# ODI
## Development Progress

# A good gig?

## The rise of on-demand domestic work

Abigail Hunt and Fortunate Machingura

Cover image: A domestic worker in
Johannesburg. © Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty
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# Executive summary

**Key messages**

- Women make up 80% of the 67 million domestic workers globally. The on-demand economy for domestic work is growing rapidly in developing countries. The potential benefits and risks attached to this burgeoning area of domestic work may affect women disproportionately.
- On-demand platforms offer some benefits to domestic workers, such as choice over working times, tracking of hours worked and wages earnt, and potentially better remuneration compared with other forms of domestic work.
- Although some benefits can be identified, overall the on-demand economy threatens domestic workers' access to decent work. Our research identifies low and insecure incomes, discrimination, further entrenchment of unequal power relations within the traditional domestic work sector, and the erosion of established labour and social protections as key challenges.
- On-demand companies have adapted to developing country contexts, notably by taking steps to engage workers by overcoming digital and financial divides.
- The infancy of the on-demand domestic work economy in developing countries means it is not too late to raise standards. This will involve proactive efforts by companies to 'design-in' good practice, as well as by government to ensure an integrated future policy, legal, practice and research agenda.

There are an estimated 67 million domestic workers globally, 80% of whom are women. Many of them work in low-paid, insecure and exploitative conditions. Technology-focused companies linking households to domestic workers through 'on-demand' platforms are attempting to disrupt the traditional sector, claiming to offer rapidly accessible, cheap domestic services to households, and flexible, well-remunerated economic opportunities to domestic workers. While still in its infancy, this 'Uberisation of domestic work' is growing rapidly in developing countries – for example, reports suggest that on-demand domestic work companies in India are expanding by up to 60% month-on-month.

Yet there remains a dearth of research on this emerging trend to examine whether or not the above claims are true. This working paper presents a scoping study, and a first step towards addressing that gap. It explores the rise of on-demand domestic work platforms and the experiences of households and domestic workers using them, to identify priorities for future policy, practice and research.

We find that the on-demand economy offers benefits to service purchasers, who cite access to cheap, convenient and reliable domestic services which can help to support work-life balance as key benefits. Some promise to improve conditions in the traditional domestic work sector is also identified. For example, the on-demand economy offers workers some choice over when they work, and platform technology can enable workers to track hours worked and wages earnt. Participants also perceived on-demand work to provide better remuneration than other forms of domestic work – particularly live-in domestic worker wages.

Overall, however, on-demand working arrangements risk undermining progress towards the achievement of domestic work as decent work, particularly in countries with relatively advanced regulatory frameworks. Empirical evidence from South Africa reveals overall low and insecure incomes, discrimination and the erosion of established labour and social protections as a result of the 'independent contractor' status of on-demand workers.

In addition, on-demand platforms are designed to facilitate service purchaser choice, trust and service quality assurance. This includes systems to rate and review workers, and the ability to select workers based on demographic characteristics such as age or gender. These systems disproportionately benefit purchasers, and appear to reinforce the unequal power relations and discriminatory structures underpinning the traditional domestic work sector.

Companies have taken innovative steps to overcome gendered digital and financial divides, which have notably focused on engaging workers using a range of context-relevant high- and low-tech methods. However, further concerted effort is required to ensure poor and marginalised groups are not left behind as the on-demand economy becomes further established as a route to economic opportunity in developing countries.

The infancy of on-demand domestic work in developing countries means that it is not too late to raise standards and ensure a fair deal for domestic workers. This will involve governments ensuring policy, legal and regulatory frameworks are fit for purpose. Companies should also act by proactively designing equality, anti-discrimination and safety into platform models. Engaging domestic workers and their collectives as well as service purchasers in active dialogue to ensure the system works for all concerned will be critical for success.

# 1. Introduction
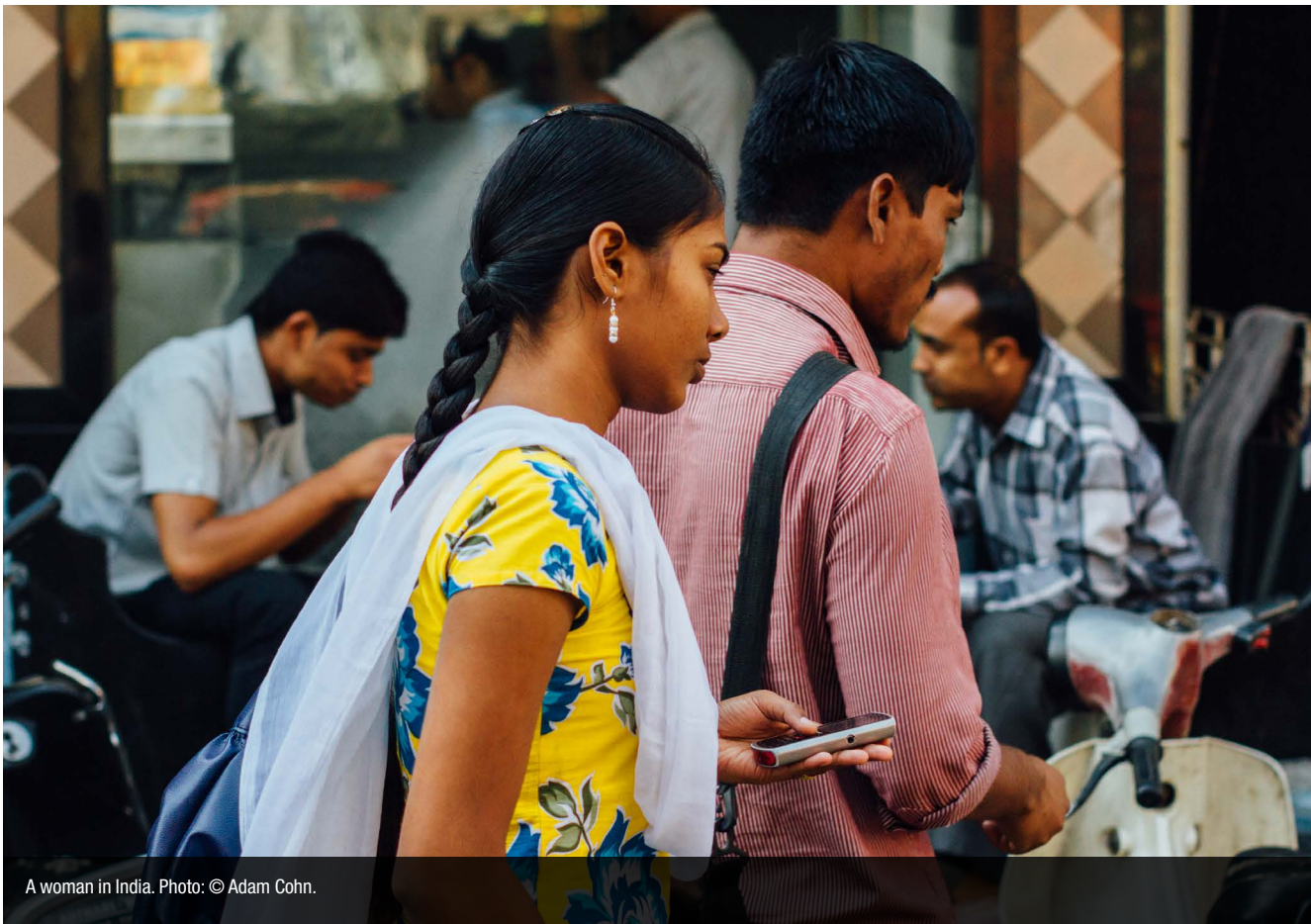


A woman in India. Photo: © Adam Cohn.

The world of work is changing. Technology-focused companies are creating a new 'on-demand' culture bringing together workers and the purchasers of their services, which is transforming consumption and employment patterns globally (Manyika et al., 2016; ILO, 2016a). Perhaps the best known example of this is Uber, which is simultaneously innovating and challenging established ways of operating within the taxi industry.

On-demand platforms are emerging and growing rapidly in developing countries,[1] driven by increased digital connectivity and availability of financial services, as well as an increasingly tech-savvy and affluent middle class. This includes platforms which facilitate the access of consumers to a range of care and domestic work services, such as cooking, cleaning, child and elderly care. Examples include MyDidi in India, Domestly and SweepSouth in South Africa, and Aliada in Mexico, which offer a range of cleaning, laundry and ironing services as a basic package. In many cases, these companies are expanding within countries, with new start-ups appearing regularly in the

market – recent reports suggest that dedicated on-demand domestic work platforms in India are expanding up to 60% month-on-month (cited in Mehta Kadakia, 2016).

The traditional domestic work sector is substantial and well-established: there are 67 million domestic workers globally, 80% of whom are women (ILO, 2016b). The sector contributes an estimated 7.5% of global women's wage employment, a figure likely to be modest given the highly informal and 'hidden' nature of domestic work (ILO, 2013a). Domestic workers support household maintenance, taking care of the home, children, the elderly, the sick and in some cases providing psychosocial support and stability to otherwise broken families (Chen, 2011; Albin and Mantouvalou, 2012; du Toit, 2013). The value of domestic workers in the global economy and wider social development of populations is no longer a contested terrain. However, the sector is characterised by informality, insecurity and in too many cases, exploitation and abuse of workers who remain without legal recourse to justice. Therefore, any new development which offers the potential to disrupt working

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1   A developing country, also called a less developed country or underdeveloped country, is a nation or sovereign state with a less developed industrial base and a low Human Development Index (HDI) relative to other countries (O'Sullivan et al., 2003).

conditions merits close attention. Could the on-demand economy support tangible improvements to the prevalent poor conditions in which domestic workers find themselves?

To date, there is little research exploring the growing on-demand domestic service economy in developing countries. This study attempts to fill that gap. It is not exhaustive, rather a first-cut attempt to scope out some of the major implications of the trend towards the 'Uberisation of domestic work'.[2] As such, this paper is focused on relatively young start-up platform companies.[3] A global desk-based review was carried out and empirical evidence was gathered through interviews with global expert key informants, and further complemented by an in-depth country case study in South Africa.

In this working paper, we present preliminary analysis of how on-demand domestic work platforms operate in different developing country contexts, and the experiences of domestic workers and services purchasers who have engaged with them. Through research and better understanding of these issues in some of the world's developing countries, we hope to shed light on the relevance of the on-demand domestic work economy to the established global development agenda (see Box 1).

On-demand platforms offer a range of benefits to purchasers – that is the person or household buying-in home help – enabling them to access cheap, convenient and reliable domestic services to support their work-life balance. The research also identified some potential to improve conditions in the traditional domestic work sector. For example, on-demand platforms can allow workers – the people using on-demand platforms to seek work – to track hours worked and wages earnt through the platform. This gives workers some choice over when they work, and in some cases, provides better remuneration than other forms of domestic work – particularly in comparison to live-in domestic worker wages.

Despite this, it is clear that the on-demand economy poses significant challenges to workers, corroborating evidence from the wider on-demand economy which highlights that gaps in work-related protections leave workers in highly precarious situations, and ultimately widen social inequality (Harris and Krueger, 2015). Low and insecure income, discrimination and abuse, erosion of the traditional employment relationship and associated labour and social protections are just some of the ways in which on-demand platforms place domestic workers in vulnerable situations. In addition, large groups of workers may be excluded from any benefits the on-demand economy provides altogether – persistent gendered digital and financial divides mean that many are unable to access or use the technology through which on-demand platforms operate.

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2   See: http://www.developmentprogress.org/blog/2016/09/15/what-uber-isation-domestic-work-means-women

3   For instance, in South Africa, domestic work app companies SweepSouth and Domestly started in 2014 and 2015 respectively. In Mexico and the US, companies appeared earlier, including Aliada and Homejoy respectively, both of which started operations in 2012.

While on-demand platform technology holds the potential to increase workers' access to economic opportunities and improve the experience of working, in its current form, on-demand work is not automatically empowering and there is great risk that marginalised groups will remain excluded. Therefore, we propose urgent action to ensure that the Uberisation of domestic work evolves to the benefit of all, and especially for those who currently stand to gain the least from it. The time to build equality of opportunity, fairness and anti-discrimination into the on-demand domestic work economy is now.

# 2. The on-demand economy and domestic work in developing countries



A domestic worker in Johannesburg, South Africa. Photo: © Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage.

## 2.1 What is the on-demand economy?

Across the world, a new wave of digital 'gig-economy' platforms accessed via information and communication technology (ICT) is bringing together workers, and purchasers of their services. Companies operating within diverse for-profit business models act as intermediaries which enable purchasers to use web or mobile-based platforms to order timed and monetised tasks from an available provider, usually taking a fee or commission at the moment the service is paid for or completed. Recent developments in ICT mean that services can be selected and purchased almost instantly, using algorithms or similar automated systems built into the platform, which minimises ongoing transaction costs to the company (Manyika et al., 2015).

The operating model of gig-economy platforms can be divided into two categories: 'crowdwork' and 'on-demand economy'. Crowdwork refers to tasks commissioned and carried out virtually, via the Internet. Service purchasers advertise specific tasks on the platform, which enables the matching of the purchaser with suitably skilled crowdworkers across the world, who can complete the task for payment. In this model of work, the crowdsourcers and the crowdworker rarely experience face-to-face interaction. Perhaps the best-known global crowdwork platform is Amazon Mechanical Turk, which facilitates tasks including data collection and input, information searches and spreadsheet design.

The on-demand economy refers to specified tasks which are carried out locally, with the service purchaser

and provider based in the same physical location. This is organised via online platforms, typically mobile applications or 'apps', by companies which often set the terms of service, including fees, minimum service quality standards, and have some role in workforce selection and management (De Stefano, 2016). On-demand platforms are not homogeneous: some match supply and demand of clearly defined tasks such as cleaning, running errands and home-repairs, while others offer more specialist services such as legal services (Aloisi, 2015). Perhaps the best-known example globally is Uber, which links purchasers requiring taxi-style private hire transport to a pool of available drivers via its platform.

It is the latter category of on-demand economy which this paper focuses on.

## 2.2 The current debate surrounding the on-demand economy

The proliferation of on-demand platforms globally has been accompanied by increasing debate on their different implications for service purchasers and workers, and for the wider economy. A brief overview of that debate is provided in this section.

Although global data remains scarce, analysis overwhelmingly points to the increased role of on-demand platforms in organising service provision and purchasing, in both traditional and 'new' sectors in the years to come. For example, one recent estimate suggests that on-demand household and professional services generated €550 million in 2015 in Europe alone, a figure projected to rise considerably by 2025 (Vaughan and Daverio, 2016; Brinkley, 2016).

On-demand companies generally emphasise the ease of use and quick access to services, service quality control via ratings and review systems, and the affordability of services as the major benefits to service purchasers. On the worker side, proponents highlight increased access to economic opportunities as the primary benefit, with the on-demand economy effectively harnessing workers' under-utilised assets and skills. Furthermore, workers' self-employed status provides independence and flexible working schedules, allowing them to balance remunerated activity with other work, study, leisure or family-related activities, and enabling them to avoid fixed working hours by engaging in paid activities via platforms at their preferred time (Hall and Krueger, 2015; Harris and Krueger, 2015).

Recent research posits that gig-economy work could have real economic benefits by raising labour force participation, stimulating consumption and boosting productivity, but warns that key challenges will need to be addressed to make on-demand work feasible and satisfying for workers (Manyika et al., 2016). This is reflective of academic literature and the increasing media coverage,[4] which identifies major challenges within the on-demand economy largely relating to the conditions of workers.

Evidence from the US and Europe suggests that for higher-skilled and higher-paid workers, many of the reported benefits of on-demand work hold true (Manyika et al., 2016). Yet current on-demand platform models have been associated with negative impacts on employment quality by restructuring the workforce in a way that exploits workers, creating a 'race to the bottom' for low-paid workers (Zook et al., 2010; Isaac, 2014).

The often intermittent nature of tasks offered by platforms can lead to low-income levels and poor income security, notably for those engaging in the on-demand economy with the lowest overall income-levels. A recent study found that income security and income level were the two key areas where independent gig-economy workers reported less satisfaction than traditionally employed workers. In addition, those engaging by choice reported a greater work-life satisfaction than those who do it out of necessity, which includes the 'financially strapped' (Manyika et al., 2016).

On-demand business models have been identified as a driver of worker dissatisfaction. Models often rely on short-term financing coupled with ambitious growth expectations from investors, which places high pressure on profit margins and shifts risk onto workers often classified by platforms as 'independent contractors' (Burrow and Byhovskaya, 2016). Key challenges related to independent contractor status involve low-income level and security, as independent contractors are not generally subject to minimum wage regulation, as well as significantly hindered access to much labour and social protection which would accompany a more traditional standard employment relationship (ibid.; De Stefano 2016).

Yet a number of successful legal challenges have recently been brought by on-demand workers who dispute their classification as independent contractors, arguing that they are subject to strict terms set by the platform and are therefore working in a misclassified employment relationship, and laying claim to benefits such as a minimum wage and basic protections.[5] Recent examples of such litigation include the Aslam, Farrar and Others vs Uber case in the UK (October 2016), and the Berwick vs Uber case in the US (June 2015). These appear to have paved the way for further discussion around on-demand service provider status and the associated benefits in different contexts.

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4    See: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/oct/28/uber-uk-tribunal-self-employed-status

5    For the UK ruling see: https://www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/aslam-and-farrar-v-uber-reasons-20161028.pdf and for the USA ruling, see: http://digitalcommons.law.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1988&context=historical

**Figure 1: Number of people and share of the global population using the Internet, 2006-2015**
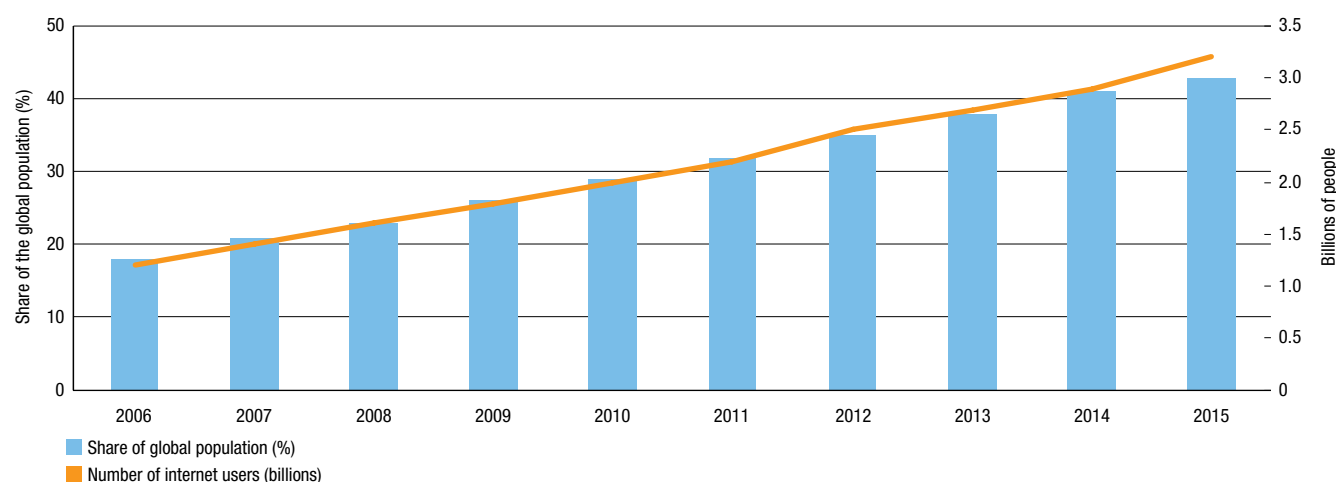


*Source: ITU (2015) data cited in Internet.org (2016), p. 4.*

## 2.3 The growth of the on-demand economy in developing countries

Evidence and analysis of the on-demand economy has overwhelmingly focused on industrialised countries and regions such as the US and Europe, which is understandable given the longer-established presence of on-demand platforms in these countries. Yet although on-demand platforms are increasingly prevalent globally, their effects are potentially different for developed and developing economies. In developing countries, they have taken advantage of rapid growth in digital connectivity and have often been adapted to fit the capacity of local infrastructure (Ramalingam et al., 2016).

Firstly, the on-demand economy relies on Internet connectivity to organise service purchasing and provision, and as such has been driven by and scaled up because of the exponential growth of the Internet in the developing world. Accurate data on Internet use is scarce, but the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) demonstrates its exponential growth in its estimates for 2016, which suggest that there were about 898 million more Internet users than in 2013 – 47.5% of the global population is now estimated to be using the Internet as illustrated in Figure 1. In the developing world, data suggests that only 4 in every 10 people use the Internet.[6] Given this low threshold, the trajectory is likely to continue on an upward trend (ITU, 2016b).

Data suggests that most people are using mobile devices to connect to the Internet – indeed, this is the only way to connect to the Internet in much of the world (Internet.org, 2016). Related to this, mobile phone adoption has also increased with an estimated 65% of the world population being unique

mobile phone subscribers, and half of them with access to the Internet on their phones as of 2016, although usage varies markedly across and within regions (GSMA, 2016a).

For example, in Africa, GSMA (2016b) reports that 46% of the population (more than half a billion people) are subscribed to mobile services, dominated by users in Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa who collectively account for almost 30% of the continent's total subscriber base. Future subscriber projections point to an estimated 725 million unique subscribers by 2020 through Nigeria, Ethiopia and Tanzania, which will collectively add another additional 30% to the current subscriber base (GSMA, 2016b). In 2015, mobile based technologies contributed a high of 3.8 million jobs, equivalent to an estimated $150 billion of economic value. By 2020, the figures are likely to increase to about 4.5 million jobs, equivalent to $210 billion (7.6% of GDP) as more and more markets reap the benefits and efficiency of increased usage of mobile phone-based services (GSMA, 2016b).

Given that the on-demand economy has to date been organised predominantly through app-based platforms, it is relevant that basic phones are increasingly being supplanted by so-called feature phones[7] in much of the world, as well as by smartphones – though levels of smartphone connection remain low in most developing countries. In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), for example, only 16% of mobile connections are via smartphone (GSMA, 2015a: 32). However, in all regions, as prices of smartphones fall, their share is expected to increase dramatically – by 2020, it is predicted that they will account for most handsets in all regions (Figure 2).

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6   Data from ITU World Telecommunications/ICT Indicators database, 2016. Available: http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx

7   Feature phones are handsets with one or more functions beyond voice calling and text messaging, but are not as extensive as a smartphone. These functions are: QWERTY/AZERTY keyboard, touchscreen, ability to access the internet and ability to download mobile applications (GSMA, 2015c).

**Figure 2: Share of smartphones as a share of total handsets by region, 2013-2020**
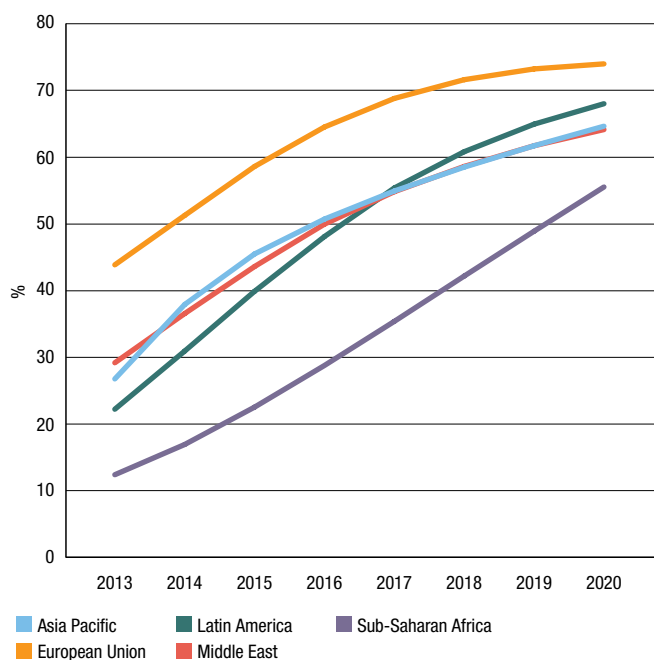


Source: GSMA, 2015b: 23.

While digital technologies have proliferated, they have not reached everyone. The 'gender digital divide' has been described as 'one of the most significant inequalities amplified by the digital revolution' (Moolman et al., 2007). Women are 14% less likely to own a mobile phone than men in developing countries (which translates into 200 million fewer women owning phones); they are 50-60% less likely to do so in India and 10-40% less likely in SSA (GSMA, 2015c). Moreover, women in the developing world are up to 25% less likely to be online than men, and in some parts of the world this figure rises to up to 70% owing to disparities in literacy and in education (Internet. org, 2016: 35-36), as well as 'entrenched socio-cultural attitudes about the role of women in society' (Antonio and Tuffley, 2014: 673). The World Wide Web Foundation reports[8] that access alone does not translate to social and economic empowerment (Jellema and Brudvig, 2015).

There can be little doubt that the expansion of mobile Internet has proved to be fertile ground for the emergence of on-demand companies in developing countries, as more people have access and are intent on using that access to make their lives better and or more comfortable. However,

gender inequalities in access to and use of technologies are likely to shape women's ability to access work: an assessment of 10 cities reveal that cities with higher gender equality gaps in education levels present the highest gender gaps in Internet access and use (ibid.).

A second key area concerns financial divides: payments for on-demand economy services are generally made and received through formal bank accounts, which potentially poses a significant barrier to operations in developing countries. It is estimated that about 2.5 billion people globally lack access to formal financial services, although the share of adults with a bank account has increased rapidly – by 11 percentage points since 2011 (GSMA, 2015b: 10; Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2015). The extent of account penetration varies markedly by region. Among developing regions, it is lowest in the Middle East (14%) and highest in East Asia Pacific (EAP) (69%). A lower share of women have an account than men in all developing regions but the gender gap is relatively low – 4 percentage points in the developing world and at the extreme, 9 percentage points in South Asia (Figure 3, overleaf).

A third area relates to the nature of labour markets in developing countries, as highlighted by Fanggidae et al. (2016). First, high levels of informality may mean workers in the on-demand economy transition from previously entirely unorganised, informal self-employment to a more formal, if not regular, work arrangement. Second, poor employment outcomes in the formal economy may provide incentives for workers to transition into the on-demand economy.

While infrastructure and practical constraints, such as access to digital and financial technologies, are closing rapidly in many developing countries, many of the same countries are facing significant decent work deficits compounded by weak labour and competition standards, and their intermittent enforcement. Yet the growth of both the Internet and 'rising middle' – a growing group of middle-income earners with disposable income (Kharas, 2010; Birdsall, 2010) – indicates that the on-demand economy is likely to increase its reach. Therefore, ensuring that gender-responsive regulatory and policy measures are put in place to close digital and financial divides in parallel with decent job creation, including for the poorest, is a pressing concern (Burrow and Byhovskaya, 2016), and one which is closely linked with the rapid expansion of the on-demand economy in developing countries (see Box 2, overleaf).

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8   The World Wide Web Foundation conducted surveys in urban poor areas in 10 countries to assess how women are using the Internet to access work.

**Figure 3: Share of all adults and of women with a bank account by region, 2014**
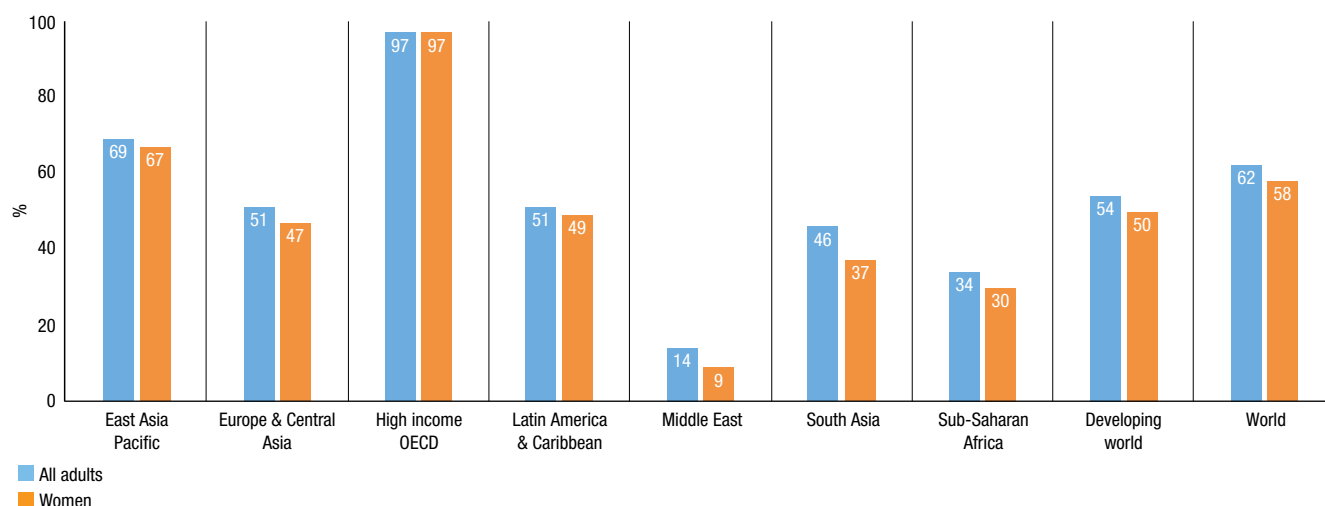


*Source: Elaboration of data in Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2015: 84.*

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**Box 2: What is decent work?**

Decent work, as defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, is employment that meets the commitments stated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 7. This commitment means that decent work should recognise, respect and uphold a person's fundamental rights and freedoms regarding work conditions, occupational safety, fair compensation, and respect of the overall, social, mental and physical well-being of the worker in his/her employment. The ILO reiterates this further, stressing the need to uphold principles of job security, family social security, career development prospects, social inclusion, participation and freedom to create progressive unions to organise and express their concerns. To this end, the ILO has framed structural dimensions of decent work through a ten indicator measurement framework used to statistically quantify and legally hold employers accountable to employees on decent work. Four strategic and overlapping pillars of the framework shape the decent work agenda: (a) International labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work; (b) Employment creation; (c) Social protection; and (d) Social dialogue and tripartism. The indicators are:

1. employment opportunities
2. adequate earnings and productive work
3. decent working time
4. combining work, family and personal life
5. work that should be abolished
6. stability and security of work
7. equal opportunity and treatment in employment
8. safe work environment
9. social security
10. social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation.

Source: ILO, 2013b.

# 3. On-demand domestic work



A woman using mobile technology in Aurangabad, India. Photo: © Simone D. McCourtie/World Bank.

## 3.1 An overview of the traditional organisation of paid domestic work

Unpaid care and domestic work, essential to maintaining the labour force and for human well-being, is disproportionately carried out by women family members as a result of gender and social norms (Cook and Ravazi, 2012; Hunt and Samman, 2016). However, women's increasing labour force participation, an ageing population and paid work intensification have led to an increase in occupational domestic work globally (ILO, 2010).

According to the recent ILO Convention No. 189, a domestic worker is 'any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship' (Article 1). A domestic worker may work on a full-time or part-time basis, may be

employed by a single household or by multiple employers, may be residing in the household of the employer (live-in worker) or may be living in his or her own residence (live-out) (Chen, 2011). They perform various household tasks which are not always be well-defined, but may include cleaning, cooking, gardening, guarding the house, and taking care of children or the elderly (ibid.; Albin and Mantouvalou, 2012).

Although precise identification of the domestic workforce is challenging,[9] recent estimates suggest there are at least 67 million domestic workers globally, and they are often at the intersection of several axes of disadvantage. It is a highly gendered occupation with over 80% of these domestic workers being women (ILO,

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9   It is difficult to precisely pinpoint the number of domestic workers globally because of difficulties in defining domestic work, variation in domestic work classifications at country level, and the hidden and informal nature of the work itself. See ILO 2010 and 2013a for further discussion.

**Figure 4: Ratio of average wages of female domestic workers to female workers in 11 countries**
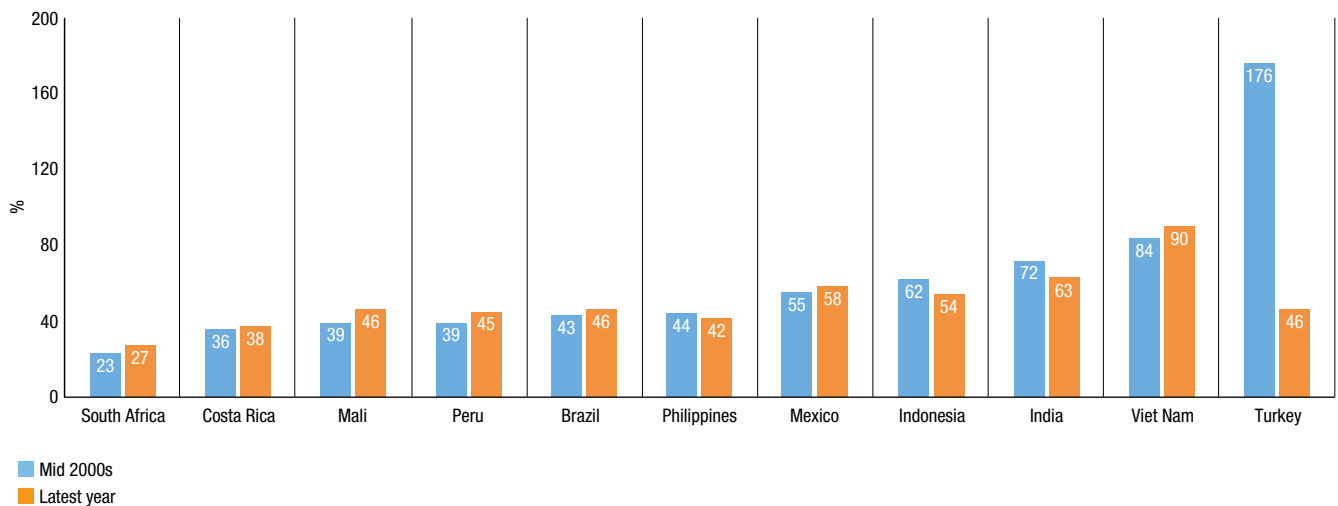


Source: *Elaboration of data in Oelz and Rani, 2015: 7.*

2016b).[10] An estimated 17% of domestic workers are migrants and they are often from marginalised racial or ethnic groups (ILO, 2013a; Oelz and Rani, 2015: 7).[11] Domestic work is a substantial proportion of women's wage employment, accounting for 7.5% of women's wage employment worldwide, and a far greater share in some regions (ILO, 2016b).

While for some women paid domestic work offers a pathway to a sustainable income on fair terms, many workers experience severe exploitation and abuse as well as unpredictable and insecure working hours, and little influence or control over their working arrangements (Hunt and Samman, 2016). Globally, 57% of all domestic workers (29.7 million individuals) have no limitations on their working hours, and often work longer hours than the national averages, particularly in developing countries. For example, in Nepal, domestic workers worked an average of 52 hours per week even though the national average was 39 hours (ILO, 2016c).[12] In addition, many domestic workers work significant periods of on-call time (ibid.).

Data on domestic worker earnings is limited, but existing data suggests wages are significantly lower than country averages, often below the minimum wage, and lower for female workers. Data available for 11 countries suggests the share of domestic worker wages was far below the average female worker (with the seemingly anomalous case of Turkey), as Figure 4 demonstrates (Oelz and Rani, 2015). Low wages can be linked to the lack of working time arrangements, with earnings not tied to actual hours worked. This is particularly the case for live-in workers or when the pay is task-based and not time-based (Ibid).

Domestic workers are often unprotected by labour legislation, for example laws on minimum wages or working time.[13] Research indicates that only 10% of domestic workers benefitted from labour laws to the same extent as other workers, while nearly 30% of the world's domestic workers are completely excluded from national labour laws (ILO, 2013a). Furthermore, of the 67 million domestic workers globally, an estimated 60 million are excluded from social security coverage (ILO, 2016b). For example, almost 40% per of domestic workers have no right to paid maternity leave (ILO, 2016c).

This low remuneration and poor working conditions is linked to the invisibility of domestic work, which takes place in private households and often remains undocumented and informal despite formalisation efforts in a number of countries (ILO, 2010; ILO, 2013a). Domestic work is often undervalued in monetary terms as it replaces unpaid work traditionally carried out by women, which remains largely unrecognised and culturally devalued as it is not seen as adding productive economic value (for further discussion see Hunt and Samman, 2016).

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10 Regional gender differences exist – for example, women's engagement ranges from 63% in the Middle East, to 92% in Latin America and the Caribbean (ILO, 2016).

11 See Oelz and Rani (2015: 7): 'In some of the countries under analysis, domestic workers largely belong to particular ethnic communities or social groups, like African Blacks in South Africa, or Scheduled Castes or Tribes in India. However, in others the composition of the workforce in the sector is much more mixed'.

12 Similarly, domestic workers reported working long hours in Indonesia (51.6 hours), Malaysia (65.9 hours), Qatar (60 hours), Namibia (62 hours), and Tanzania (63 hours) (ILO, 2016).

13 Even where minimum wage provisions are in place, domestic workers often do not benefit. For example, many do not enjoy relevant protections in Brazil and the Netherlands because they work below the minimum wage threshold of two days per week for a single employer (ILO, 2016c).

As a result of these factors, domestic work is often not considered 'real' or regular work, which has contributed significantly to continued patchy legal and social provision.

In response to these significant and persistent challenges, the ILO Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) and an accompanying Recommendation (No. 201) were adopted in 2011 following a lengthy campaign by domestic worker collectives and gender advocates. Legally binding for states that have ratified it, the Convention confers a range of rights to domestic workers, including rest hours, minimum wages, minimum working ages, protection against violence, and the right to a clear communication of labour terms and conditions, including for migrant workers. However, to date the Convention has been ratified by only 23 countries, some of whom already had relatively advanced domestic worker protections in place.

## 3.2 The emergence of on-demand domestic work platforms

On-demand platforms dedicated to providing households with domestic workers have been established for some time in the US, Europe and the Middle East. More recently, they have emerged in developing countries including India, Mexico and South Africa. This is a new trend, and the number of users currently registered with these services is still negligible compared to the size of the wider domestic work sector. For example, in South Africa the on-demand economy for domestic work encompasses some 7,000 workers – less than 1% of the country's domestic labour force of roughly 1 million (though the companies also report a large waiting list of potential workers awaiting screening).[14] But the existing evidence base suggests growth in these services has been exponential within and across countries. For example, in India companies are reported to be expanding up to 60% month-on-month (cited in Mehta Kadakia, 2016).

As noted, the rise of the on-demand economy appears to disrupt the organisation of traditional sectors, and effects may be different in developing countries. Similarly, whilst the wider on-demand economy has been associated with a deterioration

**Figure 5: Scoping study entry points**
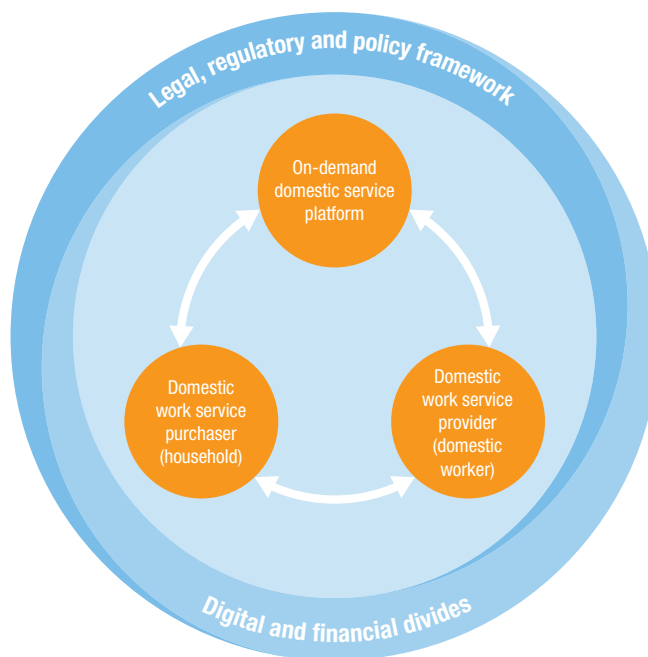


*Source: Authors' own.*

in working conditions, the poor conditions of many domestic workers in the traditional sector might – at best – not be necessarily worsened by the on-demand economy.

This paper explores this further. The main entry points for our analysis are focused on the three key groups involved in the on-demand 'triangle', individually and in relation to each other:

• on-demand domestic work platforms
• those purchasing domestic work services (demand side)
• domestic workers offering services via on-demand platforms (supply side).

Alongside this, the analysis explores the surrounding legal, regulatory and policy framework and the implications of digital and financial divides, as demonstrated in Figure 5.

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14  As of October 2016, SweepSouth is said to have 1,500 workers on its roster, and Domestly, 5,500. See: http://www.fin24.com/Tech/Mobile/domestic-labours-digital-transition-20161007

# 4. Scoping study design and approach

This scoping study combined a secondary review of existing literature on the emerging on-demand economy for domestic work services. Primary data collection involved global-level key informant interviews. A detailed case study of South Africa was developed, including desktop research of peer-reviewed and grey literature, collection of empirical data through individual life histories, group interviews with domestic workers who use on-demand platforms to seek work, individual interviews with service purchasers, and interviews and focus group discussions with key informants. South Africa was selected for several reasons:

- South Africa's historical apartheid system framed black labour as cheap, informal and irregular home-based work. The widespread practice meant that working class white households could cheaply afford domestic 'help'. To this end, domestic workers found themselves in virtual servitude in the households of their 'masters', trapped in paternalistic and colonial relationships based on racial divides and the misperception that domestic workers were not 'employees' (du Toit, 2013). Prior to 1993, the domestic work sector was completely unregulated; before 2002 there was no minimum wage (Hertz, 2004). Although major policy and legal reforms adopted since independence in 1994 have shifted and reframed the domestic work sector, discriminatory social norms and attitudes towards domestic workers and the services they provide still persist.

- South Africa has a relatively higher (52%) Internet penetration rate compared to the 28% average penetration rates in developing countries more widely (ITU, 2016b). In addition, South Africa holds an emblematic position socio-economically compared to most countries in SSA. In this respect, while its context may not be representative of all developing countries, it is likely to be indicative of how the on-demand trend may evolve in the developing world, especially in SSA.

- There are two well-established on-demand domestic services companies operating in South Africa – SweepSouth and Domestly – which provide a useful basis to explore the different ways that on-demand companies operate, and the different effects this may have on service purchasers and domestic workers.

Taken together, these factors make South Africa an interesting candidate to explore the impact of on-demand apps on the domestic work sector in-depth. While it was beyond the scope of this paper to develop a second full-country case study, secondary data from India and elsewhere provided useful comparative context. An extensive methodological description can be found in the Appendix.

# 5. On-demand domestic work – scoping findings



A domestic worker in Johannesburg, South Africa. Photo: © Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage.

## 5.1 On-demand domestic workers

### 5.1.1 Who are the domestic workers?

Our research suggests significant similarities in the profile of on-demand domestic workers with the traditional domestic workforce, although pinpointing the exact profile of on-demand domestic workers was challenging given limitations in accessing company user data, and our limited worker sample size. A review of worker profiles on Domestly, a South African platform, suggests a predominantly black African, female workforce,[15] in line with the profile of the demographic group dominating the traditional domestic industry as workers (Budlender,

2016). In some cases, companies request knowledge of English, as reported by a Kenyan company founder, who also confirmed that providers were:

> '*Overwhelmingly women between age of 23 and 40, literate or semi-literate, and mostly from rural areas who had come to Nairobi to find a job.*'

Although a minority of platform workers are men, they appear to perform gendered roles in line with the traditional gender role division in the domestic work sector, notably as drivers or cooks (Chen, 2011). As the Kenyan source noted:

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15  See: https://domestly.com/cleaners/cape-town/city-bowl/

*'We had a few 18 or 19-year-old men, but the men we had were mainly older ones, almost in their 50s. Mostly drivers. Some men were cleaners, cooks too. The men overall were much older than the women.'*

It is notable, however, that some platforms clearly identify women as domestic workers, both in the female-dominated imagery on their platforms, and in language used which clearly identifies 'women' as domestic workers or uses the feminine form throughout in relevant languages, such as Spanish.[16] On-demand platforms thereby mirror the gendered roles prevalent within the traditional domestic work sector. Finally, our research suggests that the on-demand economy for domestic work is linked to internal and international migration, see Box 6 (page 25).

### 5.1.2 Legal status of domestic workers in the on-demand economy

The employment classification of domestic workers is a crucial determinant of their access to rights, protections and benefits. Ensuring the employment relationship between domestic workers and their employer is recognised is a vital means by which their work can be incrementally formalised, while also going some way to addressing the traditionally poor working conditions associated with it (ILO, 2010). To date, many domestic workers remain in informal working arrangements, or in relationships misclassified as 'self-employment' because the reality of the working conditions correspond to those which should legally see domestic workers classified as workers or employees (depending on applicable classifications in a given jurisdiction) (ILO, 2016a).

The emergence of the on-demand economy brings a new dimension to this challenge. Some (but not all) platforms make explicit reference to domestic workers as a traditionally marginalised or exploited group, and claim to operate as a social enterprise or even 'engine for social transformation'.[17] Although not all claim a social good model, many platforms state their value to domestic workers through providing various freedoms such as supporting flexible working and choice, and dealing with traditional power asymmetries.[18] Yet, as with elsewhere in the gig economy, many go to significant effort to avoid an employee-employer relationship by engaging domestic workers as independent contractors (see Boxes 3 and 4, overleaf).

Our findings also suggest that the engagement of domestic workers as independent contractors could undo progress in the formalisation of domestic work by diminishing legal rights and protections where they currently exist, as discussed in relation to South Africa in Box 3. Therefore, any claim by companies to support the advancement of domestic workers as a marginalised group appears significantly undermined by this practice.

An additional aspect of independent contractor status is the self-management of income tax affairs (ILO, 2016a). As one key informant – the founder of a Kenyan on-demand domestic work platform – told us, once a certain level of income has been reached per month, the worker is liable to pay income tax:

*'They were not our workers, we made that very clear, they are just using the platform to access opportunities, and we got paid a commission for them accessing this opportunity. So you are paying us for a verification process, and for connecting you to a job – but you don't work for us. That way, we don't have to pay taxes to the government for each job that is done.'*

To support this, the company provided information on the process involved and liable monthly thresholds. They also advised workers on how to minimise their tax liability by ceasing to accept new 'gigs' via the platform once the taxable income amount for that period had been reached (which also meant forgoing income for that period). However, navigating Kenya's complex taxation procedures may prove challenging for women who have never previously engaged in such processes, for example because they have only previously worked informally.[19] Therefore, this system may deter workers from working enough hours to gain a livable income, or from paying taxes due.

Related to this, enforcement and accountability appears a weak point; the government is unlikely to have the capacity to chase relatively small sums from a potentially large number of workers – even if the workers can be identified and located. Furthermore, the government may be more focused on increasing economic opportunities than recouping taxes. As our informant noted, 'The government is pushing hard on online work, but they're saying "let's make the jobs first, then handle issues when they come up"'.

The current, limited scale of operations means the on-demand domestic work sector may not currently be a priority area for fiscal authorities. Yet the growth pattern of on-demand domestic work – and the exponential rise of the wider gig-economy – suggests that ensuring tax regimes are fit for purpose is an urgent priority to avoid downstream

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16  For example, see: https://aliada.mx/ or https://mydidi.in/

17  As stated in the 'Mission and Vision' of MyDidi, India: https://mydidi.in/about-us.

18  Alianda in Mexico sees the relationship between service provider and purchaser as allies. While in South Africa, Domestly sees itself changing the power asymmetry between domestic worker and purchaser through the giving authority to domestic workers to set their rates. At SweepSouth, freedoms are seen to accrue through domestic workers working when they want.

19  See Ongore, 2016.

negative impacts on public social protections and services, notably on those that stand to support women's access to economic opportunities (see UN Women 2015; Hunt and Samman, 2016).

### 5.1.3 On-demand domestic work: decent work?

Proponents of the on-demand economy highlight its multiple benefits in terms of worker flexibility, choice and independence. Given the challenges to employment-related rights and protections inherent within the independent contractor model, in this section we explore whether providing services via platforms can confer wider benefits which may disrupt poor working conditions within the domestic work sector.

*Tradeoffs: Hours worked, flexibility, income level and security*

On-demand companies hold extensive insights into provider working patterns: 'systems […] capture whether a worker is logged on to the company network and how long they work on each task', which may have negative implications for workers' privacy (Eurofound, 2015: 77). However, in the case of domestic work, this can be a more positive aspect of on-demand platform technology given the long working hours and low attached remuneration in the traditional sector. Domestic workers participating in this study confirmed that the use of the company's mobile app meant they were able to record and precisely monitor the amount of time and money earnt for each gig, which was viewed positively.

**Box 4: Company profiles: Tech company, placement agency or employer?**

Many on-demand domestic service platforms mapped for this study emphasise three points in their terms and conditions: that they are technology-based companies whose primary function is to link service purchasers to providers; that the company itself does not provide domestic services; and that domestic workers are third-party independent contractors.[†]

In general, domestic workers are only paid for the time taken to carry out tasks, and as such, many platforms classify domestic workers as 'independent contractors' and purchasers as their 'clients', thereby avoiding an employment relationship and the obligations which accompany it such as paying minimum wage, overtime and social security contributions (Berg, 2016). Some, such as Domestly in South Africa, may even have invested in legal advice to ensure their terms and conditions do not constitute contract of employment.[††] This is reflective of the reconceptualisation of the traditional employer-employee relationship as a technology-enabled commercial exchange which exists across the wider on-demand economy (Martin 2015).

While the on-demand companies referenced throughout this study use the 'independent contractor' model described, other companies appear to offer services via Internet or mobile platforms to be ordered and provided to the purchaser in a short timeframe, but with an expectation that the length of engagement will be longer term and not one-off 'gigs'. Depending on their model, these companies can be categorised as employment agencies or aggregator portals who have recognised their purchaser-base is increasingly tech-savvy and demanding quicker service delivery, and who have developed digital platforms in response (e.g. BookMyBai, which operates in India). In some cases, company approaches remain a grey area as information about purchaser and worker matching processes and contractual terms and conditions are incomplete or unavailable on their websites or accompanying apps.

† Exact language varies by company, but for example: 'Any products and/or services as availed/booked by you through the App or any other medium operated by the company are provided by third party suppliers ("suppliers") and not by the Company. These suppliers are independent contractors/service providers and are neither an employee, agent, partner of the Company nor do they have any other analogous relationship with the Company. Company is just a technology platform consolidating and connecting suppliers with the persons who wish to avail their services'. MyDidi, India: https://mydidi.in/terms-of-service

†† It has been reported that Domestly sought legal advice from Werksmans Law Firm ahead of launching to ensure their model suggests no implicit employer-employee contract between Domestly and service providers. See: http://www.fin24.com/Tech/Mobile/domestic-labours-digital-transition-20161007

Flexible working arrangements are cited as a key benefit across the wider on-demand economy (Hall and Krueger, 2015; Harris and Krueger, 2015), which is often assumed to be particularly suited to women as its flexible, ad-hoc nature can support women in balancing household and paid work.[20] However, literature suggests this flexibility is often accompanied by trade-offs as a high worker supply to demand ratio and the subsequent scarcity of tasks offered to a provider via a platform reduces financial gain, compelling workers to work very long hours and forego flexibility to raise a sufficient income (De Stefano, 2016; Aloisi, 2015; Cherry, 2009; Eurofound, 2015). Flexibility is further limited by platform ratings and review systems, which determine their ability to access future work (ILO, 2016a; Silberman and Irani, 2016).

Our findings corroborate much of this analysis from the literature review, also confirming that the level and security of income is highly dependent on good ratings from clients following previous gigs (see Section 5.2.3 below for more discussion of platform review and ratings systems). One domestic worker (Susan) spoke positively about the efficiency of the matching process and working schedule flexibility: *'it gives you power to work when you want as the domestic worker once you are through [the joining procedure]'.*

While Susan and other workers cited ability to choose and balance working time with other activities as a significant advantage, low-income levels and lack of job security remain significant challenges to workers. On-demand platforms claim that workers earn more than through jobs found via more traditional means, even surpassing minimum wages in some instances.[21] Our findings suggest variations to this narrative. On the one hand, several domestic workers interviewed have higher earnings for the number of hours worked via on-demand platforms than previously earned as a live-in domestic worker. However, they tend to lose these additional earnings through expenses incurred through on-demand work, including transport costs and mobile data – as explained by Susan in Box 5 (overleaf). Susan sees the positive side of SweepSouth in facilitating her access to economic opportunities, which are limited to her as a migrant worker. But despite long working hours she barely

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20 For example: 'women handle a disproportionate share of household work, child care, and care for elderly dependents, so flexible independent work helps them juggle these other responsibilities' (Manyika et al. 2016: 43). This assumption is problematic as fails to recognise or challenge women's disproportionate care load in relation to men (see Balakrishnan et al., 2016).

21 For example, see: http://www.financialmail.co.za/fmfox/2016/07/15/entrepreneur-sweepsouth-cofounder-aisha-pandor

earns enough to live day-to-day, let alone plan for the future for herself or her family.

Similarly, another worker (Busi) reported that navigating unknown neighborhoods with no public transport, on foot, meant that she could arrive late and be told upon arrival that the job is cancelled thereby wasting time and money travelling there without recompense. In addition, she reported:

> '*SweepSouth takes R13 [$0.90] for every R38 [$2.63]. I work for per hour. So, for example, if I work for three hours instead of getting R120 [$8.29], all I get is R75 [$5.18]. On that R75, I have to cater for my own transport no matter how far the place I go and work is. Usually, that only leaves me with R20 [$1.38] [for the whole job].*' [22]

Current statutory minimum wage for domestic work in metro areas is R13.39 per hour for those working less than 27 ordinary hours a week (R11.44 for those working more),[23] and the hourly rate paid on the platform works out above the minimum wage (R25). However, after transport costs, the worker is left with very little. As Busi said, '*this is really sad for me because I have a family to look after, I am a single parent. At the end of the week when I look at how much I have worked for, I ask myself why I am killing myself like this*'.

Though the overall level of earnings depends largely on the number of gigs the worker is hired for, platform design features also appear to play a role. Respondents working for SweepSouth and Domestly in South Africa suggest that the Domestly model – where workers can set their payment rates after having satisfactorily completed around 15 gigs – was preferable. One SweepSouth worker reported she was thinking of moving to Domestly for this reason. Respondents also stated that Domestly provides a pay rise after around 100 jobs, dependent on good ratings from purchasers, which respondents cited as a motivation to work harder. Given the low income, tips and other in-kind benefits from purchasers were seen as important. SweepSouth allows purchasers to tip via the app when they give a positive rating, although respondents reported that they were not allowed to take food or other gifts directly from purchasers which would otherwise be an important supplement to their low wages.

Domestly domestic workers reported that 'the working rates are not so bad, but it all depends on how hard you are working as the maid' (group interview participants). A commonly cited issue across respondents was that purchasers will frequently order specific services, but then demand additional tasks to be completed by the provider in the originally allocated time. This leads to an exploitative situation: given that the worker's future economic opportunities are dependent on a good rating from the client, the worker will often have no choice but to fulfil the demand. As discussed further in Section 5.2.3, ratings systems are often one-way and do not give workers the opportunity to rate clients in return.

Overall, then, while flexibility seems to be a benefit, it is severely mitigated by insufficient and insecure income. Moreover, although earnings may be higher than a live-in domestic worker wage, the extent to which on-demand domestic work proceeds are higher than the remuneration gained by domestic workers in other (non-live-in) working arrangements remains unclear.

### *Worker protection*

Our research largely corroborates the point that independent contractor arrangements implicitly exclude workers from social protection or benefits via the platform or service purchaser, for example paid sickness or maternity leave, pension or other social security contributions (ILO, 2016a). However, one key informant, a Kenyan on-demand platform founder, reported that platforms can provide some 'on the job' insurance cover, including health insurance for any injury sustained while working and damages to purchaser property:

'We don't want that if a worker breaks a $5000 vase, they have to pay for it for the rest of their life … The insurance we took was a minimal one, we realised we needed to protect them, however they are not contracted to us. There is insurance that would cover them for basic maternity leave etc. but they have to pay for that themselves. It is 20 shillings a day. You can pay for it, or choose not to pay.'

While this platform provided basic coverage, it is currently not clear to what extent this is the case across on-demand domestic work platforms more widely. There is some evidence, however, that platforms may provide some direct, personal support to workers. A domestic worker in South Africa reported that, 'Some of the [purchasers] can be very racist, they do not want you to associate with them beyond you being their maid, and they treat you like you are nothing' (group interview participants). In many cases, workers 'are used to these things' and do not complain, but said, 'if we do complain, the bosses try to look at both sides before taking action' (group interview participants). Workers working on this particular platform reported feeling that the platform protects them, even though their reasons for this and the subsequent 'action' taken by

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22  Rand to US dollar conversions were estimated based on intra-day data provided by the Interactive Data Real-Time Services, Inc. In 2015, the purchasing power parity conversion of the South Africa rand was 0.4. Source: World Bank, International Comparison Program database [all data retrieved 18/11/2016].

23  See: http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/downloads/legislation/sectoral-determinations/basic-conditions-of-employment/Correction%20Notice%20Domestic%20worker%202014.pdf

**Box 5: A glimpse into the life of an on-demand domestic worker in South Africa**

Susan is a 48-year-old migrant domestic worker from Zimbabwe, who grew up in Harare, and works with the SweepSouth platform from her Cape Town base. She has formal training as a day care nurse, and has worked as an administrator for an information systems company. Economic challenges in Zimbabwe, including high levels of unemployment, and stringent migrant worker visa requirements in South Africa meant she has been unable to find work in the sectors for which she is qualified. Therefore, she has been engaged in domestic work since arriving in South Africa in 2009. She hopes that her qualifications will enable her to eventually leave occupational domestic work, explaining:

*'Haa technology yakumberi mwanangu [haa technology has advanced indeed, my child], I am a professional IT administrator from Zim [Zimbabwe] but never really secured a job here because I am not South African ende unongoziva zvazviri kana usina ID yemunomu [You know how the struggle is when you are not a South African citizen]. So I am very fascinated by the whole process of the Uberisation of maids. But I am hoping one day I can be employed in the company offices. Asi kungoshuwirawo zvedu [it is only a wish].'*

Susan reports some benefits of working with SweepSouth: she finds the platform efficient and appreciates the flexibility of on-demand work, which gives her the 'power to work when you want as the domestic worker'. Susan affirms that she receives many requests for her services, which she believes is due to her high ratings on the platform. She works almost every day and even has to refuse some requests for her services as she does not have time to fulfill them all. Her engagement in on-demand work has helped her to support her family, but ultimately she finds the wages insufficient and the work hard. In addition, she is often treated poorly by members of households who have paid for her services:

*'I came from Zimbabwe straight into someone's home as a domestic worker. I worked as a full time house maid. Ndazoona kuti mari yandirikupiwa ishoma [When I realised that the money was too little], I moved over to the next person kusvikira ndatozoona kuti ma stay-in haasikubhadhara [until I realised that stay-in jobs are not well-paying]. I started doing part-time jobs [through the platform] and that really paid me well because I would get R200-R250 [$14-$18] per day. So I brought my children from Zimbabwe because I could now afford to take care of them and send them to school here. I could also even afford the day care course I was talking about. But honestly, it's very hard because all the [extra] money goes back to transport, airtime, bundles and some [clients] are rude and delay payment, or lie that you have stolen something, among other things.'*

Like any other parent, Susan has dreams for herself and her children.

*'I have a very brilliant child currently doing his matric. He is acing all his science subjects, but when I think of next year I cannot help but cry. I have no idea how I am going to pay for his tuition. He says he wants to study engineering at UCT [University of Cape Town] but if I think of the fees I ask myself where to even begin. Zvakaoma mwanangu [Things are/life is tough, my child]. Right now, I am hoping to get a better job elsewhere that will pay me better because izvizvi hazvisi kushanda [this is not working].'*

the platform to resolve any issues were unclear. However, workers on another platform felt the company ignored domestic worker's complaints, saying, 'When a customer complains, they immediately sort the issue out. I would really appreciate it if they started treating domestic workers as people, with dignity and respect' (Susan).

In sum, domestic workers report some benefits of on-demand work, particularly in comparison to some of the working practices and conditions of the traditional domestic work sector. However, significant challenges remain, which appear to be experienced by providers differently, and depending on through which platform they seek work. This suggests that company operating model and approach have significant effects on the experiences of domestic workers seeking and engaging in work through on-demand platforms.

## 5.1.4 Collective action, dialogue and bargaining

The highly dispersed, informal and hidden nature of the domestic workforce has meant that historically, information sharing, organising and establishing collective bargaining agreements has been difficult, although domestic worker collectives and unions have been established worldwide.[24] The on-demand economy for domestic work presents specific challenges and opportunities in this area.

Difficulties in the legal identification of the accountable party inherent within the independent contractor system can mean workers are excluded from freedom of association and organising rights, collective bargaining and discrimination protections, since these are reserved for employees in many jurisdictions (ILO, 2016a; Prassl, 2015; De Stefano, 2016).

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24 Domestic worker trade unions and formal and informal collectives exist at local, national and international level, for example see: http://www.idwfed.org/en

**Box 6: Migrant domestic workers**

Our research suggests that, as in the traditional domestic work sector, the on-demand economy is linked to international and internal labour migration. In South Africa, empirical evidence suggests that workers come from countries including Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania, as well as from South Africa. In Kenya, the platform founder interviewed highlighted that the domestic workers who came to Nairobi to work were mostly from rural areas, many of whom resided in low-income or slum areas of the city. A respondent from India, reflecting on the practice of placement agencies or traffickers actively bringing domestic workers to cities from poor rural areas (driven by employer demand for low-wage accepting workers), suggested a similar practice could eventually take place with on-demand work.

However, it remains unclear whether most foreign nationals using platforms are already in-country prior to securing on-demand work. That gigs can be procured online makes it possible for providers to seek and secure gigs from their home countries, provided they have the Internet and have already passed any company registration procedure.

South African legal experts contributing to this research highlighted that workers travelling from a foreign country could theoretically challenge the application and enforcement of immigration rules. For instance, a foreign national is required to secure a work permit before entering an employment relationship in South Africa. However, it could be argued that independent contractors do not require a work permit, thus alleviating the responsibility of purchasers to verify provider work permits and opening up job searches and potential on-demand economic opportunities to those living in neighboring countries.

Yet the on-demand economy also offers unique potential for organising, as platforms pool together large groups of workers who may otherwise operate as isolated, self-employed individuals (Dewan and Randolph, 2016).

Our findings suggest still limited yet burgeoning organising between on-demand domestic workers, and similarly nascent dialogue between workers and others involved in the sector. The website of one company suggests that it proactively fosters collaboration between workers – for example, MiDidi in India which takes a 'community led approach, organising our fleet into self-help cells for continuous improvement of our services', [25] although we were unable to ascertain how this works in practice.

Our empirical evidence confirms that on-demand domestic workers are starting to organise informally and share information between themselves, though the process by which workers first establish contact remains unclear. For example, one domestic worker participant confirmed that she communicated with other workers working through the same platform via a private WhatsApp[26] group, saying 'We are all going through the same struggles and we get to share on that group' (Busi). Another working with the same company reported that the group members plan in the future to approach the company to present various problems they are experiencing, including that the company had not paid them for completed work.

Though this collaboration was in its early stages at the time of this research, similar evidence from elsewhere points to the value of such collective action for advancing worker rights and conditions. In Indonesia, on-demand drivers have worked through social media and WhatsApp groups to create an informal workers' association that negotiates with the company on issues related to legal status and income, staging protests which have led to the overturning of unfavourable policies introduced by the company (Fanggidae et al., 2016).

In addition to worker-led action, dialogue is being initiated by external organisations. In South Africa, the Social Law Project, University of the Western Cape and the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration planned to convene a social dialogue meeting in November 2016 between domestic workers, trade unions, policy-makers, employment recruitment agencies and on-demand domestic work companies, and is discussing worker protections, security, safety and remuneration directly with companies, following similar initiatives elsewhere.[27] Following trends elsewhere in the on-demand economy and given the emergence of domestic worker grievances against companies, it appears likely that efforts to organise and establish dialogue – whether formally or informally – will continue to gather momentum as domestic work platforms grow.

## 5.2 On-demand service purchasers

In this section, we explore the motivations driving purchasers to procure domestic services via on-demand platforms, and the implications of their expectations for domestic workers. It is shown that on-demand platforms provide advantages to purchasers through convenience,

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25  See: https://mydidi.in/about-us

26  WhatsApp is a mobile-based messaging service.

27  For example, the Good Work Code developed in the US by the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and aimed at improving on-demand working conditions. See: http://www.goodworkcode.org/

reliability, cost and opportunity to manage work-life balance. However, existing inequalities and unequal power relations between purchasers and domestic workers are left untouched, and in some cases entrenched, by on-demand platforms. Importantly though, on-demand companies may be able to 'design-in' equality, non-discrimination and safety to overcome these significant challenges.

### 5.2.1 Who are the service purchasers?

Challenges obtaining platform user data means it is difficult to pinpoint the exact profile of service purchasers using on-demand platforms to obtain domestic services. However, a number of key characteristics have been identified.

A key informant from Kenya, identified the 'rising middle' as a key factor in the emergence and growth of on-demand domestic work platforms in developing countries. In line with this, the purchaser base on her particular platform included families with children and young professional households, which includes young couples as well as young men and women living in sole-occupancy or groups. In South Africa, company executives suggest purchasers are concentrated in 'affluent suburbs' and 'middle class hot spots',[28] and domestic workers interviewed mentioned that a significant number of purchasers 'are single guys who do not have time to headhunt maids' (group interview participants). This appears to reflect the modern living arrangements of tech-savvy, young and relatively affluent urban professionals in developing countries (and globally).

Not surprisingly, purchasers interviewed in South Africa reported engaging domestic workers to enable them to better manage their work-life balance through alleviation of their own domestic work burden.[29] One respondent (Gugulethu) who described herself as an insurance consultant suggested that on-demand domestic services enabled her to manage her professional and home life on her terms:

*'We are always busy, going out for events, traveling and stuff, so there is really no time for us to do laundry or the cupboards or clean. This place can get really dirty … so we book a maid at least two or three times a month.'*

### 5.2.2 Motivations for using on-demand platforms: work-life balance, convenience, reliability and cost

The motivations of service purchasers to use on-demand platforms primarily involve their perceived convenience, particularly in comparison to the 'traditional' ways of engaging domestic workers, which held true across interviews with participants from India, Kenya and South Africa, and which was implied in literature reviewed in the Mexico context. It was reported that purchasers had previously experienced significant delay in hiring a worker, as searches for a 'suitable' individual took significant time and effort, and required being involved in informal networks of people who may refer potential workers or use placement agencies who could be unreliable or expensive. On-demand platforms facilitate the process, allowing purchasers to select a provider and purchase services 'within minutes' (Gugulethu). This was corroborated by workers interviewed in South Africa, who reported using platforms to advertise their services, as 'people no longer take maids from the streets' (group interview participants).

The reliability offered by on-demand platforms was another attraction cited across contexts, and particularly in comparison to the traditional sector, as platforms could send another provider if the arranged worker was not able to go to the purchaser's home to fulfil the task purchased. In addition, as with elsewhere in the on-demand economy, the perceived low cost of services procured was an attraction. As one key informant noted: 'the biggest marketing point [platforms] have is that they're cheap and at your doorstep' (India informant).

While low service costs are a clear advantage for purchasers, this represents a significant challenge to the workers' level of income gain from platforms. Keeping commission rates at a level sufficient to ensure company growth while simultaneously encouraging competitive service prices for purchasers and sufficient wages for workers is a considerable challenge to on-demand companies (see Box 7, overleaf). However, it is a challenge which must be tackled if on-demand domestic service provision is to become a genuinely decent work option for domestic workers.

### 5.2.3 Suspicion, trust and choosing a domestic worker

The location in which domestic services take place – in private homes – means that purchasers often require substantial reassurance on the worker entering their home, sometimes unaccompanied. As one key informant noted, purchasers desire 'the right kind of people who would not steal – that's a huge thing; who are trustworthy' (India informant).

Core to most on-demand platform models are review or ratings systems, which enable service purchasers to provide feedback and rate providers' performance via their app following task completion, serving as quality assurance for future purchasers (ILO, 2016a). This system also minimises management costs for companies by eliminating internal

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28  See: http://city-press.news24.com/Business/domestic-labour-goes-digital-20160129

29  It remains unclear to what extent the introduction of on-demand services impacts on established gender norms and roles, which see women disproportionately take on unpaid care and domestic work (Hunt and Samman, 2016), or whether on-demand services directly support women in engaging in employment outside the home by alleviating this load. Furthermore, given the purchaser profile appears to consist of single, young professional men and women as well as families, the impact of on-demand domestic services on purchaser gender roles and management of work-life balance appears nuanced, and merits further study.

performance review personnel and mechanisms, and in effect, outsources customer care to the workers (Rosenblat et al., 2016).

The reviews can be viewed on individual provider profiles on the platform and therefore inform the decision of future purchasers to select an individual provider. Consequently, they play an important role in determining workers' economic opportunities (Silberman and Irani, 2016; Martin, 2015). Moreover, these systems also expose workers to implicit or explicit discrimination, as purchaser reviews are subjective and highly likely to be subject to either explicit or implicit bias on the basis of factors such as gender, age, race or ethnicity (Rogers, 2015; Leong, 2014, Rosenblat et al., 2016; Zatz, 2016).

Similarly, review and ratings systems are built into many dedicated domestic work platforms as a means of verifying domestic workers. However, companies also employ a range of checks and measures to verify providers as a prerequisite to being accepted onto platforms and thereby encourage purchaser trust in them, for example:

- A 'very rigorous process' including a verification of the provider's home address, previous employment references and honesty-focused psychometric tests (Mexico).[30]
- A requirement of three letters of recommendation from an employment-related contact, somebody from the provider's home community or village (a chief, pastor or other well-known and well-regarded person), and a close family member (Kenya).[31]
- 'Full verification' background checks, including checks on the worker's current and permanent address, and a report from a local police station to ensure the provider has no criminal background (India).[32]

In some contexts, it was felt that trust issues slow down the potential of the technology, because purchasers were not accustomed to the on-demand process as it operates elsewhere, or because trust could only be gained by meeting a provider in person. One respondent, the founder of an on-demand company, reported:

*'For me, that was the biggest challenge to scaling-up. It's not like the one in the US, care.com. It's not like that where you just put your credit card in and somebody turns up at your door in the morning, it will not work like that here. Maybe in 10% of the cases people would say "just send somebody". That would be somebody who has lived outside the country for some time and they understand [the on-demand economy]. But most*

*of the time, they will say they want to meet the person.' (Kenya informant).*

As a result, this company allowed purchasers to meet providers before confirming the purchase of their services with the platform, which significantly slowed down the matching process.

Aside from verifications of this kind, the platform profile system is often set up to enable purchasers to select domestic workers based on a range of preferences, including by demographic characteristics. One platform founder outlined this process, which was conducted manually by a team when the company was first founded, but then was later designed into an algorithm on the platform once the system had been tested: 'You have to be clear about who you want, say if you don't want an old man or woman but a younger person, we'll send you a younger person. So it matches your request to a list of skillset, age, gender characteristics that we have on our database' (Kenya informant).

Under these circumstances, it is clear that on-demand platforms' facilitation of service purchaser choice also permits the selection of workers that meet their requirements based on factors other than their qualifications and experience related to the task. Therefore, these systems not only maintain the unequal and discriminatory structures and relationships between purchasers and providers underpinning the traditional domestic work sector, but actively reinforce them. At the same time, this is one area which companies could potentially address in their platform design, by taking creative steps to build-in equality of opportunity, fairness and anti-discrimination, for example by focusing provider profiles only on work experience and similar job-relevant information.[33] Whether providers would engage 'mystery' providers without knowledge of their personal profile, though, is another question.

Importantly, processes described here are often one-way; we unearthed little evidence of similar stringent background or criminal checks being made on service purchasers before being able to join on-demand platforms. Domestic workers' experiences of abuse and violence are extensively documented (ILO, 2010). The domestic workers in South Africa interviewed for this research indicated similar experiences when engaging in on-demand work, reporting experiences of racism and maltreatment from clients (see Section 5.1.3). Encouragingly, we found evidence that one platform, Aliada in Mexico, aims to promote an equal relationship between purchasers and providers,

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30  See: https://aliada.mx/faq (translated from Spanish original).

31  As reported by a Kenyan app founder during a key informant interview.

32  See: https://mydidi.in/frequently-asked-questions

33  See also the Ted Talk, 'Who decides the future of work?' by Palak Shah, IDWA, for further discussion. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_t7jpvR05zY

with one domestic worker using the service reporting feeling supported by the company because feedback is not provided exclusively by service purchasers: she can also rate clients on how they treat her (Watson, 2015). However, this does not appear to be the norm more widely.

Another option to protect platform users may be external apps which enable users to seek help in an emergency (see GSMA, 2015d). In India, the app 'FightBack' (available in 22 Indian states and 81 countries), when activated by a user will send a direct SOS message to pre-selected contacts, confirming the user's location using GPS coordinates (ibid.). This app requires a smartphone but similar features have been developed for feature and basic phones – for example, 'Banglalink Emergency' sends an SMS alert and the user's location to three pre-registered contacts when the user dials a short code (ibid.). Such initiatives could significantly improve the experience and safety of on-demand platform users if they were built into platform design or used in parallel with mobile apps.

### 5.2.4 Service quality
Common across on-demand domestic work platforms is that services are advertised as high quality and delivered by expert professionals (although exact wording to that effect differs). This is not surprising, given that their business growth and sustainability requires attracting and maintaining a large purchaser base, and an important precursor for this is the quality of services provided to the purchaser. Service purchasers that were interviewed also confirmed that service quality was a priority factor for them. When the service was not deemed satisfactory, it called into question the quality of the service: 'I [was] left wondering whether these people are trained domestic workers or not' (Nokutenda).

According to their websites, companies provide service quality assurances through various means, including overseeing the listing of only skilled and/or experienced workers. For example, some require previous employment references and passing a domestic work knowledge exam (Aliada, Mexico);[34] while others conduct interviews and require potential providers to take a 'cleaning test' to gauge their knowledge (SweepSouth, South Africa).[35] Speaking English (or another dominant language such as Spanish in Latin America) was also often a key requirement. One service provider reported:

*'The test was really easy, because they only ask you about the map of Cape Town to see if you know where you will be working. The interview was also easy because they only wanted to know whether I had a smartphone and that I can speak English. They also asked about my past working experience as a domestic worker and I told them domestic work comes easy for us African women because we clean our houses everyday' (Busi).*

This suggests that traditional perceptions of the role of women as responsible for and experienced in unpaid work within the home are considered sufficient qualification to be accepted onto on-demand platforms.

However beyond tests and interviews, providing training to domestic workers is another common means of quality assurance advertised by companies, although the exact focus and content of this training in many cases remains unclear.[36] While training may appear to guarantee high service standards to purchasers, it may prove problematic for companies by providing grounds for workers to challenge their status as independent contractors (see Box 7). In the case of the ongoing litigation in the US at the time of writing – Zenelaj, et al. vs Handy (Handybook) – an employment misclassification claim has been made based on company requirements of workers to attend training sessions and stipulations around how workers perform tasks, and in what order, among other points.[37] Furthermore, even if not mandated, it could be argued that this kind of 'training' brings more benefit to purchasers as well as companies as a result of increased purchaser retention than to workers; it is debatable how much value training that imparts specific company procedures has for workers, as opposed to transferable skills development that widens their income generation options, for example.

## 5.3 On-demand domestic work company models
This research has demonstrated that certain aspects of on-demand domestic work company's operational approaches are similar across contexts – they emphasise their status as technology companies, which facilitate exchanges between independently contracted workers and service purchasers (see Box 7). As we have outlined, this can pose significant challenges to a worker's status and their

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34  See: https://aliada.mx/faq. Translated from Spanish original.

35  One key informant based in India reflected anecdotally to us that on-demand companies advertise publically with messaging, which highlights the way in which domestic workers are commonly treated. She said, 'The common notion is of a maid who comes and you have to really yell and shout at her to get her to do work. The billboards I saw use the same language, they say "get rid of your daily stress of shouting and yelling at a maid, find the kind of highly trained people we're offering you"'. See: http://city-press.news24.com/Business/domestic-labour-goes-digital-20160129

36  In one exception, GetDomesticHelp.com in India lists its training modules, which include life skills, health, hygiene, first aid, correct usage of equipment and tools as well as cooking and childcare. It also has an MOU with City & Guilds in the UK, for certification and assessment, and aims to be a 'market leader in training and guiding workers, even those who may be illiterate'. See: http://www.getdomestichelp.com/

37  For full details of this class action lawsuit, see: http://gbdhlegal.com/cases/zenelaj-v-handybook/

**Box 7: Homejoy: From boom to bust**

Homejoy, an on-demand domestic cleaning company based in the US, ceased operations in July 2015 citing four pending employment misclassification lawsuits from workers formerly engaged with the platform as independent workers. The wider contributing factors to the demise of this previously high-growth company provide insights into the challenges facing on-demand companies, service purchasers and workers in the domestic work sector.

The company expanded rapidly into new US domestic and international markets, at one point opening up operations in 30 cities in six months. On entering new markets, Homejoy offered heavy discounts to attract new purchasers. However, this also attracted many who paid the cheaper entry rate but did not return to purchase services at the full rate. Instead of addressing poor purchaser retention rates, the start-up prioritised high-growth numbers to please backers who had invested heavily in the platform. Ultimately, Homejoy could not generate enough profit to sustain the company.

Poor purchaser retention may not have been solely due to the higher post-introductory period service cost. Reports suggest the service quality was variable, but the company was unable to mandate worker training to support professional-level cleaning skills development and improve standards due to workers' independent contractor status.

In addition, Homejoy struggled to retain high-quality cleaners. The company kept a significant part of the cleaning fee as commission – sometimes close to half – which meant it did not pay domestic workers as much as some of its competitors. The result was platform leakage as providers would move to rival companies, or purchasers would hire cleaners they were happy with offline, as both sides could potentially strike a better deal directly with each other.

As one report summarised, 'Sure, Homejoy was a convenient platform, but trust and quality trumped this convenient technology' (Madden, 2015).

Sources: Farr, 2015; Huet, 2015a & 2015b; Madden, 2015.

working conditions. However, diversity is also evident. Successful on-demand innovations in developing countries in other sectors have adapted existing models to fit local infrastructure and access needs (Ramalingam et al., 2016). Similarly, our research found significant divergence in the operating models of on-demand domestic work companies, some of which are associated with positive outcomes for workers. Notably, companies find different and context-relevant ways to overcome digital and financial divides as a route to engaging workers, which appears to open up on-demand economic opportunities to otherwise excluded groups. It is to this we now turn.

### 5.3.1 Overcoming digital divides

The expansion of a tech-savvy middle class has driven the expansion of on-demand domestic services. Companies assume a high level of digital ease among service purchasers – to go online to establish contact, to select their service (and in some cases, a specific provider), to pay for the service and to provide feedback on a website or mobile platform. In some cases, companies also offer the opportunity for purchasers to place orders by sending the company a message on its Facebook page or by telephone.[38]

Domestic workers' access to and engagement with the platforms is more complex, particularly in developing countries with a marked 'digital divide'. Constraints common to digitally-excluded groups, include a lack of digital literacy, content relevance, affordability and network coverage (Internet.org, 2016). Other constraints

are more fundamentally gendered – namely limited time, constraining social norms and concerns about safety and harassment (Jellema and Brudvig, 2015; GSMA, 2015c). As we indicate in this section, the extent to which domestic workers are likely to be affected by these factors differs by country, and there is evidence that on-demand companies have developed their operating model to overcome some of the hurdles to access.

At one end of the spectrum, companies recruit domestic workers through low-tech methods, though they are likely to require that the applicant have at least a basic mobile phone to organise placements once registered with the platform. In some cases, this can be done via SMS messaging, a type of engagement requiring relatively low levels of digital literacy. As we heard from a key informant in Kenya:

> 'We did text messaging only, because we know workers cannot afford to be online all the time, it's a bit expensive for them. The first time they registered they were online, but the frequent communication would be messaging, unless they want to update their profile. So we just message them if there's a job.' (Kenya, informant)

At the other end of the spectrum, the worker uses their mobile to access a company's platform to connect with would-be clients and manage their own work-stream. This so-called 'disruptive'[39] modality requires a more sophisticated mobile handset as well as the ability to navigate mobile apps and a constant Internet connection.

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38  For example, see MyDidi in India: https://mydidi.in/frequently-asked-questions

39  See http://www.fin24.com/Entrepreneurs/My-Business/domestic-workers-clean-on-their-own-terms-20160701

**Figure 6: Educational attainment of the domestic workforce in 11 countries, 2009-2011**



| Country | Illiterate | Literate | Primary | Secondary | Higher |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Viet Nam | 4.2 | 21.6 | 34.3 | 39.6 | 0.3 |
| Turkey | 6.2 | 7.7 | 65.4 | 19.5 | 1.2 |
| South Africa | 8.8 | 1.9 | 17 | 72.3 | 0.1 |
| Philippines | 0.9 | 14.7 | 20.3 | 55.2 | 9 |
| Peru | 4.1 | 8.9 | 39 | 46.8 | 1.3 |
| Mexico | | | 7.8 | 1.4 | 49.1 |
| Mali | 71.9 | 12.4 | 15.7 | | |
| Indonesia | 3.8 | 21.1 | 41.7 | 33 | 0.3 |
| India | 51.5 | 13.3 | 16.9 | 18 | 0.3 |
| Costa Rica | 2 | 2.3 | 58.8 | 35 | 1.8 |
| Brazil | 4.5 | 5.2 | 37.9 | 51.1 | 1.3 |

Legend:
- ■ Illiterate
- ■ Literate
- ■ Primary
- ■ Secondary
- ■ Higher
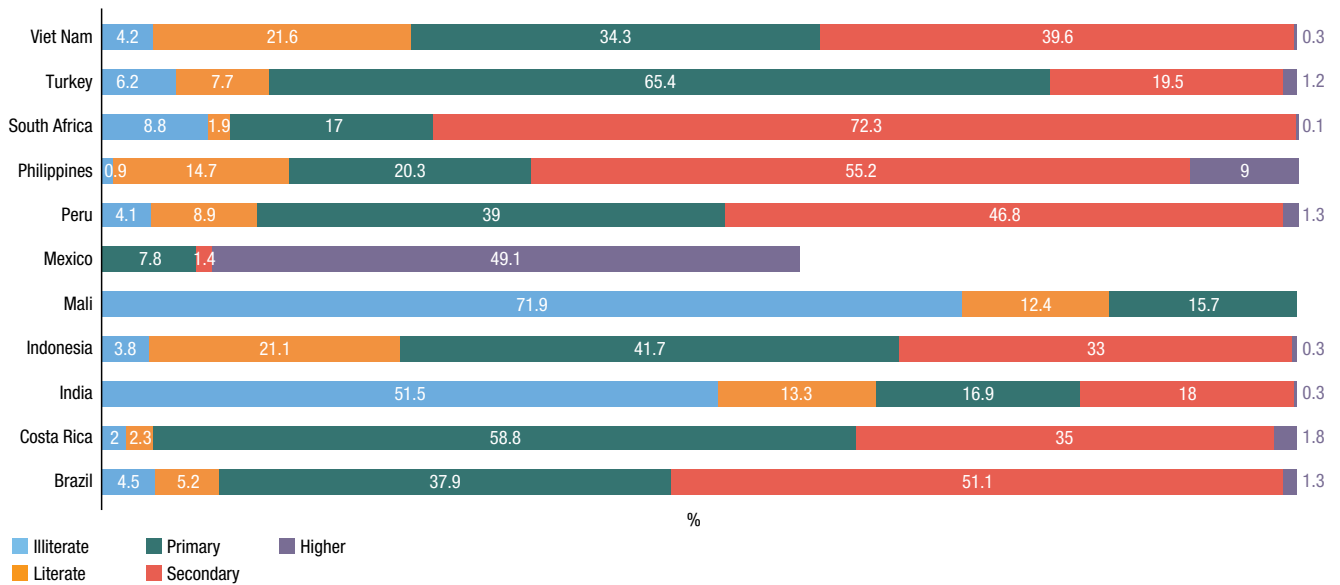
*Source: Elaboration of data in Oelz and Rani, 2015: Table 6.*
*Note: Latest available years, 2009-2011.*

Determining full causality requires more in-depth study but our very initial analysis using available data suggests that the extent to which these different modalities are in place in different countries can be linked to the levels of Internet adoption and education among the domestic workforce. Globally, the percentage of women using the Internet lags behind that of men for all age groups. Yet the number of women using the Internet is significantly increased among educated women – in a recent study across 10 countries, poor urban women with at least some secondary education were six times more likely to be online than those with lower levels of schooling (Jellema and Brudvig, 2015).

Better-educated women can more easily access Internet-based on-demand platforms. By extension, in countries where domestic workers have lower educational attainment, they may be less engaged with the Internet and therefore less likely to engage with on-demand platforms via digital technology. This is corroborated by the different modalities used by on-demand companies to engage domestic workers in India and South Africa. The two countries exhibit marked differences in Internet adoption and domestic worker education rates (see Figure 6 and 7), and this appears to inform the way that on-demand platforms have chosen to recruit domestic workers in each context.

In South Africa, where just over half the population (52%) uses the Internet (ITU, 2016b) and nearly three quarters of domestic workers have a secondary education (Oelz and Rani, 2015), a new breed of domestic work brokers clearly target Internet-savvy job seekers. This is reflected in their instructions to would-be recruits:

**Figure 7: Share of the population using the Internet in India and in South Africa, 2000-2015**



Legend:
- ■ India
- ■ South Africa
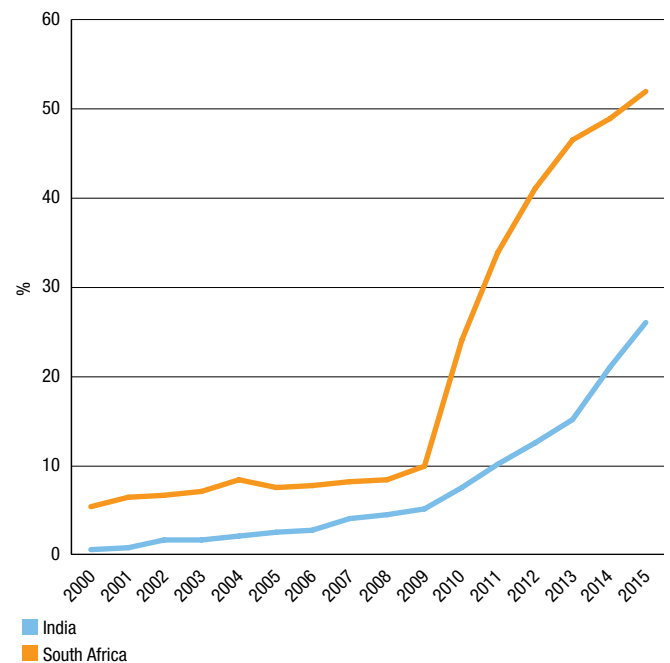
*Source: Elaboration of data in ITU World Telecommunications/ICT indicators database, 2015-2016.*

- Domestly provides domestic workers on its roster with a smartphone to use the app. To register, job seekers are instructed to fill out an online profile including a mobile phone number and to indicate whether they prefer to be contacted by SMS, email or push notifications. The appeal, per the website, is to be your own boss and '[m]anage all your jobs in one place with your mobile phone'.[40]
- SweepSouth asks applicants to supply personal information and details of their background online; it offers them the opportunity to 'gain access to hundreds of clients and work when and where you want to'.[41] SweepSouth appears to require providers to own and be able to use a high-tech phone; one worker interviewed for this study spoke of an acquaintance who was interviewed but not accepted onto the platform because 'she does not own a smart phone but a more simple phone' (Busi).

A 48-year-old migrant service provider in South Africa confirmed that levels of education and digital literacy acted as a differential in determining access to on-demand platforms, also suggesting that age plays a role:

*'For those domestic workers who are less educated, it becomes a big challenge using the app. Unozoona vamwe vavekungodzurudzutika vachishaya kwekuenda [I see my colleagues getting confused and lost, and that is how they lose out on the money]. I have also realised kuti vechidiki ava are fast and varikunyatsoziva kuti zino shanda sei, [these young women of today understand these things better and are quick in using them]. My advantage is that I have worked in IT before, and I am not entirely clueless, but my age mates struggle and within a few weeks they would have given up.' (Susan)*

The digital gender gap, and associated divide amongst women based on education levels, is more significant in India where an estimated quarter of the population (26%) uses the Internet,[42] just over half the domestic workforce is illiterate, and only 18% of domestic workers have completed secondary school, (Oelz and Rani, 2015: 8), a situation validated by our key informant from India, who noted:

*'In India, Internet usage has not reached most of working class community. Internet usage is one thing but even mobile phones for basic calling, not*

*smartphones, has not reached many people. If services are app-based, many domestic workers don't have the access. If they don't know how to use or understand implications of technology, then obviously it becomes a case of manipulating the service for them … someone else controlling it on their behalf. Maybe it's the men in the family, often sons are technologically knowledgeable, sometimes husbands, and they have access to smartphones.'*

In this context, on-demand platforms exhibit diverse high- and low-tech means of recruiting workers in India:

- A profile of a start-up company, GetDomesticHelp. com, reports a broad-based recruitment process: '*It enlists workers through the website, phone, self-help groups and non-governmental organisations. It is also in talks with a government agency to tap into the largely unorganised segment of (the) workforce*'.[43]
- MyDidi 'sets up camps' in slum and other low-income areas to provide information about the company and recruit workers, and also gives a financial reward to workers who refer other friends or family directly: '*Some of our didis have their entire family working with us – mothers and sisters as domestic helps and brothers, husbands and fathers as drivers*' (cited in Singh, 2016).

Though this indicates that the model of on-demand companies reflects the context in which they operate, other evidence gathered suggests that the relationship between domestic worker access to, use of, and control over engagement with platforms is highly complex.

As highlighted by our key informant in India, women's limited capacity to access or use mobile technology may leave them reliant on family members to mediate their engagement with on-demand platforms. Furthermore, another Indian platform, Taskbob, described workers' husbands' unease at not knowing their wives' whereabouts while at work. In response the platform sends SMS messages to husbands to inform them of their spouses' movements. As a representative reports: 'We need to bring about a mindset change. But for now, we have tried to incorporate features in the app where every time the woman accepts an order, her husband gets an SMS with the order details too' (cited in Mehta Kadakia, 2016). While engaging men can be seen as a resourceful means to support women's access to economic opportunities, it also

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40 See: https://domestly.com/home

41 See: https://sweepsouth.com/apply/

42 Per ITU data on Internet users per 100 people (ITU, 2016b).

43 See: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-weekend-life/when-help-is-just-a-click-awayTo /article4654946.ece. In another article, the Managing Director speaks of being in talks with the government of Andhra Pradesh to raise Rs 50 crore (approx. $8 million in 2013 exchange rates) 'to involve it in the training process and recognition of domestic services in the state', cited in http://archives.deccanchronicle.com/130528/news-businesstech/article/delivering-tailor-made-maids-your-doorstep.

**Box 8: Mobile money**

'Mobile money services' (which enable users to use their phones to send and receive money, make bill payments and top up their phone credit) have sought to redress the gap in access to financial services. The best-known example is M-Pesa (m for mobile, pesa means money in Swahili), which began in 2007 and which presently accounts for about 25% of Kenya's GDP (The Economist 2012, cited in Madianou, 2015: 4).

While mobile money accounts remain rare – just 1% of adults globally have just a mobile account – they are important drivers of access to financial services in SSA, where 12% of adults have mobile accounts, 45% of them exclusively (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2015). These services have expanded dramatically – 10 existed in 2008, which has expanded to 255 as of 2014, a nearly 16-fold increase (GSMA, 2015b: 15). As of 2014, these services operated across 89 countries (61% of the developing world), where they had resulted in just under 300 million mobile money accounts. The share of developing countries with mobile money services is lowest in the region of Europe Central Asia, at 14% and highest in SSA, where 81% of countries offer this service (Figure 8). The share of mobile phone connections linked to mobile money services is highest in SSA (23%), notably East Africa where it is close to 50% (ibid., 2015b: 25), with recent growth highest in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Figure 8: Share of developing countries offering mobile money accounts, by region, 2014**
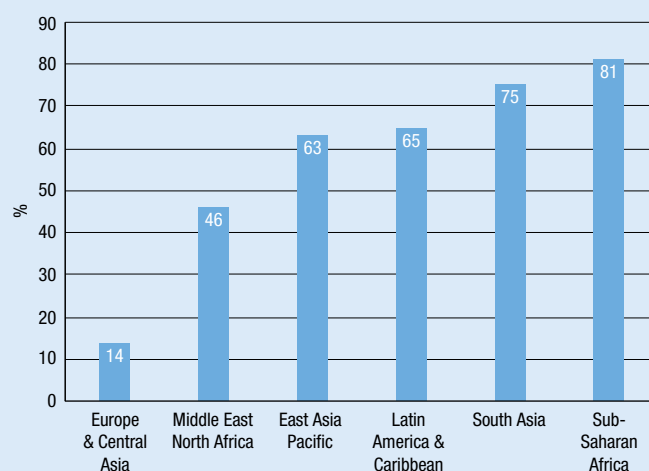


*Source: Elaboration of data in GSMA, 2015b.*

Access to mobile money services typically takes place via Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD), a text based protocol which has the advantages of low cost (it does not absorb airtime) and the ability to run on very simple phones.* However, diverse interfaces are used to reach different customers. For example, voice recognition 'can be adapted to numerous local languages and dialects', thereby helping with the targeting of 'illiterate communities, as well as people who aren't comfortable interacting with data services, typically USSD, on a mobile handset' (Ibid.: 23).

Therefore, these services offer significant potential to support the inclusion of marginalised groups in the on-demand economy – but important gaps remain. Available data suggests that early adopters were mostly male and urban, but that registered rural users may account for nearly half of all users and women may represent 28% (Ibid.: 28). Therefore, fulfilling this potential will require significant effort to ensure that fast-moving developments do not leave large groups behind – notably those experiencing multiple and intersecting inequalities.

* Other types of interface include SIM Application Toolkit (STK), Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and mobile apps.

suggests that women's engagement with platforms – and eventual gigs arising – is mediated by and reliant on men. This is problematic as it indicates that women's choice and control (and perhaps decision-making) over their own on-demand work lives can be limited.

Other evidence suggests different forms of resourcefulness to overcome digital exclusion. A key

informant from Kenya suggested that not having a mobile device (even within the family) is not necessarily a hindrance to seeking work through on-demand platforms. If people hear about an economic opportunity, they will find a way of accessing the platform – for example, by asking a friend to use their phone, or asking someone in village. The Kenyan informant reported, 'In any village

there's somebody with a smartphone [who] will be able to access that app'. This suggests that the economic opportunity presented by on-demand platforms drives potential domestic workers to actively seek to overcome barriers to access.

### 5.3.2 Overcoming financial barriers

Established on-demand platforms in developed countries often require formal bank accounts to make and receive payments for service provision. This model has been imported by some on-demand domestic work companies, for example Aliada in Mexico, which requires domestic workers to have a bank account before registering with the platform.[44] The extent to which domestic workers are unbanked is unclear. However, given what is known about their demographic profile within the traditional sector, an assumption can be made that they are likely to be financially excluded in many countries.

There is evidence that on-demand domestic work companies have recognised this exclusion and taken steps to overcome it. The founder of the MyDidi platform in India states, 'MyDidi's philosophy is to make the women financially independent', and the company opens a bank account for each service provider, with one worker quoted in the same article saying 'I know how to operate a bank account now and I'm no longer afraid of technology' (cited in Mehta Kadakia, 2016). While this appears a worthy effort, it remains to be seen how this works in practice, and whether opening bank accounts for all registered workers is scalable.

Another approach, potentially holding more promise for scalability, is the incorporation of mobile money services such as M-Pesa into on-demand platforms. This is particularly the case in contexts where mobile money is already well-established, such as across SSA (see Box 8). Indeed, the Kenyan on-demand domestic work platform founder confirmed that the platform payments were all made through M-Pesa, which included households paying for services as well as domestic workers receiving money earned. She noted, 'We had a few requests [from purchasers] to use credit cards, but it was done by M-Pesa … and anyway only 2% of Kenyans have a credit card, so there's no point putting the effort there when everybody has an M-Pesa account' (Kenya, informant).[45]

It is clear, then, that companies have attempted to develop their model to overcome digital divides, notably in terms of facilitating workers' access to on-demand work, although the cost of remaining connected to the platform remains a significant challenge. In some cases, they have also adopted financial services which offer promise to reach formally unbanked populations. However, the extent to which they have addressed the exclusion from the on-demand economy of the most marginalised populations remains unclear. Overcoming such barriers will be an important means of ensuring equitable access to the potential economic opportunities and any wider benefits that these platforms may offer, and as such should be an important focal point of future efforts to mature the on-demand economy in developing countries.

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44  See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-35113707

45  In Kenya, 4.6% of adults aged 15+ reported having a credit card in 2015, reducing to 2.3% among respondents from the poorest 40% of the population for the same period. Source: Global Findex (Global Financial Inclusion Database), World Bank.

# 6. Towards best practice

Dedicated on-demand platforms for domestic work are set for exponential growth over the years as Internet penetration and digitalisation takes further root in people's lives globally. This exploratory study has presented preliminary evidence on the emergence of this new trend, finding that while certain positive aspects exist, significant challenges also emerge – notably affecting domestic workers. Going forward, the potential of on-demand platforms to meet domestic service needs and facilitate economic opportunities must be supported in ways which harness the benefits of the on-demand economy and minimise its costs to workers.

In summary, a range of positive aspects of on-demand platform models offering the potential to support domestic workers' access to better working conditions have emerged. These may have a particular benefit to workers in contexts where the domestic work sector remains highly informal and unregulated. These include:

- Ability to track hours worked and earnings on the platform apps
- Ability to set own hourly rates
- Ability to work flexibly and to own schedule
- Company efforts to overcome digital and financial divides, including providing bank accounts or embracing low-tech means of engaging, communicating with and paying workers
- A two-way ratings and review system allowing workers to report on how clients have treated them
- Company investment in insurance to protect workers for injuries sustained at work and damages to personal property
- Company commitments to training and skills development, although course content remains unclear
- Company efforts to foster worker collaboration and mutual support through 'self-help' groups
- On-demand platforms hold aggregated data on both workers and purchasers, which has potential to be used to support advances in working conditions, for example by being able to identify and bring workers, purchasers and companies together in collective dialogue and bargaining.

However, substantial challenges have also emerged. These challenges include:

- The increase in on-demand domestic work can be seen as part of a broad phenomenon of casualisation of work globally, in which precarious and non-standard forms of employment are increasingly the norm (ILO, 2016a;

De Stefano, 2016). Our evidence suggests the regressive effects of this are particularly acute in countries with relatively advanced policy and legal frameworks for domestic work, such as South Africa. In short, on-demand work can represent a deterioration in hard-won gains in domestic work legislation, regulation and protections afforded to workers (such as sick and paternity leave and pension contributions) as on-demand companies eschew employment-related responsibilities by invoking commercially-focused 'independent contractor' arrangements.
- The relationship of domestic workers to on-demand companies remains ambiguous in many cases, resulting in a lack of clarity over the party accountable for labour standards and protections. Nonetheless, litigation in the domestic worker sector in the USA and the wider on-demand economy suggest that domestic workers may have significant grounds to contest their classification as independent contractors, as relevant to their jurisdiction.
- Overall, workers are subject to low-income levels and security. Even when hourly platform rates for 'time worked' surpass legal minimum wages, the time and money workers dispense to get to and from 'gigs' leaves workers in precarious financial situations.
- Platform ratings and review systems often reinforce unequal power relations between workers and service purchasers, as well as supporting discriminatory employment and consumer practice. Aside from harm caused from discrimination, review systems can have a significant negative impact on workers' access to economic opportunities.
- Discriminatory gender norms are upheld, for example by platforms which invoke gendered imagery and language to maintain women's overrepresentation in the traditionally precarious and exploitative domestic work sector. Furthermore, as a result of digital divides, men access platform technology on women's behalf and can thereby control women's access to and decision-making in labour market engagement.
- Ongoing barriers exist despite efforts by companies to innovate to overcome digital divides and support marginalised workers' access to platforms. Affordability is a challenge: workers are forced to spend a significant proportion of their earnings to remain connected to the platform. As a result, vast groups are likely to remain completely excluded from the on-demand economy, and from any of the potential benefits associated with it.

## 6.1 Next steps

Solutions to the challenges posed by the on-demand economy will necessitate involvement from diverse interest groups, including on-demand firms, service purchasers, workers and their collectives or unions, and policy-makers (Dewan and Randolph, 2016). Companies should be foremost in actively driving up standards, notably by working to reverse the 'race to the bottom' in on-demand work (Zook et al., 2010; Isaac, 2014) and instead 'designing-in' to their models inclusion, empowerment and equality of opportunity and outcome.

Foregrounding the experiences and priorities of domestic workers and drawing on good practice from across the wider on-demand and domestic work sectors will also support the evolution of platforms equipped to support workers. For example, mobile applications have been developed to deliver information to domestic workers about their rights and how to navigate the employment relationship, as well as supporting sector-wide network-building.[46] However, a key challenge to companies may be making good practice scalable, in particular initiatives requiring human resources within the company, such as training or opening bank accounts. Those which can be built into the platform may offer more promise in the short term, especially while companies are in start-up stage.

Governments have a vital role to play in supporting the potential of on-demand platforms to facilitate access to economic opportunities, whilst protecting against the challenges posed by the on-demand economy to decent work. Efforts should be concentrated within a wider framework of domestic work formalisation, gender equality and women's empowerment, addressing the specific causes of women's digital and financial exclusion and women's overrepresentation in low-quality employment. Tackling intersecting inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind must also remain in clear focus. Indeed, the very existence of an on-demand economy for domestic work brings a range of inequalities into sharp relief, particularly in relation to women.

Although on-demand domestic work supports some women to overcome disproportionate unpaid care and domestic work burdens, the alleviation of domestic burdens through market-based systems is typically only accessible to higher-income households. Governments therefore have a key role to play in ensuring all women are supported in line with new SDG commitments in this area (SDG 5.4), notably through quality, affordable public service provision (UN Women, 2015; Hunt and Samman, 2016). Ultimately, no initiative to tackle women's unpaid care and domestic work burdens can be considered empowering if its success is predicated on the exploitation of other, less privileged women.

## 6.2 Recommendations

In light of the evidence and discussion on the emergence of the on-demand domestic work economy, we propose the following priority areas for an integrated future policy, practice and research agenda.

Governments should:

- Develop comprehensive, integrated legal and policy frameworks which respond to the complex reality of the on-demand economy for domestic work in different contexts, including domestic work intermediary and labour regulation, social protection, technology and innovation, digital and financial inclusion, and gender equality and women's empowerment. An urgent response to addressing regression in working conditions as a result of independent contractor models is a key priority.
- Ensure rigorous scrutiny of on-demand companies through regulatory agencies to ensure they are complying with decent work standards, including labour laws, social protection and other requisite regulations. This should include mechanisms which allow workers, consumers and other groups to flag consumer and labour infractions to regulators.
- Ensure that taxation systems are fit for purpose in the on-demand economy age, which includes:
   o Targeting those most able to pay, including corporate entities
   o Avoiding implicit and explicit gender bias
   o Ensuring systems are accessible and easily understandable to all workers, including those with little experience of engaging with tax procedures.
- Recognise the right of domestic workers in the on-demand economy to organise, establish dialogue, collective bargaining and advocacy aimed at improving standards in the on-demand domestic work economy.
- Ratify and fully implement ILO Convention 189 and associated Recommendation 201 as part of a focused effort towards the formalisation of domestic work.

On-demand companies should:

- Adhere to ethical practices and protect the rights of workers, in line with the ILO Decent Work Agenda.
- Take creative steps to build-in equality of opportunity and outcome, fairness and anti-discrimination to company and on-demand platform models, for example by focusing provider profiles only on work experience and similar relevant information.
- Drive up standards by engaging in dialogue with domestic workers and their collectives/unions, service

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46  For example, Laudelina in Brazil. See: http://lac.unwomen.org/en/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2016/08/laudelina

purchasers, consumer watchdogs, regulators and the research community to share understanding and develop best practice guidelines, such as collaboratively produced codes of conduct.
- Recognise worker organisations, including groups of independent contractors, and establish collective dialogue and negotiation procedures with them.

In addition, we offer the following suggestions for domestic worker collectives and labour unions to consider:

- Work with on-demand companies and governments to ensure the active participation of domestic workers in collective bargaining.
- Engage companies and governments in constructive dialogue on corporate practices which threaten social justice and women's empowerment. This may include assisting with recommendations on better working practices, as most on-demand companies are new and may not be experienced in labour rights issues.
- Link to other unions and collectives in the on-demand or wider gig-economy sector, to share experiences, monitor practice across sectors and develop joint strategies and demands on how governments should respond to the emergence of the gig-economy.
- Work with companies, service purchasers, policy-makers, researchers and other interested parties to share experiences and lessons of good or promising practice across and within countries. This may notably target tech communities, so that companies are encouraged and supported to 'design-in' positive measures from the first stages of concept and start-up of on-demand platforms.

Finally, this scoping study has identified a number of areas of possible supplementary research. These should be further developed in close collaboration with domestic workers.[47] As a starting point, we propose that future research could:

- Investigate the impact of on-demand platforms on the domestic services sector over time. Evidence generated should inform guidance to governments, parliaments and regulators on legal, policy and regulatory tools, support on-demand companies in adhering to good practice, and assist domestic workers and their collectives in their advocacy.
- Assess how the entry of on-demand companies as an intermediary in the domestic services sector affects worker protections, including national labour and social provisions and the application of ILO Convention 189.
- Advance understanding of inequalities created by digital and financial divides and their implications for women's economic empowerment and the alleviation of women's unpaid care and domestic work load.
- Investigate the impact of technological advances and the changing world of work on women, including assessment of how they may regress social justice gains and progress made in the formalisation of the domestic work sector.
- Draw on evidence and analysis from other sectors to further develop understanding of company and government best practice, effective litigation and innovative ways to support workers in the gig-economy.

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47  For further information on collaborative processes between domestic workers and researchers see Azzarello et al. (2014).

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# Appendix

## Scoping study methodology

This study was based on a qualitative case-study research design, with South Africa as the main case. It combined document analysis, four key informant interviews, two in-depth interviews, three life history interviews, a group interview and a focus group discussion. All the interviews except for three global key informant interviews were carried out during the South Africa country case study.

### Case selection and scoping conditions

South Africa was purposively selected due to its emblematic socio-economic leadership among developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, especially given its transition towards emerging market and lower middle-income country status. In this respect, while the case of South Africa may not be representative of all developing countries, as trendsetters, it is indicative of where the developing world may trend towards regarding the on-demand economy in the near future.

South Africa was also of special interest due to its relatively high Internet penetration rates by developing country standards. Average penetration in developing countries is approximately 28%, whereas South Africa has an Internet penetration rate of 52% according to the ITU. Another characteristic that made South Africa a good candidate for this case study was its domestic worker situation. Domestic workers in South Africa have relatively high levels of education compared to other development country contexts. According to Oelz and Rani (2015), nearly three quarters of South Africa's domestic workers have a secondary education. In addition, South Africa has a fairly well-developed labour law environment with regards to domestic work, having recognised it as legitimate work in 1992, while constitutionalised labour rights in 1994 mandated a minimum wage regulation (Sectoral Determination Number 7 on domestic worker's conditions and minimum wage) and South Africa has ratified the ILO's convention 189.

Given these conditions, South Africa was considered a good candidate in which to study the impact of on-demand apps in the domestic work sector, and to glean initial impacts of technological intermediation on work, women's and worker rights and responsibilities. India, whose characteristics are different from South Africa (with half of South Africa's Internet penetration at 26%, but with a bigger market, and with over 50% of domestic workers illiterate, and only 13.3 % with secondary education) provided a useful comparative context. Below, we outline the methods employed.

### Document analysis

A global literature review traced the on-demand economy for domestic work and the legal, policy and regulatory framework surrounding the on-demand economy and domestic work. Three commissioned papers provided an in-depth analysis of trends, narratives and arguments regarding the on-demand economy and domestic work, including on gender, the digital divide, technology and the changing organisation of the care economy. The evidence included in the document analysis was selected based on the relevance to the topic and its ability to illuminate the questions used to direct the scoping study. The evidence was weighted differently, with peer-reviewed literature, source documents and reports from specialist bodies given higher weights than press reports and other grey literature. In all cases, attempts were made to compare similar information from different sources as part of source and information triangulation.

## Interviews

### Global experts

Key informant interviews (informants) were administered with global experts in labour and technology, legal and policy frameworks, and domestic work. We purposively selected these global experts based on expertise relevant for this paper. Table 1 (overleaf) summarises the global informant respondents and interview schedules.

### Service purchasers

In-depth interviews were carried out with two domestic work service purchasers who had used either the Domestly or SweepSouth mobile application. Respondents were purposively selected based on their use of the apps. Table 2 (overleaf) summarises the in-depth interview respondents and schedule.

**Table 1: Global informant interview and schedules**

| Pseudonym | Institution | Date interviewed |
|---|---|---|
| Global informant Geneva | ILO | 21 October 2016 |
| Global informant Kenya | Founder of on-demand domestic services company | 21 October 2016 |
| Global informant India | Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT) | 19 October 2016 |

**Table 2: In-depth interview respondents and schedule**

| Pseudonym | Service purchaser app company | Date interviewed |
|---|---|---|
| Nokutenda | SweepSouth | 22 October 2016 |
| Gugulethu | SweepSouth | 27 October 2016 |

### Domestic workers

Three life history interviews were carried out with domestic workers. Life history interviews were used in order to get a fuller account of the socio-economic antecedents to the domestic workers' participation in domestic work, and how they ended up using the app. This approach added depth and context, allowing the study to map fuller trajectories of domestic work services and portraits of the providers. Respondents were initially purposively selected based on use of on-demand platforms to seek work. Snowballing was used to identify other respondents. Table 3 summarises the domestic worker life history interviews and schedule.

### Policy-makers

One key informant interview (Government official, South Africa) was conducted with an official from the South African Government's Department of Labour on 25 October 2016. The Department and official interviewed were purposively selected because of their in-depth involvement on labour issues, notably the legal and regulatory side. Attempts were made to interview other policy-makers and key informants from the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on labour, but while they stated interest in the research, the targeted respondents could not avail themselves during the performance period of the study.

### On-demand companies and domestic worker collectives in South Africa

Two key informant interviews were sought from senior management teams in dedicated mobile app companies, Domestly and SweepSouth, which were the two major actors in this sector in South Africa at the time of the study. However, while an audience was granted with Domestly, the company preferred not to go on record for this study. The SweepSouth respondent went into labour and subsequent maternity leave at the time the interview was scheduled, and did not forward a replacement.

An interview was also sought with representatives of domestic worker unions in South Africa, who expressed interest in the research but were not available to participate during the data collection period of the study. Instead, relevant information was sought and secured from focus group discussion 1 with researchers of domestic work from the University of Western Cape's Social law Project (below).

**Table 3: Domestic worker life history interviews and schedule**

| Pseudonym | Domestic worker app company | Date interviewed |
|---|---|---|
| Busi | SweepSouth | 24 October 2016 |
| Susan | SweepSouth | 20 October 2016 |
| Sibongile | SweepSouth | 2 November 2016 |

### Group interviews and focus group discussions:

Group interview participants: Conducted on the 30 October 2016, with three domestic workers who use the Domestly platform. The three participants were identified through snowballing, as the target group of domestic workers using apps is still new and small.

Focus group discussion 1 (FGD1): Carried out on the 25 October 2016 with three academics from the University of Western Cape's Social Law Project. The respondents were purposively sampled because of the Social Law Project's past work on domestic labour, and their ongoing study on technology within the domestic services sector. All participants were labour law experts and researchers on domestic work.

## Ethical considerations

The study was carried out through sound research conduct and good practice. Specifically,

- Consent: All participants to interviews were briefed on the research project, and completed and signed consent forms except for the Domestly founders for reasons mentioned in the section on app companies. For respondents who needed translation, the researchers provided oral translations into Xosa, Zulu and Shona.
- Clarity of purpose: The researchers explained the purpose of the study to all participants, and gave clarifications where they were sought. Those who opted out, like the Domestly co-founders, had their wishes respected. Each respondent was provided with an information sheet, clearly written in easy-to-understand language.
- Anonymising all data: All respondents were promised anonymity, and this promise is fulfilled in this paper, where the team has coded all participants. See Tables 1-3.
- Remuneration for participants: No participants were given financial or other material incentives to participate or contribute to the study. All participants participated voluntarily without incentive or duress.
- Risk assessment: The research team considered psychological risk especially when dealing with migrant domestic workers. We used appropriate tone in speech and local language to remove any possible ambiguities in questions. Life history interviews with domestic workers made them comfortable to tell their stories, with probing from the research team.

**This is one of a series of Development Progress working papers.**

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