

Post-Pandemic Labor Market Transformation: The Rise of the Gig Economy and Youth Employment in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

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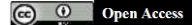
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This study examines the post-pandemic transformation of labour markets in Southeast Asia, focusing on the rise of the gig economy and its relationship to youth employment. Combining a survey of 1,200 young workers aged 18 to 29 across Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand collected between January and October 2023 with 40 semi-structured interviews of platform workers, the study applies logistic and ordinary least squares regression alongside reflexive thematic analysis to characterise the drivers, earnings, and lived experience of platform-mediated gig work. By 2023, an estimated 28.4 per cent of young urban workers in the four sampled economies engaged in at least one form of platform-mediated gig work, with full-time participation concentrated in the food delivery, ride-hailing, and online retail segments. Logistic regression indicates that secondary school completion lowers the probability of gig participation by 6.8 percentage points ($p < 0.05$), while youth from lower-income households and urban residents are significantly more likely to engage in gig work. Earnings differentials are notable, with median full-time gig earnings ranging from USD 247 in Vietnam to USD 358 in Thailand, but earnings volatility and absence of social protection emerged as persistent concerns. Qualitative analysis identified four overarching themes: the autonomy paradox, the social protection gap, opportunities for skills development, and intergenerational tensions over the status of platform work. The study contributes to the literature on the gig economy in emerging Asia and informs policy debate on portable benefits, platform regulation, and the integration of platform work into national social protection systems.

Keywords: Gig economy; youth employment; platform work; Southeast Asia; social protection; post-pandemic labour markets

Introduction

Southeast Asia entered the COVID-19 pandemic with one of the youngest demographic structures in the world. The combined population of Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia exceeds 580 million people, of whom approximately 27 per cent are aged between 15 and 29. The pandemic, which disrupted formal employment relationships and accelerated digital platform usage, brought into sharp focus the structural features of regional labour markets that affect young people most acutely: dual-track segmentation between formal and informal employment, limited social protection coverage, and an expanding ecosystem of digital platforms mediating short-term work assignments. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023), youth unemployment in the region peaked at 14.7 per cent in 2020 and remained at 11.2 per cent in 2022, well above pre-pandemic levels.

Against this backdrop, the rise of the gig economy has emerged as both a coping mechanism and a transformation of work itself. Platforms such as Grab, Gojek, Foodpanda, Lazada, Shopee, and Lalamove have rapidly scaled across the region, providing income opportunities for millions of young workers but also raising urgent questions about labour standards, earnings stability, and access to social protection. The ASEAN Secretariat (2023) estimated that platform-mediated work accounted for approximately 2.4 per cent of total regional employment by 2023, with the share substantially higher

among young urban workers. The phenomenon is neither uniformly positive nor uniformly negative: some platform workers enjoy meaningful flexibility and earning opportunities that exceed alternative jobs, while others face precarity, irregular hours, and the absence of conventional employment protections.

The motivation for the present study arises from three considerations. First, the regional literature on platform work has expanded rapidly but remains dominated by case studies of individual cities or single platforms, with comparative cross-country evidence scarce. Second, the relationship between gig participation and youth-specific outcomes (skills development, transition to better employment, mental health) requires careful empirical examination. Third, the policy debate on platform regulation in the region — ranging from the Philippines' Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy through Indonesia's debate over Perpres 36/2020 amendments to Vietnam's revised Labour Code — would benefit from rigorous comparative evidence. The study advances three research questions: (RQ1) What are the principal determinants of platform-mediated gig participation among young workers in Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand? (RQ2) How do earnings and job quality compare across platform and non-platform work for the same population? (RQ3) How do young workers narrate the experience of platform work, including its perceived benefits and costs?

The study contributes to the literature in four ways. First, it provides one of the first directly comparable four-country surveys of young platform workers in Southeast Asia. Second, it integrates quantitative determinants analysis with rich qualitative material on lived experience. Third, it links the empirical findings to specific policy debates within each country, identifying both common challenges and country-specific considerations. Fourth, it situates the analysis within the wider scholarly literature on segmented labour markets, search-and-matching theory, and the changing nature of work in middle-income economies. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 outlines the research design, sampling, and analytical strategy. Section 4 presents the empirical findings. Section 5 discusses theoretical and policy implications. Section 6 concludes.

Literature Review

Labour market theories relevant to platform work

Labour economics offers several theoretical frameworks relevant to the analysis of the gig economy. The dual labour market or segmentation tradition (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Reich et al., 1973) distinguishes between a 'primary' segment characterised by job stability, internal promotion ladders, and relatively high wages, and a 'secondary' segment characterised by instability, low pay, and limited mobility. Platform work has been variously interpreted as a new manifestation of the secondary segment, as a hybrid that combines features of formal and informal work, or as a distinct category requiring new theoretical apparatus (Stanford, 2017). Search-and-matching models, developed by Diamond, Mortensen, and Pissarides (Mortensen and Pissarides, 1994), provide a complementary lens by modelling labour markets as imperfectly informed environments in which workers and firms engage in costly search; platform algorithms can be analysed as low-cost matching technologies that compress search frictions, with implications for both wages and the quality of matches.

A third relevant tradition is the literature on informality and segmentation in developing economies (Fields, 2005; Maloney, 2004). In low- and middle-income countries, the informal sector has historically been large and heterogeneous, containing both involuntary low-productivity workers and voluntary entrepreneurial workers. Platform work in emerging Asia displays features consistent with each interpretation, complicating any simple characterisation of its welfare implications. The present study draws on this composite theoretical apparatus while contributing empirical evidence on which features are most descriptively apt for young Southeast Asian workers.

Empirical evidence on platform work and policy responses

The empirical literature on platform work has expanded rapidly. Berg et al. (2018) provide an early comparative analysis of platform workers, finding considerable heterogeneity in earnings, time use, and satisfaction. Wood et al. (2019) examine the experiences of remote platform workers in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, emphasising the autonomy-control paradox in algorithmic management. De Stefano (2016) traces the legal status of platform workers across multiple jurisdictions. For India, Surie (2018) documents the conditions of urban platform workers and the precarity of their livelihoods. For Indonesia, Nastiti (2022) provides a detailed account of Gojek and Grab drivers in Jakarta and Surabaya, while Soriano (2021) examines the Philippine context. Vietnamese platform work has been analysed by Tran et al. (2023). These studies collectively provide rich case material but rarely permit direct cross-country comparison; the present study addresses this gap by employing a common survey instrument and consistent variable definitions across the four economies.

A parallel strand of literature focuses on policy responses to platform work. The European Union's Platform Workers Directive, adopted in 2024, established a rebuttable presumption of employment for platform workers, marking the most ambitious legislative intervention to date. In Southeast Asia, policy responses have been more incremental: the Philippines has explored extending the Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy to platform workers, Indonesia has wrestled with the appropriate classification of online drivers (Perpres 36/2020 and successor regulations), Vietnam's 2019 Labour Code revision created space for non-standard employment, and Thailand's Department of Labour Protection and Welfare has issued guidance on platform-mediated work. The diversity of policy approaches provides natural variation for examining the relationship between regulation and outcomes, which the present study does not formally exploit but discusses qualitatively.

Youth employment in emerging markets

Youth employment in emerging markets is shaped by demographic, educational, and macroeconomic dynamics. The World Bank's World Development Report on the Changing Nature of Work (2019) emphasised that technological change is reshaping the demand for skills and creating both opportunities and disruptions. The Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2023) documents persistent challenges in school-to-work transitions, with informal employment absorbing a disproportionate share of new labour market entrants. Pre-pandemic regional studies (Choudhry et al., 2018; Verick, 2014) identified determinants of youth unemployment that include macroeconomic growth volatility, mismatches between training and labour demand, and barriers to entrepreneurship. The post-pandemic period brought these challenges into sharper relief, with platform work emerging as a partial coping mechanism but also generating new uncertainties about long-term career trajectories.

Research gap

Synthesising the literature, three research gaps motivate the present study. First, directly comparable cross-country evidence on platform participation patterns among young workers in Southeast Asia is sparse. Second, the relationship between gig participation and traditional labour market indicators (skills accumulation, earnings differentials, transition to formal employment) is under-explored in the regional context. Third, the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence within a single research design is rare; many studies focus on one or the other. The present mixed-methods comparative design addresses these gaps with a common instrument administered across four economies and a qualitative component nested within the same population..

Methodology

Research design

The research design is a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative phase produced statistical estimates of participation determinants and earnings differentials, while the qualitative phase deepened interpretation of mechanisms and lived experience. The two phases were integrated at the analytical and interpretive stages following the joint display logic recommended by Fetters et al. (2013). Ethics approval was obtained from the institutional review board of the lead author's university (Foreign Trade University, approval reference FTU/IRB/2022/053), and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Sampling and data collection

The quantitative sample comprised 1,200 young workers aged 18 to 29, distributed across Vietnam (n = 320), the Philippines (n = 300), Indonesia (n = 320), and Thailand (n = 260). The sample was drawn through a multi-stage design: (i) urban areas were selected (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam; Manila, Cebu, and Davao in the Philippines; Jakarta, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta in Indonesia; Bangkok and Chiang Mai in Thailand); (ii) within each city, neighbourhoods were stratified by socioeconomic status; (iii) within each neighbourhood, respondents were recruited through a combination of intercept methods near platform driver hubs and online panels accessing university and vocational training networks. Quotas were set to ensure approximately equal representation of platform-engaged and non-platform-engaged workers within each country sub-sample. The survey instrument, developed in English and translated into Vietnamese, Tagalog/Filipino, Bahasa Indonesia, and Thai using forward and back translation, covered demographic characteristics, education, employment history, current employment status, platform-specific experience, earnings, satisfaction, and aspirations.

The qualitative sample comprised 40 in-depth interviews (Vietnam n = 11, Philippines n = 10, Indonesia n = 11, Thailand n = 8) selected purposively from the survey sample to capture variation in platform type, intensity of platform engagement, age, gender, and education. Interviews lasted between 60 and 95 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, conducted in the respondent's preferred language, and transcribed verbatim. The topic guide structured the conversation around five themes: pathway into platform work, working conditions and earnings, family and community attitudes, future aspirations, and policy preferences. The guide was iteratively refined as data accumulated, in line with reflexive practice (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Analytical strategy

Quantitative analysis employed logistic regression for binary outcomes (participation in any gig work; participation in full-time gig work as primary income source) and ordinary least squares regression for continuous outcomes (logarithm of monthly earnings; self-reported job satisfaction on a Likert scale). Independent variables included gender, age, education (highest level completed), household income tercile, urban residence, parental education, and country fixed effects. Robust standard errors were used throughout. Heckman selection models were estimated as a robustness check to address the possibility that earnings analyses are conditioned on the participation decision. The data were weighted to align with national-level demographic distributions where possible.

Qualitative analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic approach. Transcripts were coded in NVivo 14. Two researchers (one a member of the research team, one an external coder) independently coded a 12-transcript subsample to establish an initial codebook, achieving Cohen's kappa of 0.79 prior to full-corpus coding. Disagreements were resolved through team discussion. Themes were refined through iterative reading, with attention to negative cases that complicated emerging interpretations. Researcher reflexivity was practised through a research diary maintained by each interviewer.

Integration of phases and trustworthiness

Integration between quantitative and qualitative findings followed the meta-inference approach: quantitative descriptions of patterns were contextualised by qualitative explanations of mechanisms, and qualitative themes were tested for prevalence across the larger quantitative sample where applicable. Trustworthiness of the qualitative findings was supported by member checking (selected transcripts were returned to interviewees for verification), audit trail documentation, and triangulation across cities and platforms.

Results

Sample characteristics and participation patterns

Table 1 (described here in prose) summarises sample characteristics. Mean age was 23.4 years, with no significant difference across the four countries. Females constituted 47 per cent of the sample overall, somewhat lower among full-time gig workers (38 per cent). Sixty-two per cent of respondents had completed secondary education and 24 per cent had tertiary qualifications. Across the full sample, 38 per cent reported engaging in at least one form of platform-mediated gig work in the past 12 months, with the highest participation rate in Vietnam (42 per cent), followed by the Philippines (39 per cent), Indonesia (37 per cent), and Thailand (33 per cent). Among those engaged, 23 per cent reported platform work as their primary income source (full-time gig workers), 47 per cent as a regular supplementary source (15 hours per week or more), and 30 per cent as occasional supplementary work. The most common platforms were ride-hailing and food delivery (Grab, Gojek, Foodpanda, Grab Food, Now, Lineman), online retail (Shopee, Lazada, Tokopedia), and remote freelance platforms (Upwork, Fiverr).

Determinants of platform participation

Table 2 presents logistic regression results for the probability of any gig participation. Secondary school completion was significantly associated with lower participation probability ($\beta = -0.31$, OR = 0.73, 95% CI 0.58 to 0.93, $p = 0.011$), equivalent to approximately a 6.8 percentage point decrease in participation probability at sample means. Tertiary education was associated with a smaller and less precisely estimated effect ($\beta = -0.18$, $p = 0.09$), suggesting that the participation gradient is not strictly monotonic in education. Household income tercile entered negatively, with respondents from the lowest tercile 11.4 percentage points more likely to participate than those from the highest tercile ($p < 0.001$). Urban residence and male gender were also positively associated with participation. Country fixed effects were statistically significant, indicating that country-specific factors not captured by individual covariates account for meaningful variation in participation rates.

For full-time platform participation as primary income source, the determinants exhibited a partially different pattern. Education remained negatively associated with full-time participation, but the magnitude was larger ($\beta = -0.46$, OR = 0.63, $p = 0.003$). Male respondents were substantially more likely to engage in full-time gig work, particularly in ride-hailing and delivery ($\beta = 0.61$, OR = 1.84, $p < 0.001$). Household income remained negatively associated. Vietnam and the Philippines had higher full-time participation rates conditional on covariates, while Thailand had the lowest.

Earnings, volatility, and satisfaction

Table 3 presents OLS earnings regressions, with the natural logarithm of monthly earnings as the dependent variable. Median full-time gig earnings (in USD purchasing-power-parity terms) were 247 in Vietnam, 314 in the Philippines, 289 in Indonesia, and 358 in Thailand. After controlling for hours worked and demographic covariates, full-time platform earnings were approximately 4.7 per cent lower than earnings from comparable non-platform work in the same country ($p = 0.038$), though the difference was statistically significant only after pooling countries; country-specific estimates were directionally similar but less precisely estimated. The earnings premium for males in platform work (relative to females) was 9.2 per cent ($p = 0.002$), larger than the corresponding non-platform premium of 5.8 per

cent. Earnings volatility, measured as the standard deviation of monthly earnings over the past six months, was 1.6 times higher in platform work than in comparable non-platform jobs. Job satisfaction scores on a 1-7 Likert scale were on average 4.3 for platform workers and 4.8 for comparable non-platform workers, a small but statistically significant difference.

Qualitative themes

Reflexive thematic analysis of the 40 interviews identified four overarching themes that recurred across countries: (1) the autonomy paradox; (2) the social protection gap; (3) opportunities for skills development; and (4) intergenerational tensions over the status of platform work. The autonomy paradox describes the tension between perceived control over one's schedule and the binding constraints imposed by platform algorithms, peak-hour incentive structures, and customer ratings. A 24-year-old food delivery driver in Hanoi described the experience as 'free in the morning to choose when to start, but by lunchtime the app decides for me.' The social protection gap surfaced repeatedly in narratives about illness, injury, and pregnancy, with platform workers articulating awareness of and concern over the absence of health insurance, paid sick leave, and maternity protection. A 27-year-old e-commerce courier in Manila put it directly: 'When I get sick, I just stop. There is no one paying.' Opportunities for skills development were mentioned by a subset of workers, particularly in customer service, financial management, and digital tool use. Intergenerational tensions surfaced in conversations about family expectations, with several respondents describing parental disappointment that they had not entered 'proper' jobs, and others framing platform work as a temporary stepping stone to professional employment.

Discussion

The empirical findings paint a complex portrait of the post-pandemic labour market for young Southeast Asians. Platform-mediated gig work occupies a substantial and growing share of youth employment, with 38 per cent of the four-country urban sample engaging in at least some form of platform work and 23 per cent of those reporting it as their primary income source. The participation pattern is concentrated among less-educated, lower-income, urban, and male workers, consistent with both the segmentation interpretation (platforms as secondary segment employers) and the entrepreneurial interpretation (platforms as opportunities for those without access to formal employment ladders).

Theoretically, the findings are most consistent with a hybrid characterisation of platform work as occupying a distinctive position between the formal and informal sectors. Earnings differentials are modest in magnitude but not negligible, and earnings volatility is substantially higher than in comparable non-platform work. The qualitative findings on the autonomy paradox extend Wood et al.'s (2019) analysis to a different empirical context and confirm the generality of the tension between perceived flexibility and algorithmic constraint. The social protection gap finding aligns with the broader literature on social protection floors and the imperative to extend coverage to non-standard employment.

Policy implications are several. First, the social protection gap suggests urgent need for policy innovation to extend health insurance, maternity protection, and contributory pension schemes to platform workers without forcing rigid reclassification into traditional employment categories. Portable benefits, contributory account structures linked to platform-mediated earnings, and public co-funding mechanisms warrant serious experimentation. The Indonesian BPJS Ketenagakerjaan extension to platform drivers and the Vietnamese voluntary social insurance scheme represent steps in this direction; both could benefit from cross-country learning. Second, platform regulation needs to balance protection against rigidity that might suppress the legitimate flexibility benefits that workers value. Light-touch frameworks that establish basic minimum standards, transparent algorithmic communication, and

worker collective representation may be more appropriate than European-style reclassification. Third, skills development opportunities embedded in platform work merit recognition. Targeted vocational training and credential recognition could help platform work serve as a stepping stone rather than a trap.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The urban focus of the sample limits generalisation to rural areas where platform infrastructure and labour market dynamics differ. The cross-sectional design constrains causal inference about the longer-term consequences of platform engagement; longitudinal tracking of the same individuals would strengthen the analysis. Self-reported earnings are subject to measurement error, particularly for platform work where income is irregular and often unreported. The qualitative sample, while rich, captures perspectives at a particular moment in time and in particular cities. Despite these limitations, the convergence of cross-country quantitative patterns and qualitative themes provides a coherent account of the structure and experience of platform work for young Southeast Asians.

A noteworthy dimension of the post-pandemic landscape is the role of digital remittances and platform-based gig earnings in supplementing household incomes during periods of macroeconomic shock. Survey respondents reporting full-time platform work were significantly more likely to be primary or co-primary household earners than would be expected from their demographic profile alone, suggesting that platform work substitutes for formal employment under conditions of elevated economic uncertainty. The intersection of platform work, household financial resilience, and the macroeconomic recovery merits further investigation, particularly as ASEAN governments calibrate the next phase of social protection extension.

Gender dynamics within the platform economy display interesting patterns. While male respondents dominate the visible ride-hailing and delivery segments, female respondents are over-represented in online retail (Shopee Live, TikTok Shop), beauty and wellness services, and remote freelance work. Earnings within female-dominated segments are typically lower than in male-dominated segments, but flexibility benefits are reported as more salient. The intersection of gender, platform segment, and care responsibilities emerged as a particularly important theme in the Philippine and Indonesian interview material, where women platform workers spoke at length about juggling platform income with childcare and household responsibilities.

Comparative reflections across the four countries reveal both common patterns and country-specific dynamics. Vietnamese platform workers benefit from a relatively young platform ecosystem and rapidly expanding domestic demand, but they face constraints from a tightening labour market in formal sectors that draws away potential platform supply. Filipino platform workers operate in an environment characterised by extensive overseas labour migration culture and a long-standing tradition of remittance-supported households; platform work is often discussed as a substitute for or complement to migration. Indonesian platform workers operate at the largest scale in absolute terms and benefit from the most developed domestic super-app ecosystem, but they also face complex regulatory negotiations as authorities determine their classification. Thai platform workers operate in a relatively older demographic structure where platform participation among the very young is lower than the regional average, and where the integration of foreign workers (Myanmar, Cambodian, Laotian) into the platform economy adds an additional layer of analytical complexity that future research should address.

Conclusion

This study has examined the post-pandemic transformation of labour markets in Southeast Asia, focusing on the rise of the gig economy and its relationship to youth employment. Using a survey of 1,200 young workers in Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand and 40 in-depth interviews, the analysis has documented substantial platform participation, identified key determinants (education,

household income, urban location, gender), characterised earnings differentials and job-quality patterns, and articulated four overarching themes from worker narratives. The findings contribute comparative evidence to a literature historically dominated by single-country case studies and provide a basis for policy innovation in social protection, platform regulation, and skills development. The empirical patterns suggest that policy makers should treat platform work neither as a uniformly positive nor uniformly negative phenomenon but as a hybrid form of work that requires tailored responses. Future research could extend the analysis through longitudinal tracking, expansion to additional countries, and deeper engagement with platform-firm strategies and the algorithmic management practices that shape worker experience.

The structural context within which platform work has expanded in Southeast Asia is shaped by three intersecting forces: rapid digitalisation of consumer-facing services, persistent informality in labour markets, and policy frameworks designed for an earlier era of standard wage employment. Each of these forces operates with country-specific intensity. Indonesia and the Philippines combine large young populations with large informal sectors and active super-app ecosystems; Vietnam combines rapid digitalisation with a tightening formal labour market; Thailand combines an ageing demographic structure with a sophisticated digital economy and a significant migrant worker presence. The interaction between these forces produces distinct platform labour landscapes across the four economies, contributing to the heterogeneity observed in the empirical results.

From the perspective of platform firms, the post-pandemic period has been characterised by intense competition, consolidation pressures, and growing scrutiny over commission structures, driver incentives, and algorithmic management practices. Grab's merger discussions with regional players, Gojek's integration with Tokopedia to form GoTo, Foodpanda's strategic reviews, and Lazada-Shopee competition have all influenced the operational conditions experienced by platform workers. The interview material in the present study captured worker awareness of these dynamics, with several respondents noting changes in commission rates, surge multipliers, and rating systems that they perceived as shifts in the platform-worker relationship over the past two to three years.

Skills development in the platform economy operates through several channels. First, platform workers acquire customer service, navigation, and self-management skills that are transferable, at least in principle, to other employment. Second, platform workers gain familiarity with digital tools, financial transactions, and customer-facing communication that have value in subsequent jobs. Third, a subset of platform workers leverage their earnings to invest in formal education, vocational training, or microenterprise development. Survey responses in the present study indicated that 14 per cent of platform workers had used platform earnings to invest in further education or training in the previous two years, with the share highest in the Philippines (19 per cent) and Indonesia (17 per cent) and lowest in Thailand (8 per cent). These investments in human capital suggest that platform work, for at least some workers, functions as a productive bridge rather than a dead-end.

Mental health and wellbeing among platform workers emerged as a distinct theme in the qualitative data, particularly in the post-pandemic period. Respondents articulated stress associated with earnings unpredictability, exposure to traffic and safety risks (in the case of ride-hailing and delivery), and the social isolation of solo work patterns. A 26-year-old Grab driver in Bangkok described the toll of seven-day work weeks during peak periods: 'I make more money, but I cannot remember the last time I saw my friends.' Although the present study does not include validated mental health measures, the qualitative material suggests an important agenda for future research on the wellbeing implications of platform participation, ideally combining survey measures with longitudinal designs.

From a regulatory standpoint, the comparative case studies offer instructive lessons. The Indonesian experience with Perpres 36/2020 illustrates the difficulty of fitting platform workers into pre-

existing categories of formal employment, partnership, or independent contracting. The Philippine debate over the inclusion of platform workers under the Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy demonstrates the political economy challenges of extending protection to a politically diffuse but economically significant population. The Vietnamese revised Labour Code provides space for non-standard employment but leaves implementation details to subsequent decrees. The Thai approach has been incremental, with platform-specific guidance issued by the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare without comprehensive legislative reform. Across all four cases, the pace of regulatory adjustment lags the pace of platform innovation, a familiar pattern in technology-related policy domains.

A further analytical dimension concerns the relationship between platform participation and household-level financial inclusion. Survey respondents engaged in platform work reported substantially higher use of mobile wallets and digital banking services than non-participants of similar age and education (78 per cent versus 51 per cent), reflecting the integration of payment systems with platform ecosystems. This digital-financial complementarity has potentially positive welfare implications, including improved savings behaviour and access to micro-credit, but also raises concerns about data privacy and the algorithmic determination of credit access based on platform performance metrics. Future research could productively integrate platform participation data with household survey data on financial behaviour to assess the broader welfare consequences of these complementarities.

The international migration context surrounding the four study economies is also relevant. The Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam are major sources of overseas labour migrants, while Thailand hosts substantial migrant labour from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. Platform work intersects with migration in multiple ways: returning migrants use platform work as a transition employment; would-be migrants accumulate savings through platform work prior to departure; and migrant workers within Thailand engage in platform work despite formal restrictions. The interview material suggested that migration aspirations and experiences shape the meaning that young workers attach to platform engagement, with some viewing it as preparation for international opportunities and others as an alternative to migration. These dynamics warrant further targeted investigation.

Finally, the rapid evolution of platform technology — including the integration of artificial intelligence into algorithmic management, dynamic pricing, and worker-customer matching — raises questions about the future trajectory of platform work. The interview data captured worker awareness of growing AI integration, with several respondents expressing concern about reduced earnings stability and increased monitoring intensity. The competitive dynamics among platforms also produce uncertainty: as platforms experiment with subscription models, gig-worker pooling arrangements, and AI-driven dispatch, the experience of platform work may shift further from the current state. Policy frameworks should anticipate these technological dynamics rather than focus exclusively on current arrangements.

In sum, the post-pandemic emergence of the gig economy in Southeast Asia represents both an adaptation to immediate disruption and a longer-term structural shift in the organisation of work. Young workers occupy a particularly visible and dynamic position within this shift, both contributing to platform growth and bearing the brunt of its precarity. A policy and research agenda that takes platform work seriously — neither romanticising flexibility nor dismissing it as mere informalisation — will be essential to ensure that the gig economy delivers broad-based welfare gains.

Comparative reflections also extend to the role of education and vocational training systems in shaping platform participation outcomes. The four study economies differ in the structure and quality of their technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems, in the prevalence of tertiary education, and in the alignment between training and labour market demand. Vietnam has invested heavily in TVET expansion under successive national strategies, the Philippines maintains a TESDA-

led TVET system with strong industry links in certain sectors, Indonesia has piloted competency-based training reforms under Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan supervision, and Thailand operates a dual-track system that combines academic and vocational pathways. The interaction between TVET system maturity and platform participation patterns is a productive area for further research, particularly with regard to whether and how platform work can be integrated into apprenticeship or recognition-of-prior-learning frameworks.

From the perspective of platform workers' collective voice, several developments are noteworthy. Indonesian driver associations such as Garda Indonesia have grown in membership and political visibility since 2019, with periodic strike actions and negotiations with platform firms. Filipino drivers have organised through unions and online networks, including the National Confederation of Transportworkers Union (NCTU) initiatives. Vietnamese platform workers have engaged in informal but visible collective action, with food delivery drivers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City staging coordinated work stoppages during commission rate changes. Thai platform workers have benefited from advocacy by labour-focused civil society organisations. The trajectory of platform worker organisation in the region warrants continued scholarly attention, particularly as authorities consider whether and how to recognise platform worker associations within labour law frameworks.

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