



#HomeBasedFlexiworkInCovid19

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Canada



Why do women prefer home-based online work?





Labour Platforms

Labour platforms, can be understood as those where the worker generates a large share of the value created. Labour platforms can further be divided into two categories:

- **Location-based work** refers to the geographically tethered provision of labour services. These are required at a specific location at a specific time. This category consists of transport services, delivery services and household and personal services.
- **Cloud-based work** refers to labour services that are extended remotely via the internet from anywhere, with the transaction taking place online. This includes online freelance services and micro-work.

Source: Bester, Linden, Dewan – November 2020



Labour Platforms – Business Models & Incentives

- **Labour platforms are two-sided marketplaces for skills and work**
- **Two sides of these marketplaces are –**
 - **Workers with skills**
 - **Consumers seeking these skills**
- **Platforms earn commissions when a transaction occurs between a worker and a consumer**
- **Therefore, platforms have an economic incentive to keep a lot of workers and customers on the platforms which results in an increasing number of transactions**



Labour Platforms – Business Models & Incentives

(cont'd)

- Platforms attract customers through marketing and offers
- Workers are attracted by sign-up incentives and performance-linked bonuses
- Platforms initially give attractive incentives to populate their ecosystem with a large number of service providers
- And then push marketing offers to attract customers
- Eventually these platforms balance the two sides and in the process some workers are rendered without enough work and income
 - This happens through a combination of performance evaluation i.e. ratings, commission generation etc.
 - Usually with a disregard to any capital investment the worker may have made in equipment



Labour Platforms – Worker Benefits & Protection

- There is a lack of regulation regarding worker rights for Gig workers in India
- As a result platforms are not obligated to provide any health or retirement benefits
- Although some platforms (Urban Co. and Zomato) have launched some scheme regarding health insurance and family benefits – these are non-systemic and small



Going forward, improvement in these would be driven by three factors –

- Competition amongst platforms to attract workers
- Worker organisations demanding better working conditions
- Government regulations



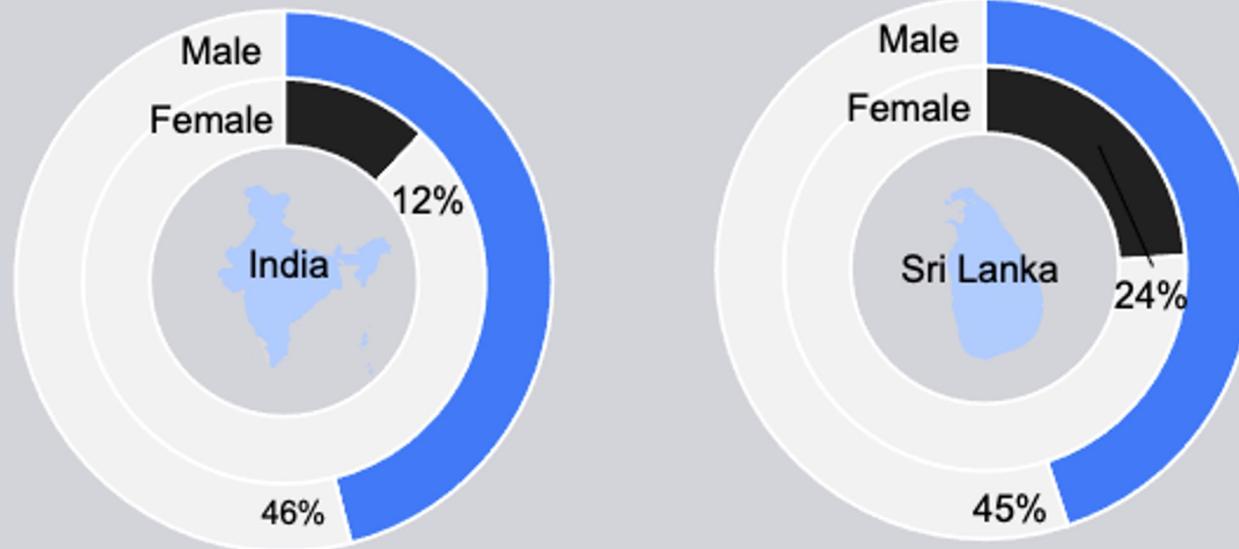
Drawing on nationally representative surveys in India and Sri Lanka, and qualitative 'e-diary' research

- **Surveys conducted in 2021 in Sri Lanka and India**
India: n = 7500, nationally representative of India (except Kerala) at a 95% confidence interval +/-1.7% margin of error
Sri Lanka: n = 2500, nationally representative of Sri Lanka at a 95% confidence interval +/-2.8% margin of error
- **Qualitative interviews conducted in 2020 in Sri Lanka**
'e-diary' method used to understand 'real-time' lived experiences of those under lockdown
- **Funded by International Development Research Centre (Canada)**



Men were 4x more likely than women to be employed during early COVID-19 lockdowns in India; 2x in Sri Lanka

Employed during the lockdown
(% of population aged 15+)

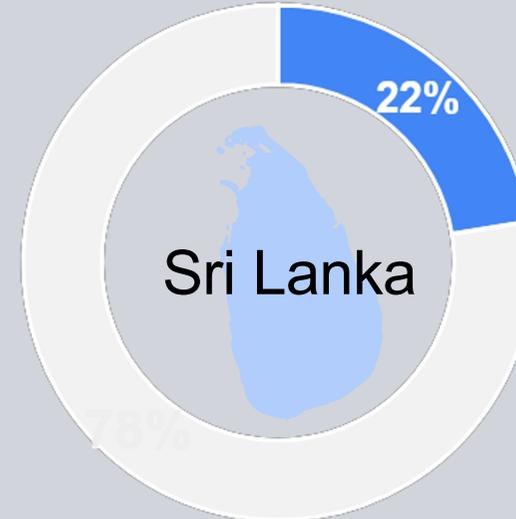
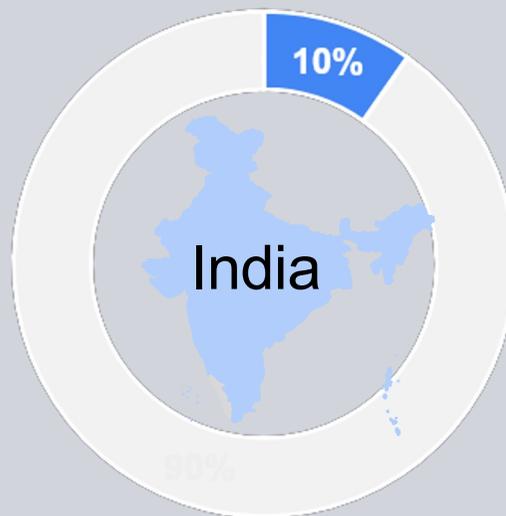


Source: LIRNEasia COVID impact survey, 2021. Representative of all households and age 15 and above population in India (except Kerala) and Sri Lanka.



Just 10% of employed individuals in India, and 22% in Sri Lanka, worked from home during lockdowns

Working from home during the lockdown
(% of age 15+ population who had a job during the lockdown)

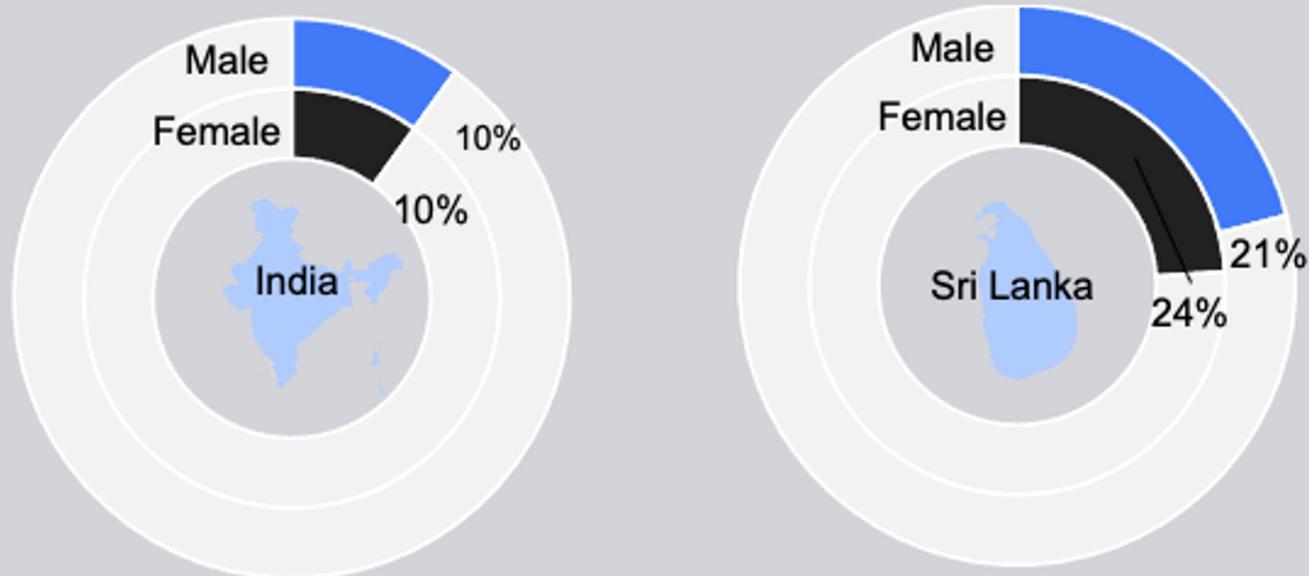


Source: LIRNEasia COVID impact survey, 2021. Representative of all households and age 15 and above population in India (except Kerala) and Sri Lanka



Little to no gender gap in working from home amongst *employed* population; slightly greater amongst working women in Sri Lanka

Working from home during the lockdown
(% of employed population aged 15+)



Source: LIRNEasia COVID impact survey, 2021. Representative of all households and age 15 and above population in India (except Kerala) and Sri Lanka.



In Sri Lanka, more women struggled with maintaining work-life balance, working more hours and engaging in care work

Challenges faced when engaging in remote work in Sri Lanka – men vs women
(% of those who engaged in remote work during lockdown)



Source: LIRNEasia COVID impact survey, 2021. Representative of all households and age 15 and above population in Sri Lanka



Lack of access to support networks compounded tasks for women, mental health impacted

“My wife’s workload has increased because she has to do extra chores. Also, she has to do the cooking and taking care of the children. We drink tea several times a day. When the children are at her parents’ home, then it is only the two of us, so we manage somehow. But now she has to cook all three meals and attend to the two kids, so her workload has increased”

R4, male, SEC C, married with children



“I often get angry. I have to see to the children’s schoolwork, cook. We fight all the time, so I have to do everything with anger. It’s also because of all the problems with money. There isn’t much peace at home”

R17, female, SEC C, married with children

Source: LIRNEasia e-diary qualitative study, Sri Lanka, 2020.



Some women became the sole breadwinners for their families; those were out of the workforce having to re-enter, sometimes upskilling

“My father used to be in the tourism sector. He is out of work now. I work at (redacted) and I have had work throughout. I’m busier than ever. These days I’m the breadwinner of the family. I give about Rs. 10,000 to my mother to buy essentials”

R14, female, SEC B

“We had to pawn some jewellery and manage because usually my husband’s salary got delayed because of the lockdown. I have now undertaken to stitch some bed sheets. I earn a little something by taking up such jobs”

R1, female, SEC B

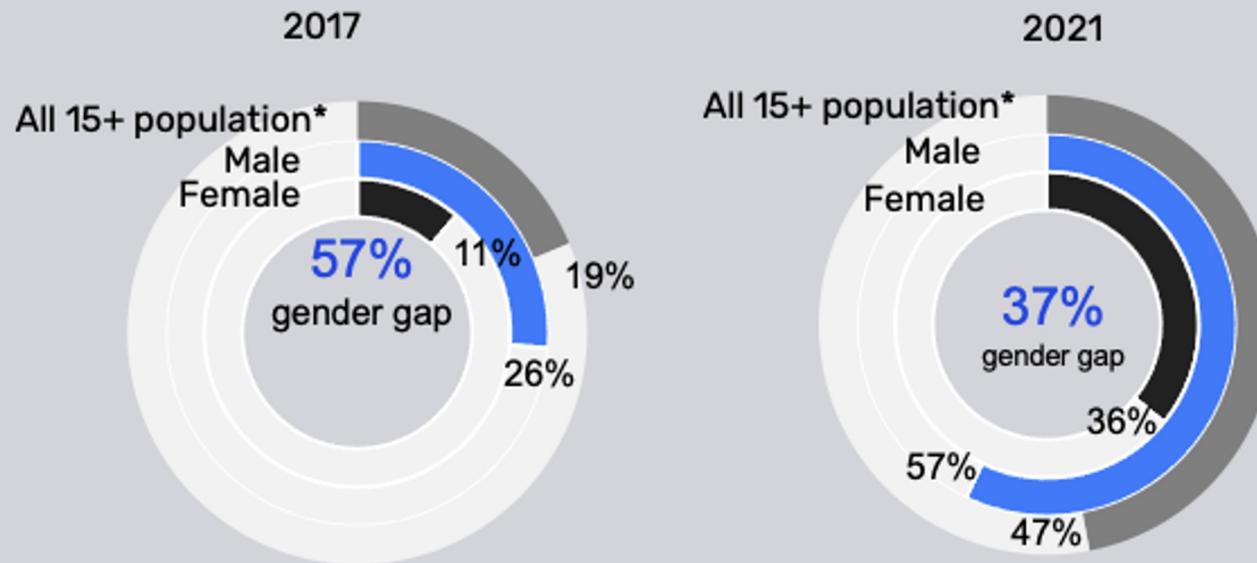
“I was told about an eBay course by a good friend who had been doing business in the past 2 years. The friend is attached to an institute where they provide guidance to amateur online entrepreneurs to start and run their online businesses. I am following that these days”

R12, female, SEC A

Source: LIRNEasia e-diary qualitative study, Sri Lanka, 2020.



Gender gaps in internet use exist, but have fallen over the years



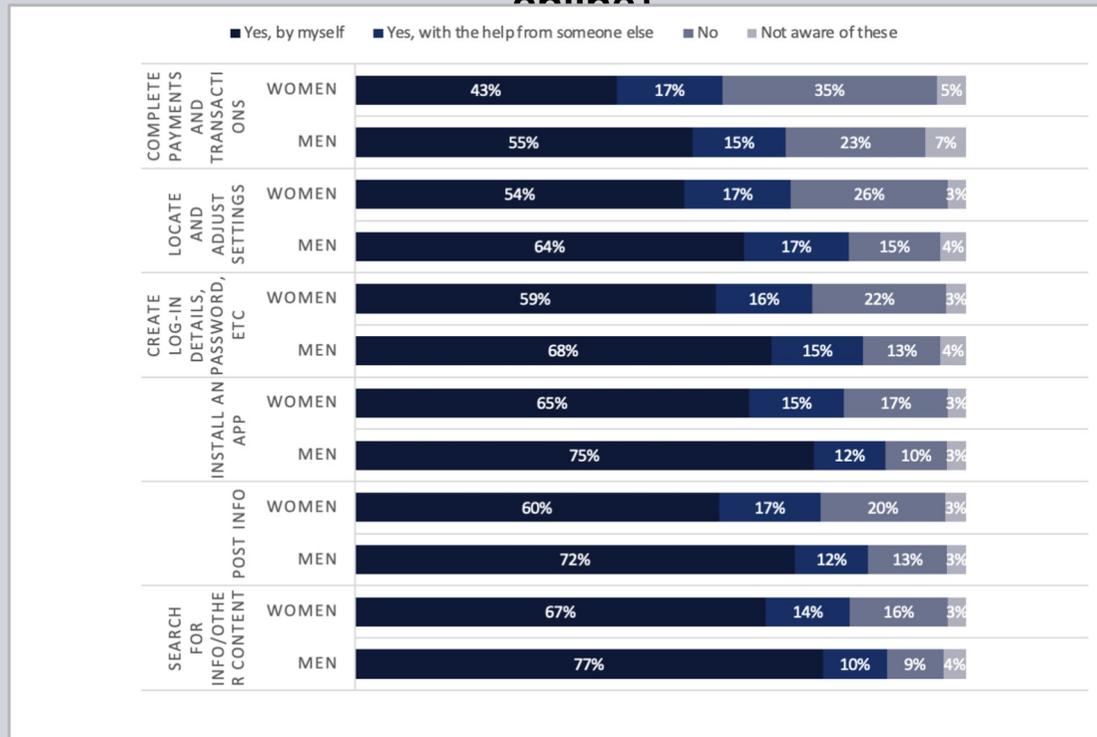
Source: LIRNEasia COVID impact survey, 2021. Representative of all households and age 15 and above population in India (except Kerala)
*Including Kerala, population aged 15-65



Digital skills lower amongst women

Digital skills: India

(% of 15+ internet users that can complete the following tasks online)



Source: LIRNEasia COVID impact survey, 2021. Representative of all households and age 15 and above population in India (except Kerala) and Sri Lanka



How did Covid impact women's livelihoods?



The Gig Sisters Podcast: *Pedicures and Penalties*

By Prerna Seth, Mukta Naik, and
Sabina Dewan

Listen to this and more on www.Connected2Work.com



Women home-based platform workers during Covid-19: India

- Online work become more attractive during lockdowns, a way to add to HH income or have an independent income
- Disparate experiences between location-based & cloud-based work
- Location-based (beauty, mobility)
 - Many issues with platforms like commissions, job allocation, rating systems, hidden costs
- Cloud-based: microwork (app testing, content), freelance work (content, design), edutech (teaching)
- Choices vary by age, marital status, education
- Interviews of women in late teens to mid-30s
 - Money 'on the side', alongside full-time work or education
 - During periods of intense care work



Key takeaways for cloud-based platform work

- Few formal entry barriers but easy to get scammed, initial learnings important
- Can work from diverse geographic locations – esp small towns
- Skill levels matter but not a critical aspect
- Allows you to build up slowly to more complex and more regular work
- Flexibility attractive for women, but many men doing this kind of work (edutech has a concentration of women)





Key takeaways for cloud-based platform work



- Finding work is time intensive
- Repetitive, bite-sized and time-bound work
- Diversifying work is a big motivation – income from several sources and several kinds of work
- Income is unstable and fluctuating for most, but some income is assured
- Not many full-time stable jobs available though that remains an aspiration – to have a job with a career path
- Rates of payment got cut during Covid as too many people came onto platforms, became harder to get hits



Gender empowerment

- Home-based work offers little exposure, mobility
- Temp work versus 'stepping stone' work
- Easiest way towards an income, however small
 - Microwork and freelance work empowering for those from modest backgrounds to be able to buy their own devices, upskill themselves etc; some are also contributing to family expenses
- Respect within family increases
- Do not generally experience gender discrimination online
- Family structures can be restrictive but also supportive
 - Working online from home is seen as respectable work
 - Working outside the home is an aspiration but mobility restrictions are a reality and precedents for women working outside the home are not very common except in gendered work like teaching
 - Care work not a big drain on time for single women, much more for married women esp with little children





About the research

- **Based on qualitative interviews with 50+ Sri Lankan women who are engaged in digitally-enabled work/earning opportunities**
 - Location- and non-location-based work
 - Mostly enabled via social media, but some specialized platforms
- **Interviews conducted in 2021 by LIRNEasia**
- **Funded by IDRC (Canada); part of a collaboration with CPR (India) and JustJobs Network**



Types of digitally-enabled work / entrepreneurship

Location-based

- **Services**
 - Driving/riding
 - Photography
 - Voice-over artists
 - Beauty services (mehendi, bridal dressing)
 - Electrician, plumbing

Non-location-based

- **Services (~cloud work)**
 - Teaching/tutoring
 - Graphic design
 - Content writing
 - Translation
 - Transcription
- **Retail/trade**
 - Apparel/accessories
- **Small-scale manufacture**
 - Home baking
 - Apparel/accessories
 - Tailoring
 - Jewelry making
 - Shoe manufacture
 - Agri-products
 - Craft

MOST-OFTEN
HOME-BASED



Flexibility means different things to different women

I really love teaching ... just that my passion is somewhere else, where right now I am just building up my way into being a psychologist though, **everyone needs to earn something now a days to survive, so what I feel is right now I am just trying to survive by teaching and trying to get myself financially independent at some way and my ultimate goal is definitely going into and being a licensed therapist.**

25, female

Online tutor, online freelancer, aspiring therapist
Masters student

So I haven't still decided to go back as of yet but I am actually liking it more like staying at home and working then actually going from there because it allows me a lot of flexibility, one with the kids one with my work, one with the time and even the pay ... I sometimes I feel like the pay is much better because you can kind of decide your pay and you can decide what to go for and what to do as opposed to 9-5 job.

31, female

Online freelancer, micro-entrepreneur,
& mother of two toddlers
MBA holder

Because when I was done with my degree I was also done with my internship, and I learned how monotonous the nine-to-five job life is, and I was like- I really need some sort of creativity in it. So I've started this.

24, female

Micro-entrepreneur & employed business
designer
Degree holder

The others [types of work] I took a break because they all required a lot of heavy thinking and a heavy input and I kind of felt that right now I can't give that effort and time.



Gender norms around mobility are reinforced by home-based flexible work, family background and networks play an important role

when I started this business was since I didn't have a 9-to-5 at that time, a lot of people, a lot of my relatives would say 'Well', like, okay, 'She started her business, now she can stay at home, she doesn't have to go out', you know, 'And when she gets married she can have children and she can manage business'. And that really, really bothered me.

24, female

Micro-entrepreneur & employed business designer
Degree holder

As for my family I think that **they are really supportive primarily because it prevents me from going to a 9-5 job** ... So they always encourage me to stick to this job... and even if I get married like I can still do it at home... they have even like discouraged me from facing some interviews to 9-5 jobs... I come from a very conservative family.

25, female

Online freelancer
Degree holder

At home and friend my brothers are supportive, but the society isn't, at the beginning I had a few issues there were one or two used to say you are a girl don't go ahead with this, its wont work out. At that time, I sat and thought can I actually do it? But from my family I had great support.

21, female
Microentrepreneur
Degree holder



Support networks are very important



- **Family/home**
 - Skills transfer – skills of the trade, digital marketing, business
 - Resources
 - Operations: deliveries, digital marketing
 - Care work, housework
 - Advice, encouragement, moral support
 - Contacts
- **Friends, old boys/girls networks**
 - Encouragement, promotion
- **Online community**
 - Collaborative vs competitive culture – collabs, shout-outs, etc
 - Advice, support



Opportunities, Costs, and Outcomes of Platformized Home-based Work for Women: Case Studies of Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand

This study examines platformized home-based work for women across four dimensions of economic empowerment : **Access and Equity, Flexibility, Economic Security, and Position in Family and Society.**



Research Partners:

- Kenan Foundation Asia
- Centre for Economic and Social Development - Myanmar
- Nuppun Research and Consulting



Research Question

How do Platformized Home-Based Work Opportunities Relate to Issues of...

- **Access and Equity?**
 - Skills and Technology
 - Women-specific barriers
- **Flexibility?**
 - Time: work schedule
 - Financial: income, other benefits
- **Economic Security?**
 - Risks vs. rewards
 - Livelihood, savings,
 - Social benefits
 - Income distribution
- **Family Structure?**
 - Gendered roles
 - Decision-making processes
 - Self-perception
 - Engagement with society
- **COVID impacts?**
 - Ability to work with platforms
 - Hygiene requirements
- **Any difference by type of platform?**
 1. Social media
 2. Food delivery
 3. Online retail
 4. Crowd work



Interviews with workers

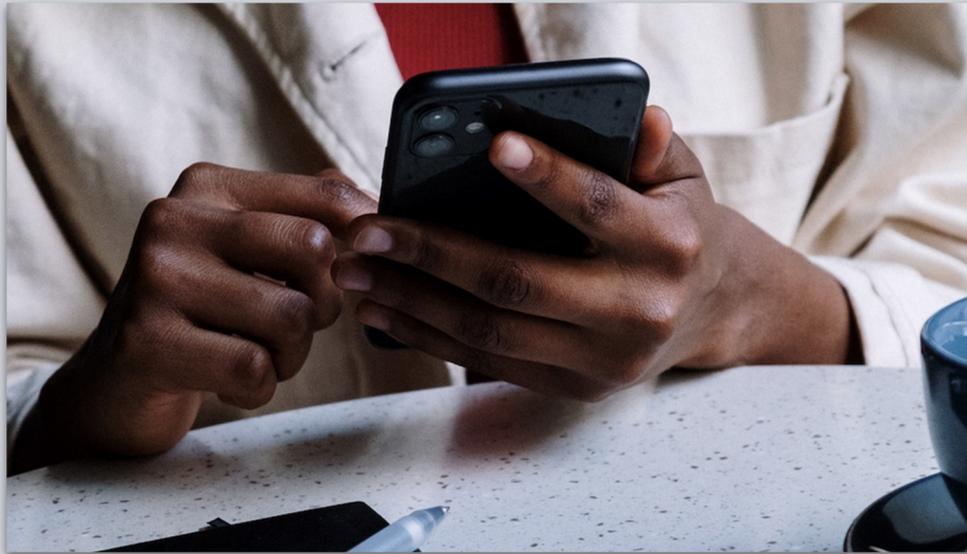
Data collected from workers to date

	Survey	Interviews
Cambodia	100	54
Thailand	63	61
Myanmar	0	0

	Sample Composition		
		Female	
ONLINE	Social media	15%	4%
	Retail	15%	4%
	Food delivery	15%	4%
	Crowdwork	15%	4%
OFFLINE	Formal worker	10%	2%
	Informal worker	10%	2%
	Total	80%	20%



Findings



- 75% of all surveyed women who work online, do it from **home**
- 52 % of their personal **income** is generated **online**
- **18 months** ago on average is when they started their online work (post-pandemic)



Preliminary Findings: types of platforms

- **Facebook is prevalent**
 - Most respondents use Facebook, either alone or in addition to other types of platforms
- **Online retail platforms: irrelevant category?**
 - No respondents sell on online retail platforms – Facebook business page instead
 - Etsy: difficult to track workers
- **Crowdworkers: unfound**
 - Mturk not available in case study countries
- **Food delivery apps**
 - Mostly used by existing restaurants (expensive fees and charges)
 - Individual entrepreneurs use Facebook page
- **Freelancers**
 - Sell their services online
 - But not necessarily on platforms, except Facebook



Preliminary findings: access and equity in Thailand

- **No gender-related barriers**
 - If anything, women have better skills for salesmanship and service industry (friendlier, detail-oriented...)
 - Age is a significant barrier while gender is not
- **Skills-related barriers**
 - Digital marketing is hard to learn
 - How to choose / learn different software (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft team, Webex)
 - Self-teaching, remote learning takes time and few resources are available online (for free)
- **Technology-related barriers**
 - At first only a phone, then more equipment is needed
 - Problem with OS compatibility
 - Glitches with internet speed or device





Preliminary findings: Covid impact in Cambodia

- **General context => shift to online platforms**
 - Shops closed during lockdowns
 - Customers buy less, revenues decrease
 - Those who rent their store hit especially hard
 - Supply shortages
- **Impact on online activity**
 - “Shops” remain open, but still
 - Customers buy less, revenues decrease **EXCEPT** for food-related businesses
 - Supply shortages + delivery issues
 - More complains from customers to deal with
 - Freelancers struggle a lot to find orders



Preliminary Recommendations by Thai workers

- **GOVERNMENT**

- Registration and social welfare system
- Intellectual property regulations
- Quality control for sales
- Free online training accessible to everyone
- Ensure equal access to internet infrastructure

- **PLATFORMS**

- Reporting mechanism, especially for abusive behaviors and sexual harassment
- Reduce fees and charges, especially for premium accounts (necessary for sustainable livelihood)
- Do not limit visibility of small businesses' posts (Facebook)
- Make platforms user-friendly and accessible for the handicapped
- Limit data and updating needs
- Provide training





Read more about
Women, Work, and the Gig Economy
on www.connected2work.org

