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The digital economy has led to the emergence of new forms of employment over the past years, like crowd-work, casual work and ICT-based mobile work. These forms of work relationships are increasingly gaining popularity globally and are emblematic of a significant change within non-standard forms of employment. Crowd work through on-line platforms has effectively reduced transaction costs and bolstered the rise of casual or independent workers. Though crowd work is considered as a positive development in the world of work not only for its high flexibility and capacity to meet individuals' needs, but it also raises some concerns with regard to living wages and social security benefits, caring for workers' satisfaction and the de-responsibility of the firms in providing training. This mechanism has been argued to foster productivity but it also challenges the existing business model and most importantly social rights as it circumvents the existing regulatory framework and operates informally. Recently, some studies have focussed on legal issues, working conditions and income security, and this paper makes an attempt to contribute to this literature with the aim of providing policy options that could help improve the working conditions and provide sufficient income for workers engaged in the platform economy.

The paper begins with an analysis of the motivation of workers to pursue crowd work, their present work and income security and whether crowd work is their main source of income. We also analyse the extent to which they depend upon their other incomes and income of other household members for maintaining their livelihoods. We then analyse whether the work on these platforms provides workers with access to social protection (health insurance, pensions, and other benefits) or are they dependent upon their other jobs or family members for social protection. Finally, we look into whether there are any solidarity groups or online forums where the workers could discuss their problems or consult for advice. The analysis is based on a Crowdwork survey of 2600 workers on five platforms – Amazon Mechanical Turk, Crowdflower, Guru, Prolific Academic and Clickworker, spread across different countries and undertaken during early 2017. The survey of workers across the different platforms provides insights about the similarities and difference in the level of protection to the workers and also brings out country-specific challenges which are important for policy formulation.