recordings of protocols	
4. Finalized case study, incorporating feedback from Futureworks Asia team	18 weeks (2 weeks to be built in for case study review, assuming one round of review. If appropriate quality standards are not met, additional rounds of review will be required)
5. Slideset reflecting finalized case study	20 weeks

All deliverables except deliverable 3 are to be submitted in English.

The researchers will be expected to participate in check in calls with the Futureworks Asia team, review meetings, and an online dissemination event. Participation in in-person dissemination may be requested on a needs basis.

Futureworks Asia will retain the right to publish and disseminate the case studies and synthesized findings, with appropriate attribution to authors.

#### 5. Eligibility

**Individual researchers are eligible to submit proposals.** Researchers must have

- (i) subject expertise
- (ii) country expertise

(iii) demonstrated experience in independently conducting primary research, including liaising with focal stakeholders.

## 6. Funding available

**The total funding available is USD 6,000.** This is an all-inclusive amount and is expected to cover all research-related costs, including personnel, data collection, and any other associated expenses. If in-person participation at a dissemination event is required, travel and accommodation costs will be covered separately by FutureWORKS Asia after contracting, in line with IDRC guidelines. Once contracting is completed, the consultant will be asked to produce a tax residency certificate to the country that the payment is being remitted to.

## 7. Application process

**Proposals should be received by 15 February 2026**, by 2359 UTC+530.

Applicants must submit their proposals through the online submission form, which can be accessed here: <https://forms.gle/dUWXTpctJFEnqPRS7>

All required sections of the form must be completed, and all supporting documents must be uploaded in the specified formats. Proposals should be submitted in English.

The applicant shall bear all costs associated with preparation and submission of the application as specified in this call for proposals, regardless of the conduct or outcome of the proposal evaluation. LIRNEasia shall have no obligation to any applicant to reimburse any costs incurred in preparing the proposals, whatever the result. Submission of a proposal in response to this call by an applicant will be interpreted by as the applicant's acceptance of this condition

Inquiries related to the call and application process should be sent by e-mail to [futureworks@lirneasia.net](mailto:futureworks@lirneasia.net) with the subject header “Clarification: Social protection for platform workers