

## Social Protection & Career Development for Women Crowd Workers

Taek-Myeon Lee, (Senior Research Fellow Division for Gender Mainstreaming and Knowledge Innovation, KWDI)

- As non-standardized employment arrangements increase these days with world-wide digital transformation, women's employment in particular is being arranged in an increasingly non-standardized manner. Korea is not an exception.
- Among new types of employment brought by digital transformation, digital platform labor has received a great attention from academic institutions or policy research groups. They have dealt with labor conditions or social protection issues regarding those who engage in 'location-based platforms'(ILO, 2018:1) such as delivery app workers or proxy drivers, and many policy initiatives have been designed and implemented(Behrendt & Nguyen, 2018:23-27). However, workers engaging in 'web-based platforms'(ILO, 2018:1) whose importance is growing as much as the location-based platforms, have received relatively less attention from academic and policy perspectives(ILO, 2018:ch.6).
- Searching for clients, who need certain labor or service, receiving work from the clients, delivering the completed or requested work or service to the clients, and receiving wage from the clients through intermediation of web-based labor platforms are in general called 'crowd work' and those who engage in such work are called 'crowd workers.' This study aims to propose ways to provide appropriate social protection and career development support for crowd workers, by exploring the nature and characteristics of crowd work, labor conditions of crowd workers, and the social risks facing the crowd workers.

- Considering the fact that women have traditionally been over-represented in non-standardized employment arrangements, the expansion of non-standardized employment arrangements caused by digital transformation constitutes a gender issue(Behrendt & Nguyen, 2018:1). Female employees have been exposed to social risks more than male employees because social protection systems mostly targeted dependent employees under the standardized employment arrangements. Digital transformation has contributed to the increase in the number of people under non-standardized employment arrangements as substitutes for the conventional dependent employees. It means that social protection systems for women workers have become more vulnerable than before.
- As crowd work allows workers to have more flexibility in terms of working hours and space, it helped lower the barriers to economic activities for women, who bear the responsibility for family care and housework. However, crowd work might have accelerated the marginalization of women in the labor market because it provides low wage, job instability, and a low level of social protection, etc(OECD, 2017; ILO, 2018). In this regard, this study aims to seek ways to strengthen the social protection and career development support for those engaging in crowd work and suggest policy improvement ideas to prevent particularly women crowd workers from being excluded from such support.

Reference for this Brief is as follows. Please refer to Chapter 7 of the original text.

Shin Seon-Mi · Park Seong-Jeong · Lee Taek-Myeon · Lee Ju-Yeong · Kang Kyeong-Joo · Kim Hyo-Kyeong · Gil Hyeon-Jong · Jeong Han-Na (2021). *Study on Women's Jobs in the Transition to the Digital Era (II): Career Development and Social Protection System*. Seoul: Korea Women's Development Institute

## Issues related to the social protection of women crowd workers

- Compared to conventional jobs, crowd work gives higher flexibility and autonomy like other platform-based jobs do. But it provides a low level of social protection(Scarpetta, 2016:3). In this regard, it is necessary to reorganize taxation and social security benefit systems to protect the workers who have not yet caught up with technological changes. It is also important to adjust the social protection measures to include a new type of labor relations that do not correspond to the conventional employee-employer relationship.
- Digital technology development has accelerated the spread of non-standardized employment arrangements that existed from the past. It also increased the number of workers who are located in the blind spot or are marginalized in the social protection system that mainly targets the employees engaging in standardized, dependent employment arrangements. Meanwhile, women's proportion is increasing among the employees under non-standardized employment arrangements. And governments across the world have innovated their policies to provide more workers with social protection. In this process, there have been many disputes over the necessity and method of social protection for crowd work(ILO, 2021; OECD, 2018; Kim Soo-Yeong et al., 2018).
- With the emergence of non-standardized employment arrangements including crowd work, an increasing number of workers have become able to provide their labor or service in a more flexible and autonomous way. Although non-standardized employment arrangements give high flexibility to the users of labor, it causes risks and instability instead of autonomy/flexibility to the labor providers or self-employed people(Eurofound, 2015:66). Crowd workers also experience stress and anxiety due to the low wage level and unpredictable income, and they are often pushed to work for long hours. Therefore, crowd workers need a certain range of social protection similar to that of dependent workers.
- Among crowd workers, women crowd workers are especially in a vulnerable position (not being able to invest long hours in working on their tasks, performing fragmentary, micro tasks for a short period of time, or being totally dependent on the income from crowd work without other sources of income).

- The current social protection system, which was designed with focus on the existing standardized employment arrangements, is fundamentally based on the male breadwinner model. It means that the current social protection system provides social protection for male employees and allows spouses or daughters of the male employees to receive relevant benefit, rather than providing women directly with social protection(OECD, 2017:7). When establishing a comprehensive social protection system encompassing those under the non-standardized employment arrangements including crowd workers, it is necessary to design a new ‘gender-sensitive’ policy to protect both men and women regardless of their employment status, instead of repeating the conventional male breadwinner model.
- The survey on crowd workers shows that 35.8% of the respondents engage only in the crowd work without any other jobs. Meanwhile, 28% of male crowd workers said that they are doing crowd work as a full-time job, but 39.8% of female crowd workers (10% higher than male crowd workers) answered that they are engaging only in the crowd work.

<Table1> I have no other job than crowd work.

(Unit: persons, %)

Classification		No other jobs		Total	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Gender	Men	33	28.0	118	100.0
	Women	92	39.8	231	100.0
Total		125	35.8	349	100.0

- As indicated in <Table 2>, 58.7% (twice as high as male full-time crowd workers) of female full-time crowd workers said that they are married and have a spouse. It implies that married women who do not have other jobs tend to seek for jobs in crowd work to do both work and childcare/housework.

<Table 2> Distribution of full-time crowd workers by gender/marital status

Classification		Marital status			Total(%)
		Unmarried	Married and have a spouse	Married and no spouse	
Gender	Men	63.6	30.3	6.1	100.0
	Women	40.2	58.7	1.1	100.0
Total		46.4	51.2	2.4	100.0

- An in-depth interview with highly-skilled freelance crowd workers and low-skilled crowd workers who provide simple labor or service shows that most of the former was classified into the self-employed and was outside the scope of employment insurance and industrial accident compensation insurance(some of them tried to figure out whether they can subscribe to the employment insurance for artists). The highly skilled freelance crowd workers were expecting that they could find a reasonable way to subscribe to social insurance scheme. Meanwhile, low-skilled crowd workers, except for those who have other main jobs that allow them to subscribe to an insurance, generally recognized the need for an employment insurance but were worried about the burdensome insurance premium and difficulties in providing proof of income and in proving their eligibility as a beneficiary.
- Both highly skilled crowd workers and low-skilled crowd workers said that they experienced situations where fairness in labor relations was undermined or where their rights were violated. They also raised complaints about unfair closing of accounts, inaccurate and ungrounded appraisal system, an extremely low level of wage, and overly high intermediation fee.
- Meanwhile, the survey on crowd workers shows that a significantly large number of crowd workers are not insured with employment insurance(60.4%) and industrial accident compensation insurance(64%). The uninsurance rate among female crowd workers was especially higher than that of male crowd workers: 54.5% of male crowd workers and 63.4% of female crowd workers were not insured with employment insurance, and 52% of male crowd workers and 70.2% of female crowd workers were not insured with industrial accident compensation insurance. Although the absolute uninsurance rate of National Pension and National Health Insurance among crowd workers was low, the gap between men and women still exists. Those who engage in crowd work along with another part-time job or those who work as a full-time crowd worker showed a significantly high rate of uninsurance. The latter, in particular, showed an uninsurance rate of 86.4% for employment insurance and an uninsurance rate of 89.6% for industrial accident compensation insurance. (Please refer to <Table 3>)

<Table 3> Percentage of those who are NOT insured with social insurance

(Unit: %)

Classification		Frequency	Employment insurance	Industrial accident compensation insurance	National Pension	National Health Insurance
Gender	Men	123	54.5	52.0	35.0	13.8
	Women	238	63.4	70.2	45.0	25.2
Type of crowd work	Full-time job + crowd work	127	24.4	29.1	11.8	2.4
	Part-time job + crowd work	97	75.3	77.3	54.6	22.7
	Only crowd work	125	86.4	89.6	61.6	38.4
	Sub-total	349	60.7	64.2	41.5	20.9
Total		361	60.4	64.0	41.6	21.3

- When asked whether they intend to subscribe to employment insurance or industrial accident compensation insurance through crowd work, a significantly large proportion of the respondents(46.8%) answered that they have no intention to buy such insurance policies. Slightly more women(48.3%) than men had no intention to subscribe to the insurance. However, a remarkably low percentage(30%) of those who engage in crowd work along with other part-time jobs or those who engage only in crowd work said that they have no intention to subscribe to social insurance. This survey result shows that crowd workers who are doing another part-time job or are engaging only in crowd work have a wide range of reasons to subscribe to employment insurance and industrial accident compensation insurance through crowd work. (Please refer to <Table 4>)

<Table 4> Percentage of those who answered that they have no intention to subscribe to social insurance

(Unit: %)

Classification		Frequency	No intention to subscribe to social insurance (%)
Gender	Men	123	43.9
	Women	238	48.3
Type of crowd work	Full-time job + crowd work	127	59.8
	Part-time job + crowd work	97	37.1
	Only crowd work	125	39.2
	Sub-total	349	46.1
Total		361	46.8

- According to <Table 5>, the largest proportion of the respondents(56.2%) chose “I feel no necessity for social insurance (I don’t care if I repeatedly experience unemployment, and the risk of industrial accident is low for me)”, which was followed by “The insurance premium is a burden for me”(31.4%), and “I think that the level of insurance coverage will be low”(7.7%), as the reason for no intention to subscribe to social insurance.

<Table 5> Reasons for no intention to subscribe to social insurance

(Unit: %)

Classification		Total frequency	Feel no necessity for social insurance	Insurance premium burden	Concerns about low coverage level
Gender	Men	54	51.9	31.5	9.3
	Women	115	58.3	31.3	7.0
Type of crowd work	Full-time job + crowd work	76	61.8	26.3	5.3
	Part-time job + crowd work	36	52.8	36.1	8.3
	Only crowd work	49	53.1	34.7	8.2
	Sub-total	161	57.1	31.1	6.8
Total		169	56.2	31.4	7.7

## Issues related to the career development of women crowd workers

- Another issue related to crowd work is that crowd workers have low access to training and hence their career development opportunities are limited(Scarpetta, 2016:3). Career development of crowd workers requires a comprehensive skills strategy that not only helps the crowd workers accumulate sufficient skills but also focuses on facilitating their skill adaptation so that they can change and upgrade their skills in line with new technical requirements.
- It is often argued that crowd sourcing causes ‘de-skilling’ of crowd workers because, by nature of crowd work, the whole task is divided into smaller units(ILO, 2018:6). Moreover, some of the crowd work is regarded as jobs that do not require a separate career development or acquisition of skills(ILO, 2018:88, etc.). Therefore, it is necessary to provide policy support for crowd workers, who are supposed to be affected the most by the de-skilling trends caused by the evolution of digital technologies. Then, they can adapt to the rapidly changing technologies and access high quality vocational training and upskilling education to increase their employability.
- As a result of the in-depth interviews with highly skilled freelance crowd workers and low-skilled crowd workers who provide simple labor or service, the highly skilled group tended to think of the crowd work itself as a platform to develop their career but did not feel the necessity to receive additional education/training from the crowd work platform or from a training institute to conduct their tasks. Low-skilled crowd workers said that it is good to start crowd work without a special entry barrier and to generate income in a quick and easy way. But they mentioned that, in order to continue their crowd work as a main occupation, they need education programs or career development support from the crowd work platform or from a third-party training institute to accumulate their career as a crowd worker and move towards highly skilled/highly paid crowd work.
- As seen in <Table 6>, the survey on crowd workers shows that when asked to mark a score on a five-point scale from 1(‘totally disagree’) to 5(‘strongly agree’) regarding the statement ‘Crowd work is something that anyone can do if the person knows how to use a computer or a smartphone without special capabilities or skills’, many respondents chose ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree,’ with an average score of 3.45 points. This survey result indicates that crowd workers in general perceive their tasks as simple jobs that do not require a special skill. In the survey, women held such a perception more than men in that the male crowd workers showed an average score of 3.28 points, whereas the average score among women crowd workers was 3.54 points.

<Table 6> Perception on the level of skills required for crowd work tasks

(Unit: points, mean difference examination)

Classification		Frequency	Crowd work is something that anyone can do if the person knows how to use a computer or a smartphone without special capabilities or skills (1: Totally disagree - 5: Strongly agree)
Gender	Men	123	3.28
	Women	238	3.54
Type of crowd work	Other jobs + crowd work	97	3.44
	Only crowd work	125	3.52
	Sub-total	349	3.47
Total		361	3.45

- <Table 7> shows that regarding the question of whether they need to acquire a new certification or a license to perform a better job at crowd work, slightly more of the respondents answered 'yes', showing an average score of 2.41 points based on a four- point scale. By gender, more women crowd workers(2.42 points) than male crowd workers(2.39 points) answered that they need such certification or license. Meanwhile, those who are engaging only in crowd work felt stronger necessity to acquire a certification or a license(2.62 points), compared to those who are engaging in crowd work along with other full-time or part-time jobs.

<Table 7> Perception on the necessity for a new certification/license

(Unit: points, mean difference examination)

Classification		Frequency	I need to acquire a new certification or a license to perform a better job at crowd work (1: Totally disagree - 4: Strongly agree)
Gender	Men	123	2.39
	Women	238	2.42
Type of crowd work	Full-time job + crowd work	127	2.59
	Part-time job + crowd work	97	2.58
	Only crowd work	125	2.62
	Sub-total	349	2.60
Total		361	2.41



# Policy tasks for the social protection and career development of crowd workers

- Establishment and execution of autonomous code of conduct
  - The tripartite commission agreed to establish a basic, autonomous code of conduct for platform companies in the areas of (1) signing of contract, (2) payment, (3) fee, (4) tax, (5) prevention of discrimination, (6) appraisal system, (7) proof of career experience, (8) resolution of disputes, (9) customer support, etc.(press release by Economic, Social & Labor Council on May 26, 2020:2).
  - The Subcommittee on Digital Transformation and Future of Labor under the Economic, Social & Labor Council also announced the code of conduct for platform labor in 2020(May 27, 2020) and decided to apply self-regulation to the matters regarding the payment method, fee, prevention of discrimination, performance appraisal, and resolution of disputes between platform workers and platform operators.
  - The self-regulation should include specifically how the code of conduct is established by whom, how they are going to create incentives for compliance with the code of conduct, and how they are going to establish effective sanctions against violation of the code of conduct.
- Verification and approval on service agreements
  - Crowd workers, who are not recognized as labor providers in the Labor Relations Act, do not have any window of collective negotiation or communication with the crowd work platform or with clients regarding their working conditions and wage. In this situation, the crowd work platform serves as the most powerful regulator that determines the working conditions of crowd workers, and the relevant document evidence is the service agreements written and notified by the platform(ILO, 2018:95). In order to correct and monitor unfair practices in the service agreements, it is necessary to establish a certain level of regulations or constraints on a legal basis.
  - With reference to the precedents of France, a platform operator and a crowd worker could autonomously discuss the service agreement and submit the completed draft agreement to the competent government department (Ministry of Employment and Labor in the case of Korea). Then the competent government department shall review and approve the service agreement, and the platform operator and crowd workers shall have the obligation to comply with the service agreement and the code of conduct(Kim Jong-Jin, 2021:43).

- Support for establishing a mutual aid association or a cooperative for platform workers
  - It was agreed through tripartite conversations that the government will provide support for establishing a cooperative among platform workers(press release from Economic, Social & Labor Council, May 26, 2020:6; The 3rd Framework Plan for a Cooperative, joint efforts by relevant government departments, 2020b). Following the suit of platform labor cooperatives, Translation Cooperative and Korea Freelancers' Social Cooperative have recently been established and are active in the relevant field(The Hankyoreh Newspaper, July 7, 2020).
  - It is necessary to amend the provision(Article 9) of the Legislation on Protection and Support for Platform Workers(hereinafter referred to as the Legislation for Platform Workers) which confines the definition of a mutual aid project operator to the platform operator. It is also important to establish a legal ground for the government to support not only platform operators but also mutual aid associations or cooperatives that were independently created by platform workers for the purpose of mutual assistance((Kim Jong-Jin, 2021:76).
- Policy suggestions regarding career development of platform workers
  - The HRD Learning Card supports career development training courses for crowd workers, such as the Specialized Training for Platform Workers and K-Digital Credit Specialized Training. According to the Operating Policy of the HRD Learning Card (Notification of the Ministry of Employment and Labor No.2021-70), it is difficult to consider the crowd workers, who complete the training courses supported by the HRD Learning Card and maintain the same job as a crowd worker, as getting a new job.
  - Several areas of improvement were identified in the National Employment Support Program to enhance the accessibility for crowd workers. If crowd workers, who have been receiving the job promotion allowance, provide platform labor and earn more than the job promotion allowance(usually, KRW 500,000 per month), then the job promotion allowance is suspended during the relevant period. If the allowance is suspended three times or more, the crowd workers shall lose the eligibility to the allowance/employment support. Meanwhile, the national employment support service will be terminated if the crowd workers who have been receiving the support service get employed for a job that requires working hours of 30 hours or more per week.
  - In short, Article 6 Eligibility Requirements of the law does not have a clear definition of the “state of not being employed”. Therefore, crowd workers who were receiving the job promotion allowance might be deprived of the eligibility due to Article 21, Article 29, or other relevant subsection of the law, even if there is no special change in their job-seeking activities.
  - Therefore, just like the HRD Learning Card, the National Employment Support Program needs to set a clear criterion to define the “state of being employed”, in consideration of the crowd workers(or others with non-standardized employment arrangements).

- Policy tasks regarding the support for social insurance subscription
  - Through amendment of the Employment Insurance Act, part of the workers who are not insured with employment insurance, such as artists and workers in special employment types, are now eligible to be insured. But platform workers or crowd workers are still not applied with employment insurance and industrial accident compensation insurance.
  - The Korean government basically plans to expand the employment insurance coverage for a wider range of platform workers, through social consensus and amendment of relevant laws and regulations including the Employment Insurance Act, based on the national employment insurance roadmap. There are also voices that the Legislation for Platform Workers, which is pending at the National Assembly, should include a comprehensive provision to cover a wider range of occupations or a policy to expand the coverage of employment insurance in a way to favor platform workers (Kim Jong-Jin, 2021:87-89).
- Policy response to gender issues - care and maternity protection
  - In providing social protection for all workers regardless of their employment types, there are important gender issues such as how to design the support programs dedicated to women workers such as childbirth-related support or maternity protection programs before and after the childbirth.
  - Article 24 of the Legislation for Platform Workers describes the regulations related to the treatment of women platform workers, but those regulations are only declaratory provisions that prohibits business users of the platform from treating the platform workers unfairly for reasons of 'pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare'. Through amendment of the Employment Insurance Act, the government is paying benefits to artists and some of the workers with special employment arrangements before and after the childbirth(Article 77-9 of the Act, and Article 104-15 of the Enforcement Decree of the same Act). Except for some of the workers with special employment arrangements, crowd workers and platform workers are excluded from the above government's support.
  - It is expected that the government will expand the coverage of childbirth benefits to include a wider scope of workers, according to the national employment insurance, as mentioned in the previous paragraph regarding the expansion of employment insurance coverage. However, it might require a social consensus to expand the coverage of childcare leave benefits to include platform workers.

- Policy response to gender issues - prohibition of discrimination and sexual harassment
  - All provisions related to the prohibition of discrimination and sexual harassment against workers in the laws and regulations including the Labor Standard Act, Act on Equal Employment and Support for Work-Family Reconciliation, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act are basically applied to the relationship between workers and their employers. The government needs to enact a separate legislation to prohibit discrimination and harassment in the area of platform labor because platform workers or crowd workers are not recognized as labor providers and have difficulties in identifying an employer or a business site.
  - However, the existing Legislation for Platform Workers does not have clear provisions regarding the discrimination and harassment against platform workers, such as the definition, responsibility of protection, relief procedures, and punishment on perpetrators.
  - In order to effectively protect the platform workers and crowd workers from discrimination or sexual harassment that might happen during the course of their work, the government needs to amend the Legislation for Platform Workers in a way to at least specify the relief procedures and punishment clauses at a level defined by other labor-related laws and regulations.