

# Global Conference on Measuring New Forms of Employment

Brussels, 4 - 5 July 2024



#MeasuringEmployment

# Measuring Digital Platform Workers in Australia

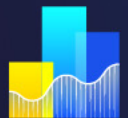
Session 5

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# An evolutionary approach



## Background

- ▶ High interest – both policy and public interest - in the understanding the prevalence of digital platform work and changes over time. Often within the context of the broader concept of “gig work”.
- ▶ The Australian Government's '[Closing loopholes](#)' reform agenda has a focus on 'employee-like' arrangements.
- ▶ Digital platform workers are usually required to have an Australian Business Number to engage in work using the platforms – working as independent contractors – but this relates to registering their business and not registering their specific working arrangements.



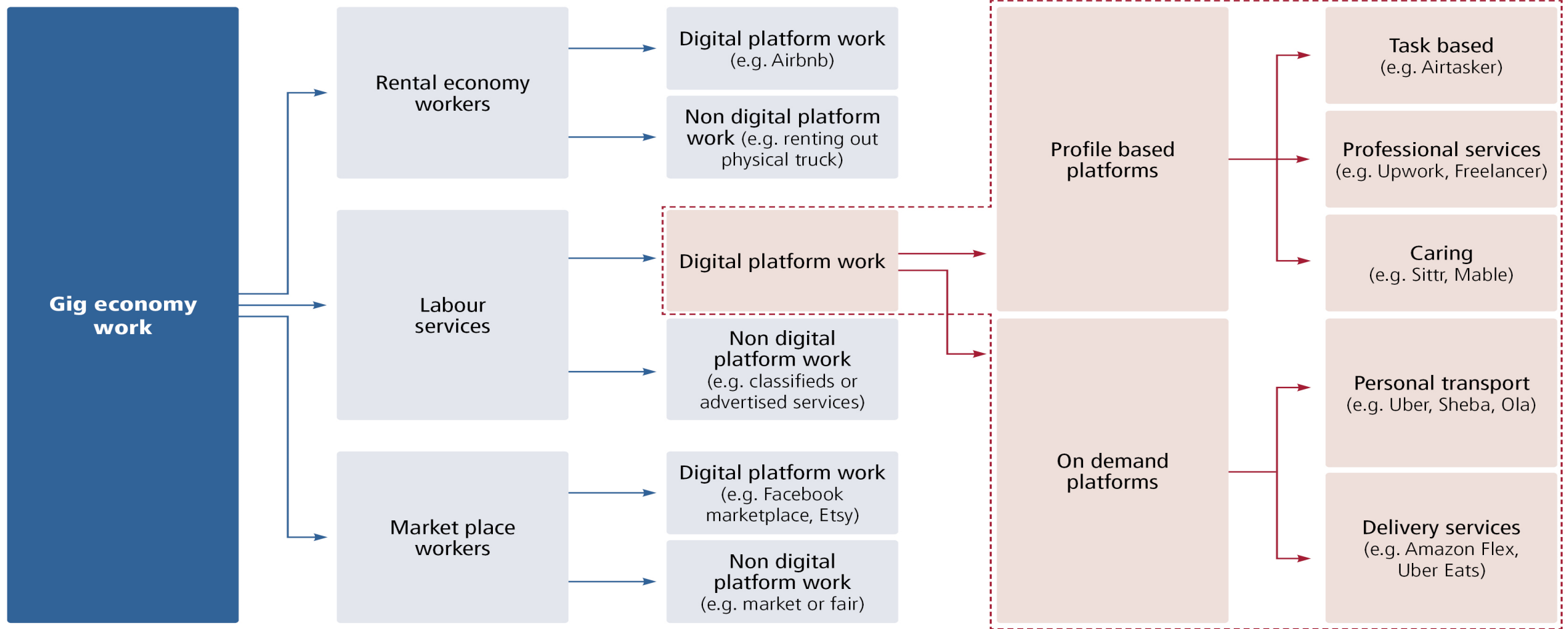
## Background (continued)

- ▶ Began our measurement journey by developing a framework for the Australian context and an initial experimental module to measure digital platform workers in 2022-23.
- ▶ The ABS developed an initial framework focused on those providing labour services through a digital platform – with the following intentionally focused/limited scope of:

*“the provision of fixed duration labour services, in the form of tasks/jobs which are accessed by the worker through digital platforms and are paid per unit of work delivered through the same platform.”*



### Gig economy – ABS population of interest



## An evolutionary approach

- ▶ The ABS developed an initial experimental survey module on digital platform workers for the 2022-23 financial year.
- ▶ Set the expectation that an evolutionary would be useful to explore a new and potentially complex measurement space. Starting simple and learning from the initial cycles.
- ▶ Intentionally did not limit asking questions only of employed people.
- ▶ Given the population (and sample counts) were expected to be small, with often small amounts of activity, the previous four weeks was used, rather than the single LFS reference week.





## An evolutionary approach (continued)

- ▶ A public consultation process was held in 2022 to gather feedback on the topics collected and the framework. This was targeted at experts but also open to the general public (including those who are using these platforms).
- ▶ Further refinements were identified from this consultation, which has informed the updated approach for the second year, 2023-24, including an expanded range of topics.





## Digital Platform Workers module

- ▶ The Australian Labour Force survey includes:
  1. monthly core content; and
  2. quarterly extended core content (in February, May, August and November); and
  3. single-month annual supplementary topics (in February, May and August, asked of all sample except the outgoing rotation group); and
  4. a series of modules that are asked of people in the outgoing rotation group.
- ▶ A new Digital Platform Workers module was added to (4) and asked of outgoing LFS respondents after their final month response to the core questions.

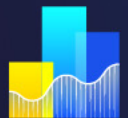


## Digital Platform Workers module (continued)

- ▶ Benefits of collecting it in the outgoing rotation group:
  1. Collecting from 12 rotation groups of sample (1.5 times the monthly 8 rotation group sample); and
  2. Avoiding pronounced seasonality in the data (1/12 each month); and
  3. Asking questions of a selected person in those modules, who answer about themselves, rather than the 'any responsible adult' that is used for the rest of the LFS (that is, this allows for targeted questions of individuals and asking about their motivations).
  
- ▶ As with the LFS, non-usual residents are out of scope. We used models in the quarterly Labour Account to also model an estimate for this group, given people born outside of Australia are more likely to do digital platform work.



# Prevalence



## Low prevalence and many don't think of it as a job

- ▶ Low prevalence - equivalent to around 1% of the employed population recently undertook some digital platform work in 2022-23, in the previous four weeks.
- ▶ However, of those who reported undertaking digital platform work:
  - 87% were employed; but
  - 13% were not employed (3% unemployed and 10% NILF)
- ▶ Also, while 53% undertook this work in addition to their main job, only 11% reported that they were multiple job holders in the Labour Force Survey.
- ▶ Suggests that many digital platform workers consider it a “side hustle” and source of income, but not a job, even when they don't have a job.



# Measurement challenges and future directions



# Measurement challenges for surveys

- ▶ False positives that needed to be excluded – including people who:
  - Were just using digital software in their job
  - Were just using social media to advertise their business
  - Organised a 'gig' using a digital platform but only to register (e.g. presenters booking into a conference, like this one)
  
- ▶ Some workers struggled with classifying or describing activities, which required editing:
  - Some selected multiple tasks for the same work. For example, carers who transport their patients often responded yes to both transport and caring categories.
  - Others will not select the appropriate category for them. For example, some drivers did not select the transport category.



## Measurement challenges for surveys (continued)

- ▶ Some apps can offer digital platform work along with non-digital platform work. For example, the [hipages](#) platform in Australia connects tradespeople with clients but can also handle payments. Not all tradespeople will use the payment component.
- ▶ As expected, even with the four week reference period, the achieved sample was small, limiting the range of outputs.
- ▶ Unable to include non-usual residents who are not in scope for the LFS.





## Updated content for 2023-24 (our second year)

- ▶ Changes between 2022-23 and 2023-24 include:
  - Ability to specify the type of caring work undertaken (e.g. aged/child/disability/veteran care).
  - Expansion of the reference period to tasks undertaken in the past 12 months and the frequency of digital platform work.
  - Additional questions around motivations, preferred working arrangements and why they are undertaking digital platform work.
  - Perception of safety and whether a workplace accident has occurred.
- Will release 2023-24 statistics (and further learnings) towards the end of 2024.



## Future measurement considerations to explore

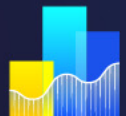
1. How do we reconcile the different way that respondents interpret most LFS questions around digital platform related jobs, compared with other jobs?
  - Do we reconcile them? Do we make changes, or accept they are a small conceptual challenge for aggregate statistics but at the margin?
2. How does this type of work fit into status in employment? Are there degrees of independent contracting that should be reflected?
3. Given the small prevalence, what useful data can we produce on working arrangements and experiences (e.g. a workplace accident, which is itself a relatively uncommon event)?
4. How would the design of the survey change if data became available directly from all/some of the digital platforms?



<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/digital-platform-workers-australia>

[www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour](http://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour)

email us: [labour.statistics@abs.gov.au](mailto:labour.statistics@abs.gov.au)



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