J. URMILA / ILO

GIG WORK ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Case Study 1: QuikrJobs – India

Learning, Evaluation and Research Activity II (LER II)

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Despite high rates of economic growth in India over the past two decades, employment growth has been notably slow; unemployment reached a 40-year high at 6.1 percent between 2017 and 2018.[1] Over 4.75 million young people are expected to join the labor force every year, yet only one to two million jobs are reported to have been created in 2017.[2] Labor market data in India is fragmented and contested, and has recently become a highly politicized issue with the government delaying the release of the periodic labor force survey because it showed unfavorable unemployment numbers. The survey found that 7.8 percent of urban employable youth were without jobs. The gap between education, skills, and employment is also dire, with one report suggesting that only 3.84 percent of engineering graduates were employable.[3]

Labor markets in India are marked by heterogeneity and informality. The unorganized sector of the economy employs a majority of the workforce in India and contributes a little over half of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Over 80 percent of the labor force in India is engaged in non-standard employment, within the unorganized sector, characterized by low wages, poor job security, and the absence of employment-related social protection benefits.[4]

---

[1] Kumar, C. (Ed.). (2019, January 31). India's unemployment rate hit four-decade high of 6.1% in 2017-18, says NSSO survey. Business Today. Retrieved from https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/india-unemployment-rate-hits-four-decade-high-of-6-pct-in-2017-says-nsso-survey/story/315420.html.

[2] Nagaraj, R. (2018, August 28). Jobs growth claims in India: a fact check. *The Mint*. Retrieved from https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/YUAVT11h0flTmoK16Q9pvM/Opinion--Jobs-growth-claims-in-India-a-fact-check.html.

[3] Aspiring Minds (2016). *National Employability Report: Engineers Annual Report 2016*. Retrieved from https://www.aspiringminds.com/sites/default/files/National%20Employability%20Report%20-%20Engineers%20Annual%20Report%202016.pdf.

[4] Lawyered (2017, July 13). How to avoid being exploited for your time and money while practising as a Freelancer [Blog post]. *The Better India*. Retrieved from https://www.thebetterindia.com/108197/freelancers-india-start-using-contracts/.

Underemployment is an equally pressing concern, as most workers are unable to access enough hours of paid work to make a decent living or are working in jobs below their skill level.[5] Within the organized sector of the economy, which employs approximately 20 percent of the labor force, there has been a steady rise in the contractualization and casualization of labor.[6] Automation and other advanced digital technologies are posing a further threat to job creation. This is a massive concern for a country like India, where only 20 percent of the population is engaged in high-skilled labor.[7] In this context, the current policy narrative in India identifies the platform economy as an enabler of self-employment and entrepreneurship. Platforms, such as ride-hailing apps Ola and Uber, have also recently signed agreements with various state governments to assist workers with the skills and financial means to secure work through the platform.[8]

---

[5] Ghose, A. K. (2016). India employment report 2016: Challenges and the imperative of manufacturing-led growth. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

[6] Kapoor, R. (2016, February). Technology, jobs and inequality: Evidence from India's manufacturing sector. Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, Working Paper 313.

[7] Tandem Research & ILO. (2018). Emerging technologies and the future of work in India. ILO Asia Pacific, Working Paper series.

[8] Telangana govt, Uber flag off first 100 cars under Driver Empowerment. (2018, March 28). *Money Control News*. Retrieved from https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/india/telangana-govt-uber-flag-off-first-100-cars-under-driver-empowerment-2538709.html.

1.2 RESEARCH INQUIRY

This case study examines the ways in which a digital work platform in India, QuikrJobs, influences workers' access to work, the terms of employment, and worker rights and agency. Has it enabled or improved access to quality work in India? How, if at all, are employment relationships and conditions changing? Does QuikrJobs support or undermine workers' rights and ability to bargain for adequate wages and terms and conditions of their labor?

QuikrJobs is a digital work platform for low- to medium-skill jobs, often classified as blue-, gray-, or entry-level white-collar jobs. Job profiles include delivery boys, tele-callers, data entry, marketing and sales executives, teaching, nursing, office assistants, receptionists, and security guards. Quikr, the parent company, is India's largest classified advertising platform. In 2018, QuikrJobs acquired BabaJob, making it India's largest platform for blue- and gray-collar workers. Founded in 2007, BabaJob largely targeted blue-collar workers, entry-level white-collar workers, and gray-collar workers, and included a large range of jobs in the household sector, business process outsourcing (BPO), delivery and logistics, security, data entry, and retail, among others. BabaJob was supported by USAID in addition to venture capital. QuikrJobs management informed us they now have over 10 million registered users all over the country. In the words of platform management, QuikrJobs intends to "bridge the gap between Bharat and India"[9] and "create opportunities for those living in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities and towns, beyond the English-speaking urban, metropolitan areas."[10]

1.3 METHOD AND LIMITATIONS

This study relied on semi-structured interviews with workers, platform management, and labor market experts. A total of 19 interviews were conducted for this study: 14 workers, two members of the QuikrJobs team, and three labor market experts. Gig work is an emergent field of study, particularly when exploring the effects for workers in the Global South. It is thus important to understand the priorities and experiences of workers. The semi-structured interview format enabled flexibility and adaptability, allowing participants to speak about the issues that mattered to them. The importance of interviews to qualitative research is not limited to the fact that they highlight subjective experiences, but also that participants are able to express themselves in their own voice and language. Much of this cannot be captured through conventional survey methods. The clear limitation of this approach is that the findings cannot be assumed to represent the experiences of a larger sector of QuikrJobs workers or blue- and gray-collar workers in general. Wherever possible, however, we corroborated our findings with available secondary literature, including some of Tandem Research's ongoing research on gig work in India.

Bangalore was chosen as the site for this study for two main reasons. As an urban metropolitan with a large youth and migrant population, experiences of workers in Bangalore are likely to be similar to those in other large metropolitans. This is corroborated by our previous research on digital work platforms in India. Most platforms in India see the maximum amount of activity from both users and workers in the metropolitans of New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Chennai. This is because of high urban

---

[9] Bharat is the Sanskrit name of the country, which in this case is used to evoke the masses and past tradition and not the globalized, modern version of India

[10] Interview with Amit Jain, Head of QuikrJobs

density and the large number of internet users. The QuikrJobs head office is also located in Bangalore, and with the short window available for this study, it was necessary to limit our travel to one city. The Bangalore experience is likely not to be representative of the experiences of workers in non-metropolitans. This is the case for not only QuikrJobs but other platforms as well; platforms are only slowly beginning to enter these markets. Growing internet users and connectivity, as well as growing migration from rural areas to Tier 2 and 3 cities in India, is likely to change this dynamic in the coming years; a number of the leading ride hailing platforms are looking to these cities for the next phase of their expansion.

In order to access workers, we purchased the QuikrJobs' database for employers and created an initial sample size of 60 workers, reflecting a cross-section of blue- and gray-collar workers, gender, and professions. There were almost twice as many male gray-collar workers on the database as women or blue-collar workers. The database listed their phone numbers, and we called workers individually to request an interview. Of the blue-collar workers we contacted, all but two declined an interview, saying that they had still not found a job through QuikrJobs despite being on the platform for two to six months. Of the gray-collar workers we contacted, only seven agreed to be interviewed. QuikrJobs also connected us with five gray-collar workers who had successfully found employment through the platform. Of the 14 workers we interviewed in total, 11 (of which two were blue-collar workers) had received a job on the platform, while three were still awaiting employment. The two blue-collar workers had received jobs as a nanny and caretaker, and the gray-collar workers had mostly received jobs as entry-level sales executives, customer relations executives at retail outlets, and BPO workers. We also spoke with the head of QuikrJobs, the head of marketing and sales, and three labor policy experts: Sabina Dewan of Just Jobs Network; Radhicka Kapoor from the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER); and Chandan Kumar, a labor rights activist.

A fundamental issue in accessing workers engaged on platforms is that they are dispersed throughout the city and there is no central coordination or meeting space. For low-wage workers, particularly blue-collar workers, many have never been asked about their experiences as workers before, and thus found it odd and suspicious to be contacted by researchers; others did not see the value of taking time off or travelling to a meeting place because it took time away from work or care commitments. This posed a clear limitation to our method and the ability to generalize our findings.

We spoke with workers about a range of themes, including previous work; motivations for joining the platform; access to work; income security; engagement with other workers; working conditions and entitlements in terms of hours worked, paid leave, and ability to approach supervisors with concerns about compensation terms or grievances; and their future aspirations. However, most of the workers we spoke with were first-time jobseekers; this was not only reflective of our sample, but most users of the platform. This meant that some of our lines of inquiry were not applicable to them or they did not feel they had enough comparative experience to respond adequately. For example, while there was a general level of dissatisfaction with level of income, jobseekers did not have a comparative experience against which to evaluate their current job. A further limitation of the study was the nature of the platform itself. In many ways, QuikrJobs is an online job bulletin board that aggregates the demand and supply of labor, but all engagement between jobseekers and employers takes place off the platform. As a result, the questions around access to work were the most relevant; workers had far less to say about the ways in which their use of QuikrJobs influenced employment rights, income security, and engagement with other workers.

Section 2 of this paper lays out the journey map of a job seeker and employer. This is meant to illustrate the structure of the platform and the platform's involvement in the jobseekers' journeys. Section 3 clusters findings around three themes: previous work and motivations for joining the platform; access to decent work; and employment conditions. Section 4, the conclusion, returns to the central questions guiding this study and provides insights on the ways in which the platform influences workers' access to work and their rights and agency.

2. QUIKRJOBS: JOURNEY MAP

2.1 JOBSEEKERS

Jobseekers can either use the free service or a premium paid service. Costing between US$2-3 for a period of 30 days, the premium package offers a range of services, including a resume service where the QuikrJobs team helps jobseekers write or edit their resume. Jobseekers are labelled as VIP candidates to employers, allowing potential employers to search specifically for VIP candidates, as well as shown "premium jobs." The QuikrJobs website claims that paid service profiles are three times more likely to be shown to employers. The premium service is also advertised as offering access to recruiter telephone numbers, verification of government IDs, and customer care support. However, as discussed later, many of these promises are not met by the platform.

Make profile on QuikrJobs → Enter basic details like age, contact details, location, qualification, language spoken, etc.

Choose job category → Select desired job role. Enter additional qualifications required for that role, e.g., driver's license for driver jobs.

Apply to advertised jobs → Browse advertised positions based on location, role, etc. Apply and wait to be contacted.

Figure 1: Journey map of jobseeker on free service

There are minimal joining requirements for jobseekers. They can join the platform via the mobile phone app or the website by filling in their basic demographic information, educational qualifications, and contact information—preferably a mobile phone number so that they can be contacted easily, but email addresses and landline telephone numbers are also acceptable. Once their mobile number or email is verified, they can receive calls from prospective employers. For the free service, there is almost no verification of workers; in the case of the paid service, the verification process remains the same. Workers can choose job categories in terms of desired role; job type, such as part-time or work-from-home; by city; or by industry. The platform does not have any review or rating system for either jobseekers or employers, which could be a reason for fraudulent job postings on the platform.

Make profile on QuikrJobs and pay → Enter basic details. Pay for premium service.

Choose job category → Select desired job role and enter additional qualifications. Get CV writing service.

Apply to advertised jobs → Browse through premium job postings. Profile will be shown to employers posting premium jobs.

Figure 2: Journey map of jobseeker on premium service

2.2 EMPLOYERS

Employers who use QuikrJobs to hire workers include households, small enterprises, and large corporations who bulk-hire. Employers can hire workers in two ways. They can browse profiles of jobseekers based on their requirements or purchase a package from the platform to access jobseekers' contact details and get in touch with shortlisted candidates directly. All interaction between jobseeker and employer takes place off the platform and QuikrJobs' involvement is minimal.

Search profiles — Based on role, location, or job. Post job.

Contact jobseeker — Buy package to access contact details of workers.

Interview, verify, and hire — Conduct interview. Hire employee.

Figure 3: Journey map of employer

Alternatively, the platform also offers a paid service to corporate clients who are looking to bulk-hire for their organization. The cost of the package is determined by the number of employees, location, sector, and job profile. QuikrJobs plays a more active role in this process, contacting suitable candidates and following up throughout the hiring process.

Design package with QuikrJobs — Required profile of workers (location, number of workers, etc.).

QuikrJobs shortlists candidates — Candidates shortlisted by QJ and contacted for further interview.

Interview and hire — Interview by company. QJ contacts candidates with results.

Follow up by QuikrJobs — QJ follows up on candidates who accepted job for 2-4 weeks after date of joining.

Figure 4: Journey map of paid client hiring from the platform

3. FINDINGS

3.1 PREVIOUS WORK AND MOTIVATIONS

QuikrJobs has a high proportion of young workers and first-time jobseekers. Most of the respondents we interviewed were first-time jobseekers. It is likely that first-time jobseekers and younger people use the platform because of higher levels of trust in digital technologies and fluency and comfort in navigating information online. Those who were previously employed joined the platform hoping for better pay or for jobs more suited to their skill set. For example, a tele-caller we spoke to had joined the platform looking for jobs in the IT sector; the platform allowed her to continue her current job while looking for more desirable job opportunities.

The appeal of QuikrJobs to jobseekers also seems to lie in its distinction from more traditional forms of recruitment or job-hunting. The first of these distinctions is that the platform doesn't restrict jobseekers to a particular location or role. The widespread presence of QuikrJobs across the country and the ability to access it on a mobile device allows jobseekers to widen their search. One customer relations executive said, "I like Quikr because I can look for a job from home and I don't have to go out. I don't have many friends or family in Bangalore so I cannot go through referrals." For migrant workers from other states, the platform allows them to seek job opportunities in localities where they don't have personal social networks or in which they are unsure of a suitable recruitment agency.

Another advantage of QuikrJobs is that it is free to access for all jobseekers, which differentiates it from traditional recruitment agencies. "QuikrJobs is good. I don't have to pay and I can get good jobs," one respondent informed us. There seemed to be high mistrust of traditional recruitment agencies because of high incidences of cheating and fleecing. Many jobseekers complained of paying fees to agencies and never hearing back from them again. This might also explain the low uptake of the paid service on QuikrJobs by jobseekers. Respondents felt that because Quikr was a "big brand," it could be trusted and would be a good place to look for jobs.

The platform posts messages for jobseekers telling them to "beware of fraud posts" or reminding them to "stay safe" on the platform. This might help in building trust, but it also places the onus of safety and verification with jobseekers. Some workers did note that they had come across fraudulent postings on the platform and some had even paid money when contacted by these fraudulent posters. QuikrJobs has processes in place to screen and remove fraudulent postings, but some still remain. While we were unable to ascertain the percentage of fraudulent postings, and QuikrJobs was also unwilling to share this information, a majority (over 80 percent of the initial 60) of the workers we spoke with mentioned having come across such fraudulent posts. With most fraudulent postings, the aim is to convince workers to pay some money to the prospective recruiter.

The platform is designed such that jobseekers can look for jobs passively without spending too much time tailoring each application to a particular job advertisement. They can simply press the "apply" button on the platform and wait to be contacted by the employer. This allows jobseekers to continue looking for better opportunities while they are employed elsewhere. This also can help reduce the time between jobs. No workers reported tailoring their applications to suit particular jobs. Workers said their profiles contained all the required details; some even questioned the value of uploading a resume.

This might be because of the large number of first-time jobseekers who would assumedly have no substantial experiences to report that would not be covered by their basic profiles.

Further, in the context of underemployment in India (i.e., workers doing jobs lower than their skill level), QuikrJobs allows workers to remain on the lookout for more suitable opportunities. For example, one of our interviewees, another tele-caller, had a degree in computer science and would have ideally liked a job in software systems testing. She had taken her current job because she couldn't find anything else at the time. She had also found a part-time data entry job through the platform, which she used to supplement her income.

3.2 ACCESS TO WORK

It is unclear the extent to which the platform is facilitating access to work. During the course of initial sampling based on the QuikrJob database, we found that a majority of the blue-collar jobseekers like drivers, delivery agents, maids, and cooks had failed to find work and were still waiting to hear from employers even four to six months after joining the platform. Most of the workers we spoke with were still unemployed or employed only part-time and were still seeking new or alternative employment opportunities. An earlier impact assessment on BabaJob between 2013 and 2015 reiterated this point. The assessment found that only six percent of jobseekers had found employment through the platform.[11]

Of the interviewees who had opted for the paid service, none reported finding a job through the service. Some found the resume service helpful because the QuikrJobs team helped them format their resumes and correct errors, like putting qualifications under the wrong heading; many were not sure what their resume should contain. However, two others complained that they hadn't received their resumes even though their subscription to the package was expiring soon. Further, the government identify verification doesn't seem to have been implemented yet—most just said they received a phone message to confirm their identity. It is worth pointing out that such verification could be especially important to blue-collar workers, some of whom are unlikely to have any other form of accreditation.

However, both QuikrJobs management and the labor market experts we spoke with pointed out that the availability of jobs is dependent on market conditions and the platform has little role to play in actually creating employment opportunities. "The availability of jobs depends on liquidity. There are some blue-collar job roles where the demand is not very high so not everyone will find a suitable one," said a senior Quikr representative. QuikrJobs management did state that although VIP candidates' profiles are promoted, the final decision to contact the jobseeker and eventually hire him or her rests solely on the employer and their requirements. QuikrJobs sees the willingness to purchase the package as an indication of desperation for a job and likelihood that a jobseeker will accept an offer. They also said they had rolled out the government ID verification scheme using the national biometric identity card (Aadhar), but had to delay it due to the ongoing case in the Supreme Court over the ID's scope of use.

In contrast, gray-collar workers seemed more successful in finding work through QuikrJobs. This might be partially location-related—Bangalore is a major IT hub, and there is thus a high demand for entry-

---

[11] Media, S., & Srinivasan, D. (2016, March 18). End line evaluation of the "Empowering Informal Sector Job-Seekers Project" - A For-Profit approach to providing digital access to jobs in India.

level IT workers. Moreover, the requirements for jobs like tele-callers, customer relations, or data entry workers are much more standardized and easier to accredit. For prospective employers, this makes it easier to sort through applications and select a suitable candidate. In contrast, for blue-collar workers, such as a cook or housekeeper, there is no standardized set of qualifications to guide an employer in their choice. These kinds of jobs often rely on trust and personal relationships and employers often prefer going through existing social networks. In other words, people are less likely to use a platform to hire household help than they would an office worker because these reputation systems and networks of trust are not yet established on the platform. Further, QuikrJobs' paid service for employers targets those in gray-collar and entry-level white-collar jobs. Corporate clients are likely to use QuikrJobs when they are hiring at scale in industries where there is a demand for workers. The higher employment rate of gray-collar workers could also be explained by this bulk hiring facilitated through QuikrJobs.

Yet, it is important to recognize the other ways in which the platform can facilitate access to work. It addresses time poverty of jobseekers who do not have the luxury of waiting a long time for the perfect job to come along, since every day not worked means potential earnings lost. The 11 respondents who had found jobs on QuikrJobs did so within a few weeks to two months of joining the platform. They were shortlisted by employers and contacted within a few days after becoming active on the platform. "QuikrJobs is very quick. That's why I like it," a female tele-caller told us. Most jobseekers who found a job reported receiving calls from prospective employers within the first few days of joining. On average, they attended two to three interviews before accepting an offer. This was a pattern we found among gray-collar workers in full-time positions.

Moreover, the QuikrJobs management team highlighted that the platform enables workers to respond to changing market conditions. Jobseekers can adapt their profile depending on the availability of particular types of jobs. For example, QuikrJobs management told us that a few years ago, the rise of cab aggregators and delivery services in India saw an increase in demand for drivers; as a result, many jobseekers adapted their profile to match this market demand. Similarly, the festive season sees a demand for part-time workers in retail, and jobseekers switch to this role as demand rises.

3.3 EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

QuikrJobs only connects jobseekers and employers, and further engagement between the two takes place off the platform. As QuikrJobs is not involved in the setting of wages, working hours, or other terms of employment, it has had little effect on worker rights and employment conditions. Platform management informed us that the scale of the platform did not allow for its close involvement in setting wages or employment terms and conditions. Further, the wide range of employers and job types on the platform also means a diversity of employment conditions and terms of engagement, all of which are beyond the ambit of the platform.

Compensation is set by market standards, and the employer has the last word. We found that most workers earned more or less the industry standard for their sector of work. The lack of data on salary, standardized rates of work, and terms of employment for low-wage workers makes it difficult to negotiate higher wages and better working conditions. This information asymmetry is heightened by the fact that jobseekers may be looking for jobs in locations different from where they previously lived or worked and could possibly be applying to different job roles.

QuikrJobs management did mention that they create a report on salary and hiring trends, demand for job roles, and market conditions. However, this is not released publicly. Having such data could help jobseekers negotiate better employment terms and conditions and avoid being exploited. It is worth noting that BabaJob used to have a feature that allowed jobseekers to see the average salary range for the particular job in that locality. This feature is not present on QuikrJobs.

Though not intended as such, jobseekers who had been contacted by a client who availed of QuikrJobs' paid service reported a more positive experience. They felt greater trust and confidence in the prospective employer, since they were contacted by the platform rather than the employer. QuikrJobs plays a more involved role when hired by a client, conducting several rounds of phone conversations with the jobseeker, informing them of the job role, salary, working hours, and benefits. QuikrJobs also follows up jobseekers two to four weeks after joining the role. One respondent in customer relations who was hired through this service stated, "The people from Quikr called me and told me about the job so I knew it would be good. And then they helped me with information about what to expect at the interview and the job role." This information was usually related to the interview, the job role, salary, and benefits. This would seem to indicate that QuikrJobs' involvement in the hiring process had the effect of making the employers seem more reliable and trustworthy to jobseekers. Further, it seemed to give the workers some degree of confidence that there is an external third party looking out for their interests.

Employment conditions may also vary depending on the type of work. Our interview with one blue-collar worker, a nanny, highlighted how employment conditions are often established informally. The personal relationship and level of trust influenced decisions around paid leave, compensation, and working hours. The nanny said, for example, "I know this family and I have to think about their schedules when I am planning to [have] my holiday. The baby is still very small so I can't take leave at only my convenience." While this is a single example, it also resonates with some of the insights shared by domestic workers in the SweepSouth case—that employment conditions and relationships are often negotiated informally—and also resonates with some of our current research on women and work in India.

Jobseekers have no way of reviewing employers or reporting fraudulent job postings; neither do employers have a way of reviewing workers. QuikrJobs management informed us that jobseekers can and do make complaints via the platform's social media channels. However, this is not enough to hold fraudulent posters or unfair employers accountable. Since all interaction between jobseeker and employer takes place off the platform, QuikrJobs has little control over those who misuse the platform. This places jobseekers at risk, and many complained of being swindled on the platform.

4. CONCLUSION

Three key conclusions can be derived from this case study. First, with regard to the extent to which a platform like QuikrJobs can enable access to quality work and influence employment relationships and conditions, the impact currently seems to be minimal. The availability of jobs is dependent on market conditions and the platform is reflective of those conditions. The success of a jobseeker depends heavily on the sector where demand for workers is higher. This varies across location, industry, job role, and even seasonally. For example, there is a higher demand for part-time retail workers and bartenders during the holiday season. Further, given the structure of the platform, it plays little role in setting the terms of employment or compensation; subsequent to connecting jobseekers to employers, all interaction occurs off the platform.

That being said, the platform does allow workers to search for jobs across a wider geographical area and helps reduce the need to rely on existing social networks, which is particularly useful for migrant workers. Moreover, in the context of vast underemployment in India, a platform like QuikrJobs allows workers to continue to look for work opportunities suited to their skill levels or desired income level, even as they continue with other work they consider less desirable.

Second, as the platform is currently designed and run, it neither supports nor undermines workers' rights and ability to bargain for adequate wages and terms and conditions of their labor. As noted above, this is primarily because all engagement between workers and employers about compensation and terms of work occurs off the platform.

Yet, the platform has the potential to play a significantly larger role here. There is very poor and fragmented data on labor market conditions for informal workers. Digital platforms like QuikrJobs could play a role in collecting, analyzing, and sharing data with workers, companies, and governments alike that can enable the standardization of services and skills within the informal sectors of the economy. For example, as noted earlier, the reports that QuikrJobs compiles on demand for particular jobs and average salaries could be used by workers to gauge the skills demanded in the market as well as fair and competitive wages. Access to such information could provide them a bargaining tool to realize their rights.

Additionally, blue-collar workers would have much to gain from a robust verification process by QuikrJobs. Hiring of blue-collar workers often rests on reputation systems and trust, and employers seem to be more comfortable hiring workers who have been vetted by others. Identification papers are key to verification, and often blue-collar workers do not have these. If the platform could introduce a process of verification for blue-collar workers, employers may be more willing to hire off the platform. Further, because blue-collar workers generally have lower levels of education, the resume writing service could be very helpful, but only if done properly. Two respondents who used the paid service we spoke to mentioned that they hadn't received a review of their resumes, despite having submitted them many months ago. This could erode trust and make jobseekers less likely to use the paid service. The platform could also implement a verification process for employers and job postings on the platform. Blue-collar workers in less organized sectors are already vulnerable to poor working conditions and exploitation. The absence of verified jobs could put jobseekers at risk of undesirable and dangerous situations.

Third, the intent of the platform matters. BabaJob seemed much more focused on addressing concerns of informal workers. This meant that certain design features were built into the platform towards these ends, such as the one that allows workers to see the average wage for a job in their locality. In contrast, QuikrJobs has a decidedly more hands-off approach, and does not seem to be taking steps that are intended to directly address worker rights or agency. Grievance redressal mechanisms are poorly developed on the platform with no feature to collect worker feedback or complaints. Both jobseekers and employers are expected to reach out to the platform via social media or email. Platform managers did state that they conduct periodic surveys to gauge user and jobseeker feedback but didn't specify how this data was used to improve the experiences of jobseekers.

Additional platform design features have the potential to address some worker concerns and could be explored further. For example, allowing jobseekers to review or verify employers would have the effect of at least partially addressing the information asymmetry between workers and employers. BabaJob users may notice a difference in the service they are offered after the platform was acquired by QuikrJobs. While some jobseekers may now have access to more job opportunities and benefit from QuikrJobs' collaboration with industry for their bulk hiring services, other jobseekers may find themselves in a poorer position to bargain because of the absence of information. Changes implemented by QuikrJobs after the acquisition of BabaJob's users could impact certain categories of workers differently.

Finally, it is important to recognize that worker agency and rights are already severely constrained in India. Only eight percent of the labor force in India, for example, has access to formal, employment-related social benefits. The Global Rights Index, published annually by the International Trade Union Confederation, ranked India among the 10 worst countries for working people in 2018.[12] With a paucity of good or decent jobs and an over-supply of cheap labor, market conditions are chronically exploitative of low-wage workers. In this context, worker expectations of platforms and even employers are quite low—most are focused on getting jobs and income security, rather than labor rights or employment conditions. This is not in any way to deny the importance of these issues, or to reduce the aspirations of workers to a single variable of income, but to suggest that it will be difficult to hold platforms to higher standards than existing labor market conditions. In fact, platforms like QuikrJobs that aggregate data on labor market conditions have the potential to enhance existing labor market infrastructure by leveraging the information-gathering and standardization capacity of platforms. However, this will require regulatory interventions by governments, and is unlikely to happen if left to digital work platforms alone.

---

[12] Nigam, A. (2018, January 20). India among 'worst' countries for workers' rights. *The Hindu Businessline*. Retrieved from https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-among-worst-countries-for-workers-rights/article8756695.ece.