

Corporate Accountability in the Gig Economy: Re-examining Labour Law to Prevent Digital Slavery

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Abstract:

This paper examines the growing problem of corporate accountability in the gig economy by critically analysing how digital labour platforms exercise employer-like control while avoiding employer-like legal responsibilities. It argues that the platform economy, often celebrated for flexibility and autonomy, in reality produces a deeply unequal labour structure marked by algorithmic control, economic dependency, surveillance, and lack of social protection. The study shows that gig workers, though formally classified as independent contractors, are functionally subjected to pricing control, performance monitoring, automated penalties, and deactivation mechanisms that closely resemble managerial authority. In this context, the paper uses the concept of “digital slavery” as a normative framework to describe labour conditions shaped by coercive algorithmic management, absence of bargaining power, and structural precarity. It further analyses how platform companies rely on contractual misclassification, corporate structuring, and the legal fiction of neutrality to separate control from liability. Through a comparative study of the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and India, the paper demonstrates that while several jurisdictions have attempted to regulate gig work, most responses remain incomplete and fail to fully address platform accountability. The paper finally proposes a reconstructed labour law framework based on economic dependency rather than traditional employment classification. It advocates recognition of dependent contractor status, platform liability for worker welfare, algorithmic transparency, social security obligations, and specialised grievance mechanisms. The central argument of the paper is that unless labour law evolves to address digitally mediated control and platform-based asymmetry, the gig economy risks normalising exploitative labour conditions under the guise of innovation and flexibility.

Keywords: Gig economy; corporate accountability; digital slavery; algorithmic management; labour law; platform workers; economic dependency; worker misclassification; social security; platform regulation.

1. Framing the Problem: From Flexibility to Digital Control

The gig economy is also often put forward as an example of a flexible labour market, entrepreneurship, and technological change where people act as autonomous economic participants who can decide when, and how, to work at their own will. Uber, Swiggy, Zomato, and Amazon Mechanical Turk are digital platforms that have grown fast by advancing the notion that employees are not workers but rather independent contractors that have flexibility and choices regarding their schedule. Nevertheless, this story hides a structural change in working relationships whereby work is controlled by not the conventional

managerial supervision but by the algorithms that define work distribution, pricing, performance appraisal, and discipline. Consequently, the gig economy is not only a new mode of work organisation but a change in the managerial control to algorithmic control, where digital platforms act as invisible employers without necessarily taking on equivalent legal liabilities.¹

The change in the traditional employer-employee model to the platform-independent contractor model has serious legal and economic implications. Platform companies by categorizing workers as independent contractors do not have to pay attention to minimum wages, social security payments, health care insurance, vacation time, and collective bargaining rights. The workers are officially independent but are economically reliant on platforms to give them access to work, consumers, and revenues. Rating systems, dynamic pricing algorithms, and automated penalties support this dependency and control the behaviour and performance of the workers. The algorithmic management therefore establishes a digital surveillance and performance control system, in which employees are expected to keep their ratings and acceptance rates in order to stay functional on the platform. The system is effective in shifting business risks to the workers and having the platforms to maintain operational control without legal liability.²

These architectural aspects bring up the issue of what can be termed as digital slavery not in the conventional legal meaning of property but a state of economic bondage coupled with algorithmic manipulation, the inability to negotiate and the inability to have social security. Gig workers frequently have no power to negotiate their pay, appeal algorithmic ruling, or receive grievance procedures, and can be deactivated without a trial. Economic dependency, continuous digital surveillance, and algorithmic discipline coupled with absence of social security form the circumstances of structural vulnerability and precarity in labour that questions the adequate nature of the current labour law frameworks that were previously developed in relation to conventional employment relations. Based on this, the key question is whether the current labour law provisions can address the imposition of corporate responsibility on gig platforms or that a new legal framework is needed to regulate platform-mediated labour and avoid exploitative terms akin to digital slavery.³

2. Conceptual Foundations: Redefining Work, Employer, and Control in the Digital Economy

The classic employer employee relationship in the labour law has historically been founded on recognisable factors like being in control, supervising, integrating in the business, and being economically dependant. Some of these tests have included control test, integration test and economic reality or dependency test, which have been used by courts and labour law systems to establish whether a worker is an employee. The tests are based on a traditional workplace model where the employer actively oversees the work, sets the working hours and has visible management power. Nevertheless, the rise of the platform economy undermines these presumptions since the platforms assume control indirectly not by human control but by algorithm, making it unclear how to differentiate between the employees and independent contractors.⁴

Platform companies have modified the independent contractor model typically defined by autonomy, entrepreneurial risk, and independent decision-making to consider gig workers self-employed.

¹ Valerio De Stefano, The Rise of the “Just-in-Time Workforce”: On-Demand Work, Crowdsourcing and Labour Protection in the “Gig-Economy,” 37 *Comp. Lab. L. & Pol’y J.* 471 (2016).

² Jeremias Prassl, *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy* (Oxford Univ. Press 2018).

³ International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms in Transforming the World of Work* (2021).

⁴ Mark Freedland & Nicola Kountouris, *The Legal Construction of Personal Work Relations* (Oxford Univ. Press 2011).

Theoretically, independent contractors have control over their working practices, price negotiation, and are independent business persons. In the platform economy model, workers have no control over the price and customer distribution, performance ratings, or work opportunities. Rather, these elements are dictated by digital platforms which provide algorithmic management systems to distribute tasks, price dynamically, tracking performance in ratings and handing out automated penalties or disabling. Algorithmic management is thus a managerial control method that is done by use of technology and not face-to-face supervision and in this way makes it difficult to use the traditional employment classification tests.⁵

The weakness of the conventional classification models is clear as the control, integration and economic dependency tests are run on gig work. Although platforms argue that workers are independent contractors because they have flexibility in their working hours, platforms nevertheless dictate key factors of work like prices, customer allocation, and performance standards, which is indicative of functional control. Likewise, gig workers commonly rely on one platform as their economic source and are part of the fundamental business activities of the platform, indicating that they act like dependent workers rather than independent entrepreneurs. This has made scholars come up with the term of dependent contractors which acknowledges economic dependency and functional control despite the lack of formal employment contracts.⁶

It is in this context that the notion of digital slavery is developed as a hypothetical framework based on labour relations that are typified by economic dependence, algorithmic authority, constant monitoring, and bargaining powerlessness. Although gig workers are not the property of the law, the authority to work, to earn money, and to remain a part of the labour market is manipulated by the algorithmic systems that cannot be negotiated or contested effectively. The digital platform has been subjected to theoretical positions like labour exploitation theory, surveillance capitalism, Marxist labour commodification, and platform capitalism that clarifies how digital platforms derive labour value and delegate employment to workers at the same time shifting risk to them. Other researchers refer to this system as similar to neo-feudal labour relations, in which platforms act as digital intermediaries determining access to economic opportunities instead of traditional employers.⁷

These theoretical advances imply that gig workers cannot be precisely defined as independent contractors under the established labour law frameworks. Instead, they are a type of economically dependent employees that are managed by controlling them with algorithmic systems instead of being supervised. That questions the dichotomy between employee and independent contractor and suggests that labour law typologies need to be reconfigured to take into consideration the phenomenon of algorithmic control, economic dependence, and platform-mediated labour relations.⁸

3. Corporate Structuring and the Legal Fiction of “Platform Neutrality”

The main aspect of the gig economy of doing business is that platform companies are legally considered neutral technological intermediaries and not employers. Platform companies always identify as digital marketplaces that only provide a connection between service providers and consumers and thus refute the presence of any employment relationship. Employees are also referred to as workers, partners or

⁵ Jeremias Prassl, *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy* (Oxford Univ. Press 2018).

⁶ Valerio De Stefano, *The Rise of the “Just-in-Time Workforce”: On-Demand Work, Crowdsourcing and Labour Protection in the “Gig-Economy,”* 37 *Comp. Lab. L. & Pol’y J.* 471 (2016).

⁷ Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Polity Press 2017).

⁸ International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms in Transforming the World of Work* (2021).

independent service providers or users of the platform instead of employees. This is not just a semantic linguistic and contractual framing but rather a specific legal strategy aimed at avoiding the obligations of the labour law and vicarious liability as well as social security contributions. Platform companies seek to distance economic control and legal responsibility by organising themselves as intermediaries and not employers, and establishing a regulatory gap in labour law.⁹

This legal fiction of platform neutrality is also strengthened by the contractual architecture of platform work. Platform company drafted standard form contracts usually contain express statements to the effect that no employer employee relationship exists and that employees run independent businesses at their own peril. These are non-negotiating and offered on a take or leave terms and do not exhibit any form of equality of bargaining power between platforms and workers. Although workers are contractually classified as independent contractors, the platform has authority to manage key elements of work through algorithmic management systems. Work is assigned to users and prices set, routes are optimized, performance is rated, penalties are imposed and the user is suspended or switched off the platform using algorithms. Employees are not able to negotiate prices, select customers at will or contest algorithmic resolutions. This framework enables the platforms to have functional control over labour and formally reject any employment relationship.¹⁰

Legally, this set-up casts doubts on worker misclassification and applicability of the doctrine like vicarious liability and joint employer liability. Misclassification of workers takes place when workers who are in practice employees are treated as independent contractors of the contract to escape the legal liability. In a number of jurisdictions, courts have been looking more at the content of the relationship as opposed to contractual labels, with the understanding that control taking place by means of algorithms may still amount to employer control. Equally, the joint employer doctrine can be applicable in a situation where a platform wields much influence on working conditions despite the worker being officially contracted under an intermediary or contractor arrangement. The latter doctrines put into question the argument that platform companies are just a passive bystanders who have no control over the labour conditions.¹¹

Corporate structuring is also important in the limitation of liability. Platforms companies are also usually characterized by complicated corporate hierarchies, subsidiaries, and contractualization that distance the platform entity with the liabilities of operations. The corporate veil doctrine is historically applied to shield the parent companies of liability of the actions of subsidiaries but in platform business models it can be adopted to protect the controlling entity against labour laws and other worker claims. Also, platform contracts can be described as sham contracts in which the working relationship is not represented in the form of a contract. Such arrangements of disguising employment relationships through the use of contractual terms have been previously ignored by courts.¹²

Platform neutrality is a legal fiction thus allowing platform companies to have employer-like control over workers but not employer-like liability. With contractual misclassification, algorithmic management, corporate structuring, and unequal bargaining power, the platform companies are successful in parting control and responsibility. Such division of labour is one of the most notable regulatory issues in the gig

⁹ Jeremias Prassl, *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy* (Oxford Univ. Press 2018).

¹⁰ Valerio De Stefano, *The Rise of the “Just-in-Time Workforce”: On-Demand Work, Crowdfund and Labour Protection in the “Gig-Economy,”* 37 *Comp. Lab. L. & Pol’y J.* 471 (2016).

¹¹ Mark Freedland & Nicola Kountouris, *The Legal Construction of Personal Work Relations* (Oxford Univ. Press 2011).

¹² Guy Davidov, *A Purposive Approach to Labour Law* (Oxford Univ. Press 2016).

economy and poses basic questions concerning the sufficiency of current labour and corporate law frameworks to hold platform-based business models to corporate responsibility.¹³

4. Comparative Legal Responses: Global Attempts to Regulate Gig Corporations

UK: The Middle Ground Approach.

The United Kingdom has taken a mixed approach to the legal system by acknowledging the legal status of the gig workers as an intermediate category of law as workers but not as an employee nor as an independent contractor. The UK approach was brought to the fore with the case of *Uber BV v. Aslam*, in which the UK Supreme Court did not discuss the contractual terms but reviewed the actual facts of the working relationship, specifically the aspects of control, dependency, and integration into the business model of the platform¹⁴. The UK legislation by considering gig workers as workers offers very few labour protections without making them fully employed. Nonetheless, this is not enough to fully impose the liability of the employer because platforms do not have to offer full employment benefits like redundancy insurance or full social security payments. Hence, even though the UK model is a partial solution to the problem of worker misclassification, it is still a trade-off between the flexibility of the platforms and the minimum standards of labour, as opposed to the full solution to corporate responsibility.

America: the ABC Test and the California Experiment.

The concept of gig workers in the United States has been primarily influenced by the regulation on the state level, especially the Assembly Bill 5 (AB5), the California legislation that brought the ABC Test of employment status determination. This test highly limits the capacity of the gig economy to classify workers as independent contractors since platform drivers and delivery workers usually carry out jobs that the company is in the business. Nonetheless, lobbying by corporations resulted in the enactment of the Prop 22 that established another group of app-based drivers that have limited benefits but is not considered employees. This shows the clash between the efforts by lawmakers to make companies responsible and the opposition of companies to maintain platform neutrality. The US paradigm consequently describes regulatory discontinuities and corporate interference in the labour classification systems.

European Union: Assumption of Employment and Algorithms Transparency.

The European Union has been more structural in its regulation by proposing the Platform Work Directive, which creates a legal presumption of employment whereby some indicators of control exist, especially an algorithmic management system, performance measurement, and termination of workers.¹⁵ The EU approach realises that the digital economy is not physically but technologically controlled and as such, labour law should embrace algorithmic management systems. The EU framework is a step closer to holding corporate accountability on a platform company since it shifts the burden of proving that the worker is truly independent onto them. Nevertheless, there is a difference in the implementation of the member states, and the problem of enforcement is still very serious.

India: Recognition without Rights.

India has embarked on recognition-based strategy by the Social Security Code 2020, which identifies legally the gig workers and platform workers as a special category of labour. The legislation however does not emphasize on employment rights but mostly on welfare schemes and social security measures. The

¹³ International Labour Organization, World Employment and Social Outlook: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms in Transforming the World of Work (2021).

¹⁴ *Uber BV v. Aslam*, [2021] UKSC 5.

¹⁵ European Commission, Proposal for a Directive on Improving Working Conditions in Platform Work, COM (2021) 762 final.

Indian model does not treat gig workers as employees and thus they are not protected by the minimum wage standards, collective bargaining rights, and conventional protections of labour laws in the country¹⁶. Consequently, the platform companies still evade the employer responsibilities and enjoy labour flexibility and lower operational rates.

Comparative Analysis Table

Country/ Religion	Worker Status	Social Security	Minimum Wage	Collective Bargaining	Corporate Liability
United kingdom	Worker (intermediate category)	Partial	Yes	Limited	Partial
United States (California)	ABC Test/ Hybrid	Partial	Conditional	Limited	Partial
European Union	Presumption of Employment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Stronger
India	Gig worker category	Limited Schemes	Yes	No	Weak

Comparative Analytical Conclusion

The comparative analysis reveals that the majority of the jurisdictions shifted towards the acknowledgement of gig workers as a separate category of labour but the act of recognition does not lead to corporate accountability. The United Kingdom offers minimum labour protection by means of an intermediate category, the United States tries to reform classification by the ABC Test but is opposed by corporations, the European Union tries to pass to presumption of employment and algorithmic regulation, and India tries primarily to recognise welfare but does not provide employment rights. In all jurisdictions, the fundamental issue of regulation is the same: platform firms have the control of an employer, but the liability of an employer. As such, global juridical reactions are characterized by a slow movement to regulation but remains short of reorganising completely the labour law to respond to the structural power unequal between gig companies and the platform employees.¹⁷

5. Digital Slavery: When Algorithmic Management Becomes Coercion

The change in the nature of labour relations in the gig economy causes some basic issues that are not limited to the contractual classification and reach the sphere of human rights and labour exploitation. Although gig work is formally defined as a voluntary, flexible arrangement, its structural aspects become more and more similar to the conditions of coercion between the digital systems instead of physical one. However, the lack of formal employment does not remove control; this control is just embedded in algorithmic systems of access to work and the determination of the level of income and the preconditioning of further involvement in the labour market. This type of control combined with economic dependence and absence of legal rights forms a structure where workers are forced to acquiesce to the requests of the

¹⁶ Code on Social Security, 2020 (India).

¹⁷ Valerio De Stefano, Platform Work and the Employment Relationship, 41 Comp. Lab. L. & Pol’y J. 471 (2020).

platforms in order to keep their livelihoods alive thus forming a grey line between free labour and forced labour.¹⁸

One of the features of this system is lack of bargaining power and economic dependence. Gig workers usually have one platform as their main or only income source, but they have no possibilities to negotiate wages and conditions of work or contractual terms. The algorithmic process of prices is unilateral, and the rate of acceptance and performance are the factors that directly affect the further distribution of work. Ratings systems are the means of control, and customer assessment does not only define the stability of income, but also leaves the worker further access to the platform. This builds up a regime where employees internalize discipline to keep their ratings positive and in effect they are subjected to the constant behaviour regulation without the need to be supervised.¹⁹

This dynamic is further enhanced by algorithmic management and active digital surveillance and automated enforcement. Platforms monitor the whereabouts of workers, efficiencies, response time and interactions of the customers in real time creating a culture of never-ending observation. A non-conformance to the anticipated standards of performance can lead to a punishment, diminished presence or even being shut down on the platform, in most cases without any prior warning or a chance to challenge the ruling. The lack of procedural protection or grievance systems implies that algorithmic dismissal is a one-sided and non-transparent kind of control. Employees, thus, work in uncertainty and insecurity, in which their future access to labor is conditional to adherence to algorithmic orders that cannot be negotiated and are not transparent, as well as to adhere to them.²⁰

The structural conditions like the debt cycles and lack of social security contribute to these conditions. Most gig workers purchase cars or other equipment using a loan, and thus they are forced to be on-the-job all the time to pay off the debt. This is what leads to the addiction to take up bad working conditions and long hours to continue earning. Social security services such as health insurance, unemployment benefits, and stable incomes are absent, which further makes people vulnerable. The platform in this regard acts as an invisible employer, with no accountability, and the workers suffer the economic risk without institutional safeguards.²¹

These conditions have a legal and normative echo with the larger ideas of forced labour and exploitation under the international labour standards. The International Labour Organization considers forced labour as labour provided under the threat of punishment in cases where the employee has not volunteered to work, and even though gig work might not be based on physical coercion, the economic dependence, algorithmic punishment, and inability to choose might be used as structural coercion. These dynamics involve basic rights like human dignity, right to livelihood as well as the right against exploitation. In this regard, the digital control without any legal responsibility provides the grounds that, although the process of the latter is technologically mediated, it possesses the fundamental features of the contemporary types of unfree labour, and thus, the reconsideration of the labour laws paradigms in the framework of the gig economy is necessary.²²

¹⁸ Jeremias Prassl, *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy* (Oxford Univ. Press 2018).

¹⁹ Valerio De Stefano, The Rise of the “Just-in-Time Workforce”: On-Demand Work, Crowdwork and Labour Protection in the “Gig-Economy,” 37 *Comp. Lab. L. & Pol’y J.* 471 (2016).

²⁰ International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms in Transforming the World of Work* (2021).

²¹ Guy Davidov, *A Purposive Approach to Labour Law* (Oxford Univ. Press 2016).

²² International Labour Organization, *Forced Labour Convention*, 1930 (No. 29).

6. Reconstructing Labour Law: From Employment Classification to Economic Dependency The Re-evaluation of the Foundations of the Labour Law Regulation.

The regulatory crisis of the gig economy is a result of the fact labour law remains based on the binary system of employee-or-independent-contractor division of workers. This model of classification was intended to be used in industrial employment relationships that have physical workplaces, direct supervision and identifiable employers. Nonetheless, platform-based labour relations are based on algorithmic control, contractual misclassification and dispersed corporate forms and, therefore, the customary classification tests are insufficient. The main regulatory issue, then, should not be, is a worker formally an employee, but, is a worker economically reliant on a platform to earn a livelihood and have a stable source of income. Economic dependency is the actual power disparity of platform work and is a better legal ground to establish corporate responsibility. By transforming the approach to labour law and replacing an employment relationship model with an economic dependency model, legal systems can control platform corporations without being limited to the old categories of classification.²³

Development of a New Legal Type: Dependent Contractor.

One of the reform suggestions is the establishment of a new category of laws called the dependent contractor that would be existing between the employees and independent contractors. The category would consist of formally self-employed workers who are economically reliant on one platform and are under the platform control in terms of algorithmic management. The core labour protections of minimum earnings guarantees, social security contributions, collective bargaining rights and unfair termination protection would be applicable to dependent contractors, though with some of the flexibility of independent work. A number of jurisdictions have already tried intermediate categories, yet a more elaborate and detailed system of law is needed concerning platform-based labour. The identification of dependent contractors would deal with worker misclassification and make sure that platforms cannot evade liability simply by writing contracts that do not acknowledge employment relationships.²⁴

Accountability of the Platform and Regulation of the Algorithms.

The other essential change is the introduction of platform responsibility legislation and transparency of the algorithms. Because platforms are regulated by algorithms and not human operators, legal control should be directed at algorithmic governance and not the conventional managerial control. The workers must legally be entitled to clarification about the algorithmic decisions like work placement, price adjustments, performance assessment, and account deactivation or suspension. The laws of the transparency of algorithms would force the platforms to reveal the decision-making requirements, to avoid non-discriminatory algorithms, and to offer procedural protection prior to the deactivation. This would bring in the principles of natural justice to the digital labour management system and avoid arbitrary algorithmic punishment.²⁵

Institutional Mechanisms, Collective Rights, and Social Protection.

The lack of social security and collective representation in the gig economy should also be covered by labour law reform. The platforms must be obligated to provide to the social security of gig workers such as health insurance, accident insurance, retirement benefits and income protection plans. Minimum earnings guarantees ought to be put in place to avoid volatility in income due to algorithmic pricing

²³ Guy Davidov, *A Purposive Approach to Labour Law* (Oxford Univ. Press 2016).

²⁴ Mark Freedland & Nicola Kountouris, *The Legal Construction of Personal Work Relations* (Oxford Univ. Press 2011).

²⁵ Valerio De Stefano, *Negotiating the Algorithm: Automation, Artificial Intelligence and Labour Protection*, Int'l Labour Org. Working Paper (2018).

systems. Gig workers should be given collective bargaining rights to enable them to negotiate with the platform on the working conditions and policies as a group rather than as an individual. Also, institutional solutions like a Digital Ombudsman or a Gig Worker Tribunal are needed to address the problem of unfair deactivation, payment disputes, algorithmic discrimination, and contract violations. Employees must also have data rights, such as the ability to access their performance data and transfer reputational ratings across platforms, so that there is less dependency on a platform and lock-in effects.²⁶

Platform Responsibility Structural Reform.

Lastly, the structural reforms would also encompass the requirement of written contracts, mandatory platform liability insurance against risks of workers, and regulation of working hours to avoid excessive working hours, and a tax or fund of welfare of the platform should be set to ensure the welfare of gig workers. Such policies would make the platform companies internalise the social cost of labour, instead of pushing all risks on the workers. The larger scale aim of such reforms is to re-structure labour law based on economic dependency, digital controls and corporate responsibilities as opposed to legal employment status. Without a change in the conceptual basis of labour law, which requires moving the existing emphasis on the categorisation of employment to a focus on economic dependency and control, platform companies will remain capable of exercising the power of employers without the responsibility of employers, which further entails structural exploitation in the gig economy.²⁷

7. Corporate Accountability Framework for the Platform Economy

Requirement of a Model of Corporate Accountability.

The regulation of the gig economy cannot be discussed in the context of the classical labour law system that is based on the employment classification. Platform companies exert an economic and technological control over employees without the liability of an employer because it is organized through a contract and algorithmic management. Thus, platform economy corporate accountability should be designed in a thorough legal framework, as opposed to isolated labour law changes. A five pillar corporate accountability scheme offers a regulatory framework that systematically allocates accountability to classification, liability, transparency, social protection, and dispute resolution. This model changes the emphasis of labour regulation towards corporate power and economic dependency instead of the contractual nature of employment, more valid as a description of the platform labour relations.²⁸

The Five-Pillar Corporate Accountability Model

1. Classification Reform Dependent Contractor Status.

The pillar one is that gig workers should be regarded as dependent contractors but not as independent contractors. This grouping would be applicable to the economically dependent workers, who are controlled by an algorithm on work allocation, pricing, and performance measurement. Dependency as a contractor would provide workers with the core labour protection including minimum earnings protection, social security coverage, protection against unfair deactivation but some flexibility in line with independent work.²⁹

²⁶ International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms in Transforming the World of Work* (2021).

²⁷ Jeremias Prassl, *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy* (Oxford Univ. Press 2018).

²⁸ Guy Davidov, *A Purposive Approach to Labour Law* (Oxford Univ. Press 2016).

²⁹ Mark Freedland & Nicola Kountouris, *The Legal Construction of Personal Work Relations* (Oxford Univ. Press 2011).

2. Corporate Liability Platform as Welfare Employers.

The second pillar entails the introduction of restricted employer responsibility on platforms of labour welfare, work protection, insurance and compensation. The platforms should also not be given the ability to exercise employer like control and yet not be given the same responsibilities as employers are. Economic control should also be associated to corporate liability as opposed to formal employment classification.³⁰

3. Algorithmic Transparency and Accountability.

The third pillar demands the platform to publish algorithmic decision-making systems in regard to work allocation, pricing, ratings, and account suspension. The employees must have a right to be told and be able to appeal against automated decisions on their livelihood. The computer-based transparency presents procedural fairness and accountability into digital labour management.³¹

4. Social Security Contributions by Platforms.

The fourth pillar mandates platform companies to make social security contributions on the policy of health insurance, accident insurance, disability benefits, and retirement. This spreads the labour risks among the workers and platforms as opposed to putting all economic risks on the workers.

5. Dispute resolution- Gig Worker Tribunals.

The fifth pillar is to have specialised Gig Worker Tribunals or Digital Labour Ombudsman institutions to settle the disputes based on unfair deactivation, payment disputes, and algorithmic penalties. Specific courts would offer more convenient and quicker solutions compared to the conventional labour courts.³²

Proposal Model Law Platform Workers Protection and Corporate Accountability Act.

Dependent contractor classification, platform liability, algorithmic transparency, social security contributions and specialised dispute resolution mechanisms can be included in a model law that can be offered based on this framework, which is the Platform Workers Protection and Corporate Accountability Act. This kind of law would move labour regulation out of employment classification disputes and into the area of corporate accountability and economic dependency regulation in the platform economy.

8. Conclusion: Preventing the Normalization of Digital Slavery

The gig economy cannot be perceived as informal or flexible labor in the traditional sense but as an algorithmically controlled technologically mediated labour system marked by economic dependency and asymmetry of the contract. The platform corporations have reorganised labour relationships such that they separate control of labour and legal responsibility so that they can operate as employers in economic reality without incurring the liabilities of employer in legal form. This organisational distance is one of the acute dilemmas of labour law, which is still predominantly constructed on the models of industrial employment and is not able to reflect algorithmic management and online supervision. Thus, the main concern is not only the classification of workers but the problem of corporate responsibility in digitally mediated labour markets in general.³³

As the analysis conducted all through this paper indicates, the current two-pole classification of employee and independent contractor is not sufficient to regulate the platform work. Economic dependency,

³⁰ Jeremias Prassl, *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy* (Oxford Univ. Press 2018).

³¹ Valerio De Stefano, *Negotiating the Algorithm: Automation, Artificial Intelligence and Labour Protection*, Int'l Labour Org. Working Paper (2018).

³² International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms in Transforming the World of Work* (2021).

³³ Jeremias Prassl, *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy* (Oxford Univ. Press 2018).

algorithmic control, and unilateral control of contracts are among the conditions under which gig workers work, and seem to be subordinate labour relationships, even though formally contractual autonomy is maintained. The labour law should thus be changed to an economic dependency model, as opposed to an employment classification model, which acknowledges control, dependency and integration, instead of using the term contractual. This change would enable the imposition of responsibility on platform corporations by legal systems that are not limited to the old categories of doctrines.³⁴

Without the evolution of labour law, the gig economy has the potential to become a form of labour in which workers are subordinated to digital systems with no social security, no collective bargaining, and no law. This can contribute to the naturalisation of digitally mediated labour regimes which are similar to contemporary modes of unfree labour in which coercion is not physical but economic and technological. A legal system that ensures corporate responsibility, provides social protection, and governs the algorithmic management system is a solution to preventing the normalisation of such conditions. Finally, the future of work in the digital economy will be determined by the answer to the question of whether the legal systems will focus on technological innovation or will strike a balance between the innovation and labour rights, the human dignity, and the protection against exploitation.³⁵

³⁴ Guy Davidov, *A Purposive Approach to Labour Law* (Oxford Univ. Press 2016).

³⁵ Valerio De Stefano, The Rise of the “Just-in-Time Workforce”: On-Demand Work, Crowdsourcing and Labour Protection in the “Gig-Economy,” 37 *Comp. Lab. L. & Pol’y J.* 471 (2016).