

# ► Research Brief

February 2026

## Digital labour platforms: Number of platforms and workers<sup>1</sup>

### Key points

► **Persistent measurement gaps**

Current data sources remain insufficient to accurately estimate the total number of individuals who engage in digital platform employment, reflecting limitations in coverage and data availability.

► **Need for internationally agreed statistical standards**

Advancing internationally agreed statistical standards, including through the ICLS process, is essential to improve measurement frameworks, enhance harmonization and support the production of comparable statistics.

Over the past decade, there has been a significant rise in the number of digital labour platforms which are creating employment and income opportunities and transforming the world of work. The digital platform economy encompasses a diverse array of platforms and work activities occurring in all regions and countries, regardless of development level. It engages businesses, workers and consumers in the exchange of goods and services. The impact of this change on labour markets has caught the attention of social partners and governments, leading to ongoing discussions on how to best measure, monitor and address this development. Core to these deliberations is the need for robust and comparable statistics describing the prevalence of digital platform work, its development over time, worker characteristics and associated working conditions. Such information is essential to inform the ongoing policy debate.

However, the rapid evolution of the platform economy has outpaced the traditional data collection mechanisms, making conventional enterprise and labour statistics inadequate for capturing the true scale and scope of this phenomenon. Measurement practices and conceptual frameworks are still being refined, and further steps are needed to close existing gaps and ensure that digital platform employment is accurately measured. The lack of comprehensive data makes it difficult to precisely estimate the proliferation of digital labour platforms, the total number of workers engaged therein and overall market penetration. This statistical brief directly addresses these critical gaps by providing the number of active digital labour platforms using the Crunchbase database. It complements these figures with insights from labour force surveys conducted by various national statistical offices, which offer valuable insights on the number of workers engaged in or mediated through these platforms.

<sup>1</sup> The authors, Uma Rani, Michael Frosch and Morgan Williams, would like to thank Rishabh Dhir and Nora Gobel for supporting them with the collection of platforms as well as verifying it, in the initial phase.

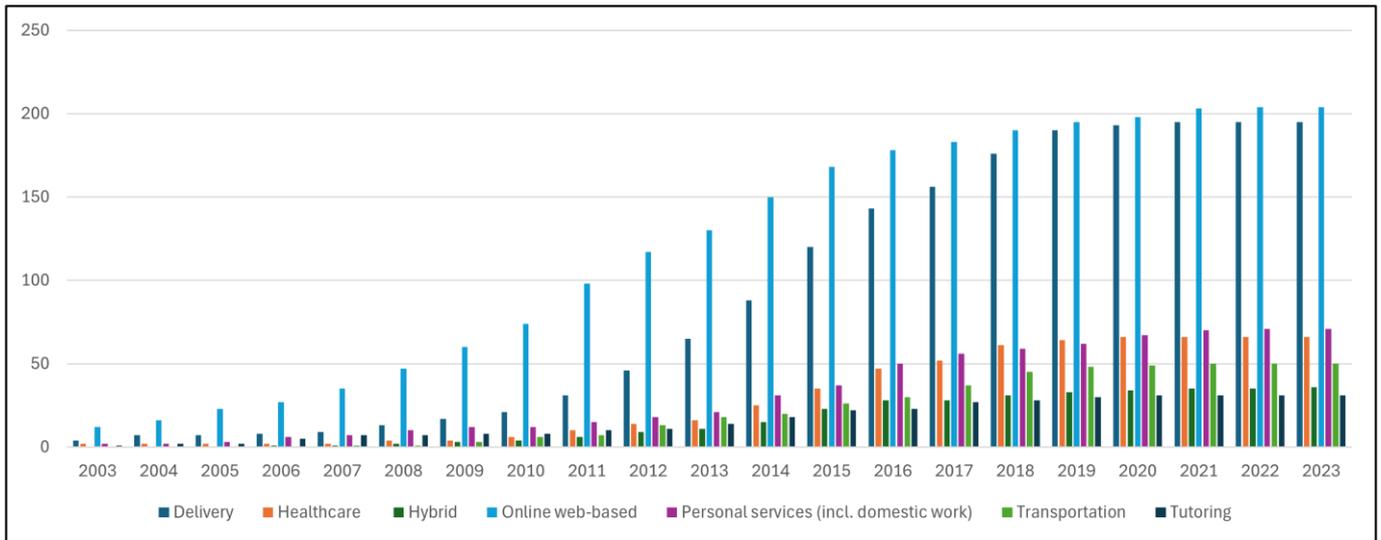
## Estimates of number of digital labour platforms

Over the past decade, digital labour platforms, encompassing both online web-based and location-based models, have experienced rapid growth. As of October 2025, focusing on global online web-based platforms and location-based platforms in sectors like taxi, delivery, healthcare, personal services, and tutoring, at least 653 active platforms were identified (Figure 1, based on Crunchbase data<sup>2</sup>). This figure is lower than the 777 platforms reported in 2021 for online web-based, taxi, and delivery sectors, likely due to closures or consolidation of

platform companies through mergers and acquisitions in recent years.

The online web-based category represents the highest number of platforms at 204, followed by the delivery sector (195), personal services (including domestic work) (71), healthcare (66), taxi sector (50) and tutoring (31). Additionally, there are 35 hybrid platforms offering a diverse range of services such as taxi, delivery, personal, and domestic services. Within the online web-based platforms, freelance platforms (136) constitute the majority, followed by microtask (42) and competitive programming platforms (25).

► **Figure 1: Number of active digital labour platforms globally, selected categories, 2003-2023**



Source: Crunchbase database.

Note: Only currently active platforms are included. Healthcare includes care work and medical consultation.

<sup>2</sup> Crunchbase is a database that contains business information about private and public companies and start-ups, including digital labour platforms. It obtains its data in four ways: the venture program, machine learning, an in-house data team, and the Crunchbase community. The venture program allows investors to keep their firm's Crunchbase profile up to date and provides members with free access to company data on Crunchbase and other discounts. Members of the public can submit information to the Crunchbase database. The list of companies and start-ups in the database provides data on their location, funding history, investment activities, acquisition trends and number of employees. It covers platforms from 98 countries around the globe. As the database relies, in part, on self-reporting, it is likely that some active platforms, especially from developing countries, are not listed in the database. Therefore, a small number of platforms which are not represented in the Crunchbase database were identified through country-level surveys and included in the dataset. Once we collect information about the company, we verify whether it is a digital labour platform or not, and whether it is functioning. As the mortality rate of these platforms are quite high, we verify its functioning every few months and the latest verification has been done in October 2025, and we have not updated platforms since October 2023. In addition, we keep a track of platforms and whenever there are mergers and acquisitions, we remove the platform that has been acquired to ensure that there is no double counting of the platforms.

## Number of workers engaged on digital labour platforms

Digital labour platforms typically involve two distinct work relationships: those where individuals are directly employed by the platform (internal employment), and those where the platform mediates the engagement and work of external contractors (external employment) (OECD-ILO-Eurostat, 2023)<sup>3</sup>. Estimating the number of workers in this latter category is particularly difficult due to a lack of data, as most platforms do not publicly disclose the number of active workers utilising their services. Despite this transparency challenge, this brief provides estimates based on surveys conducted by various statistical offices.

## Workers directly hired by digital labour platforms

The ILO (2021) report gathered data on the number of employees directly hired by 749 (96 per cent) of the 777 digital labour platforms, drawing information from annual reports or databases like Crunchbase and Owler. These workers are employed on a full-time, part-time or fixed-term basis to carry out various tasks essential for the platform's creation, maintenance and overall operation, and in some cases may also include employees of the digital platform who provide labour services to clients matched through the platform. Platforms also engage freelancers for development and maintenance, though obtaining data on freelancer engagement is challenging unless platforms disclose this in their annual reports.

## Digital platform employment: Estimates based on surveys

The lack of access to data from platforms has compelled statistical offices to rely on surveys to estimate the number of individuals who provide goods or services for pay or

profit on or through these platforms. The most common source used by countries to produce a representative estimate of the prevalence of digital platform employment is the Labour Force Survey (LFS), typically by adding an additional module to the national survey. Importantly, 'employment' here is understood in the statistical sense set out in the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) Resolution 2013 — covering all persons who carry out an activity for pay or profit, regardless of their status as employees, self-employed, dependent contractors etc. However, a country review conducted by the ILO reveals significant variability in these estimates, largely due to differences in definitions and methodologies<sup>4</sup>.

**Definitional Differences:** In the absence of an international statistical standard for digital platform employment, countries have developed their own definitions and measurement approaches, limiting cross-country comparability<sup>5</sup> (see Box 1 for various definitions). Some progress towards harmonization has been achieved — for example, through Eurostat's development of a harmonized EU module and the jointly published OECD-ILO-Eurostat Handbook on the Measurement of Digital Platform Employment and Work. However, significant differences remain. These include variations in scope: some countries focus exclusively on labour services (both web-based and location-based), while others adopt a much broader approach that also encompasses e-commerce, rental services and content-creation activities mediated by platforms. Nevertheless, even countries that target a similar set of activities and digital platforms, employ definitions that differ in important ways, thereby further constraining meaningful cross-country comparison.

<sup>3</sup> OECD/ILO/European Union (2023), Handbook on Measuring Digital Platform Employment and Work OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0ddcac3b-en>

<sup>4</sup> See ILO, 2025. Measuring Digital platform Employment: Country practices and approaches; <https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/measuring-digital-platform-employment-country-practices-and-approaches>

<sup>5</sup> See ILO, 2025. Measuring Digital platform Employment: Country practices and approaches; <https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/measuring-digital-platform-employment-country-practices-and-approaches>

► **Box 1: Examples of broad and narrow definitions**

Examples of broad definitions (digital labour platforms, e-commerce, online rentals, etc.):

- Statistics Canada considers work carried out on “platforms that pay workers directly, those that exercise another form of control, and those that simply connect workers with clients and let them arrange the payment by themselves.”
- Eurostat defines a digital platform worker as “a person who has worked for pay or profit in tasks or activities organised through an internet platform or a phone app, for at least one hour in at least one week, during the reference period.”
- The Philippines Statistics Authority defines digital platform workers as “those wage and salary, and own-account workers that are engaged in digital labour platforms or online work or onsite work for less than 30 hours in a week (part-time worker) or full-time workers (more than 30 hours) but want additional hours of work, on a contract basis through short-term or seasonal casual job/business or work for a different employer on day to day or week to week basis.”

Examples of narrow definitions (labour platforms only):

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines digital platform employment as “the provision of fixed duration labour services, in the form of tasks/jobs which are accessed by the worker through digital platforms and are paid per unit of work delivered through the same platform.”
- The Singaporean Ministry of Manpower’s Research & Statistics Department defines online matching platforms as “labour sharing platforms that serve as intermediaries to match or connect buyers with workers who take up piecemeal or assignment-based work.” Such platforms could be either websites or mobile applications, covering services such as ride-hailing, goods/food delivery, creative work, etc.

Source: Canada: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/240304/dq240304b-eng.pdf?st=UrPFfb7t>;

Eurostat: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment\\_statistics\\_-\\_digital\\_platform\\_workers](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_statistics_-_digital_platform_workers);

Philippines: [https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/ncs/paper-presentations-manuscripts/Initiatives%20to%20Measure%20Gig%20Workers%20and%20Online\\_Embile\\_0.pdf](https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/ncs/paper-presentations-manuscripts/Initiatives%20to%20Measure%20Gig%20Workers%20and%20Online_Embile_0.pdf);

Australia: <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/digital-platform-workers-australia>;

Singapore: <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-In-Singapore-2024.aspx>

Additionally, there are also differences in the reference period used. While some countries follow the standard reference week applied in labour statistics, others extend the recall period to as long as 12 months to increase the likelihood of capturing cases in countries where the frequency of digital platform employment is relatively low, thereby improving the potential for meaningful data dissemination<sup>6</sup>. In addition, as some do such work on a sporadic and ad-hoc basis, extending the reference period also helps to better capture such instances.

**Methodological Differences:** Beyond definitional issues, countries also vary in their survey methodologies. Some identify digital platform employment only among individuals already classified as employed in the LFS, while others identify them from the entire working-age population. Evidence from the latter approach indicates that a small but significant share of those engaging in digital platform work fall outside standard employment, possibly reflecting the sporadic or secondary nature of such activities.

Surveys also differ in their question design. Some rely on a limited number of screening questions, which increases the risk of both false positives (identifying non-platform workers) and false negatives (failing to identify actual platform workers). Others use more detailed question sequences to capture a wider range of activities and improve measurement accuracy.

Designing survey instruments that can reliably identify digital platform workers — without over- or under-estimating their number — remains one of the main challenges for national statistical offices. This underscores the importance of adopting clear strategies to minimize measurement errors and enhance cross-country comparability (ILO, 2025)<sup>7</sup>.

**Digital platform employment prevalence:** As previously described countries use different definitions with different boundaries and reference periods. Estimates from countries applying a broad scope (i.e., including digital labour platforms, e-commerce, online rentals, etc.) suggest

<sup>6</sup> See ILO, 2025. Measuring Digital Platform Employment: Country practices and approaches; <https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/measuring-digital-platform-employment-country-practices-and-approaches>

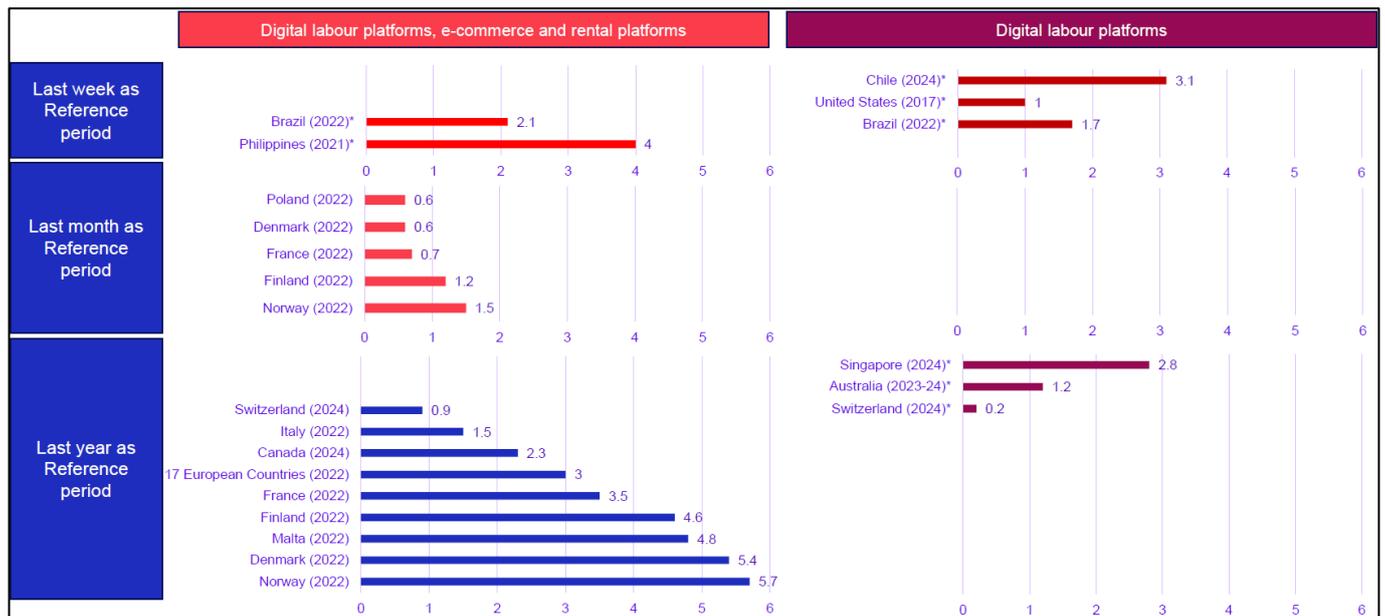
<sup>7</sup> See ILO, 2025. Measuring Digital platform Employment: Country practices and approaches; <https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/measuring-digital-platform-employment-country-practices-and-approaches>

Digital labour platforms:

that 5.7 per cent of the working-age population in Norway has offered some form of good or service via a digital platform (Figure 2). However, estimates in other countries range from 0.9 per cent (Switzerland) to 5.4 per cent (Denmark) when using the past year as the reference

period. The per cent of workers engaged on these platforms declines when the reference period is for the last month, dropping to between 0.6 per cent (Denmark) and 1.5 per cent (Norway).

► **Figure 2: Estimates of workers engaged on digital platforms based on labour force surveys (percentage of adult population)**



Source: ILO compilation based on various surveys conducted by the statistical offices.

Note: Countries marked with an asterisk calculate their estimate as a percentage of the employed population and not as a percentage of the total working age population.

Focusing more narrowly on individuals who have ever worked or earned income only on digital labour platforms, estimates vary between 0.2 (Switzerland) and 2.8 per cent (Singapore) when we consider the reference period for the past year. When the reference period is restricted to the previous week, the proportion of workers engaged on digital labour platforms ranges between 1 per cent (United States) and 3.1 per cent (Chile).

**Global data gaps:** Although an increasing number of countries have sought to measure digital platform employment or some of its components such as activities linked to digital labour platforms only, substantial global data gaps persist. In preparation for the 22nd ICLS, the ILO conducted a country review. Of the 133 countries that responded, only 40 countries reported having undertaken such measurement. The majority were in Europe and Central Asia, including 17 European Union and European

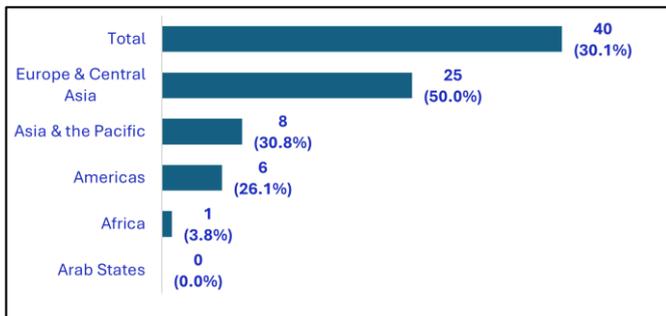
Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries<sup>8</sup> that participated in a Eurostat pilot survey (Figure 3).

Coverage remains particularly limited in Africa and the Arab States, constraining the ability to form a comprehensive global picture of how digital platforms are reshaping labour markets across different regions.

<sup>8</sup> The EFTA consists of four member countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Digital labour platforms:

► **Figure 3. Number of countries that measured digital platform employment or some components of it**



Source: ILO, 2025. Measuring Digital Platform Employment: Country Practices and Approaches.

**Towards more harmonized statistics on digital platform employment:** Given the strong need for more harmonized and globally comparable statistics on digital platform employment, the ILO has initiated the development of an international statistical standard on digital platform work and employment. Acting on a mandate from the 21st ICLS in 2023, the ILO established a dedicated working group

comprising representatives of workers and employers, national statistical offices from all regions, and other international and non-profit organizations.

The aim of this work is to develop a statistical standard to be submitted to the 22nd ICLS in 2028 for discussion and possible adoption. The standard will provide a coherent framework for measuring digital platform work and employment, including clear definitions of its main components and a set of indicators to guide countries in producing relevant statistics. It will also be accompanied by data collection tools and methodological guidance to support national implementation.

This initiative will play a key role in strengthening countries' capacity to generate policy-relevant statistics in this rapidly evolving area and will mark a significant step towards achieving more harmonized and comprehensive global data on digital platform employment.



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