Arguments and issues on platform work and City government’s policy task: Response by international organization, nation, location and labor and management

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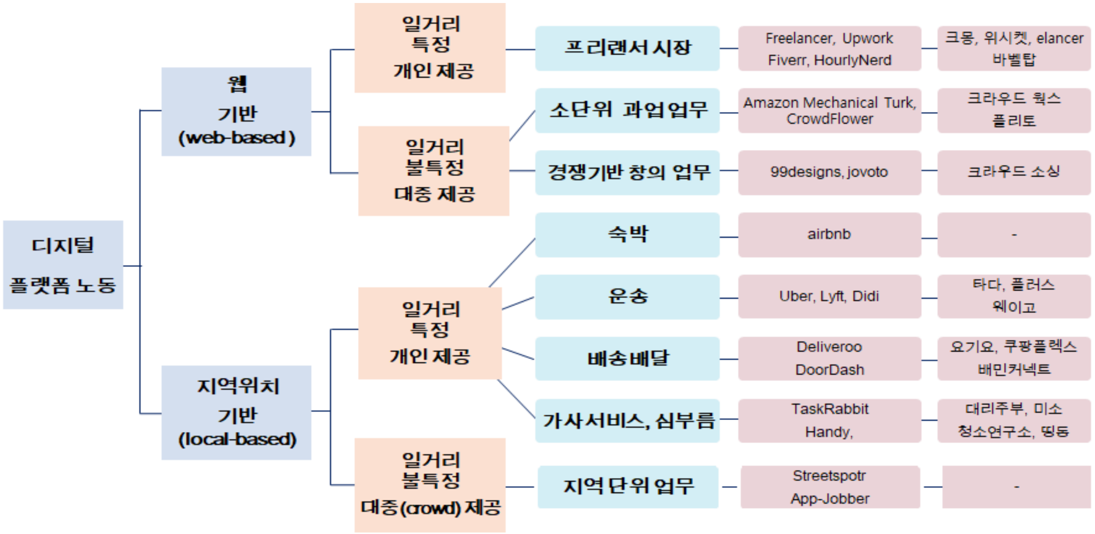
Platform work, which is represented by Uber drivers or delivery riders, is emerging as a social issue around the globe. Employees in this new field of work account for 2% in Europe, while the numbers differ by country with 3 to 4% in the U.K., 2.5% in Germany, 0.4 to 0.5% in the U.S. and 1.7 to 2% in Korea. It is a phenomenon resulting from ICT converging with existing industries, and is further expanding due to the development of digital technology. Platform work is categorized into web-based and location-based work. Except for a small part of highly-skilled field, the emergence and expansion of platform work puts medium-skilled jobs at risk of being replaced by lowly-paid, instable jobs.

[Figure] Categorization of digital platform labor and cases


디지털 플랫폼 노동
웹 기반 (web-based)
지역위치 기반 (local-based)
일거리 특정 개인 제공
일거리 불특정 대중 제공
일거리 특정 개인 제공
일거리 불특정 대중(crowd) 제공
프리랜서 시장
소단위 과업업무
경쟁기반 창의 업무
숙박
운송
배송배달
가사서비스, 심부름
지역단위업무
Freelancer, Upwork Fiverr, HourlyNerd
Amazon Mechanical Turk, CrowdFlower
99designs, jovoto
airbnb
Uber, Lyft, Didi
Deliveroo DoorDash
TaskRabbit Handy,
Streetspotr App-Jobber
크몽, 위시켓, elancer 바벨탑
크라우드 웍스 플리토
크라우드 소싱
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타다, 플러스 웨이고
요기요, 쿠팡플렉스 배민커넥트
대리주부, 미소 청소연구소, 띵동
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Source: Restructured by the author from Smith (2017), ILO (2018)

The definition of platform work may vary greatly, but it is generally defined as a work in which unspecified crowds or individuals solve specific problems or supply services in exchange for remuneration (ILO, 2018; OECD, 2019). International organizations define platform work as "a new form of work," classifying into web-based (work performed online) and location-based (call-type offline work) (ILO, 2018·2019; EU, 2018). ILO (2018) categorizes digital labor platform, excluding non-commercial platform, according to the type of service provision and task method (Figure 1).

Platform work has positive aspects in that it is free from harmful environment at work, can achieve work-life balance and the work from informal economy sector is converted into that of formal sector, but also bears negative aspects such as safety issues, non-standard contract, loophole in labor safety health management and non-coverage of social insurance (ILO, 2019b). The strength of platform work is that entry barrier to labor market is lowered and labor participation is thus promoted, but the weakness is that it does not receive any institutional protection in terms of employment terms, social insurance and safety (EU, 2018). Since the current legal system has limits in protecting platform work derived from new technology and economical phenomenon, international institutions or major countries propose establishing legislations, social agreements or various policies (dispute settlement body, fair trade, standard contract and unit cost, social insurance, safety and health, and education and training) (EU, 2018; ILO, 2019; OECD, 2019).

[Table 1]

Differences in approach and protective measures for platform work: Inclusiveness and binding force

Inclusiveness of Application Scope

Binding force of regulation	High	Low
L	**[Approach A] ILO**	**[Approach C] Individual nation**

ow	Expand scope of application: Includes independent businesses, sets minimum conditions and standards, monitoring and norms	Review current laws of the nation (regarding tax and social security): Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, Netherlands, U.K., etc.
High	**[Approach B] EU, Region (Bologna, Italy)** EU expands the scope of worker, encompasses rules such as judicial judgements, guidelines and recommendations Social pact: City's digital work agreement (Bologna, Italy)	**[Approach D] France** France: Apply legislation for the purpose of socially protecting platform workers regardless of employment status Region: Implement laws applied to workers (California, U.S.) Labor-management agreement: Applies same conditions as collective agreement (Hilfr in Denmark)

Source: Restructured by the author from Broecke (2019), EU (2018) ILO (2019, OECD (2019)

Considering the reality where platform work is bound to expand, countries will start discussing how to guarantee the minimum rights and social protection for platform workers. Approaches taken and responses to the issue of platform work differ by international organizations and countries. Still, they can be categorized into four types depending on approaches taken for platform work, inclusiveness of scope of application and binding force of regulation (Table 1).

Location-based platform workers are categorized as self-employed even though they perform similar task as waged workers. For this reason, platform work is unfolding around worker-related issues and industrial accidents in a form similar to the issue of dependent self-employed. However, web-based platform work is more influenced by the new form work and differs from location-based platform work in terms of contract method, task-performing process and control.

It is identified that the form of work, contract, employment method, work time and control methods vary by each category, and thus, international organizations and nations may have different discussions on platform work. The need for social protection including application of existing laws by expanding the concept of conventional employment status or application of minimum standards is on the discussion table. Now is the time to discuss about actions on social coregulation and inclusive solidarity in an effort to find an alternative for platform work.