

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO THE PLATFORM ECONOMY

08 May 2026



From 7 to 8 May 2026, the African Regional Labour Administration Centre (ARLAC) High-Level Bilateral Dialogue on the Future of Work in Africa took centre stage in Sandton. The dialogue brought together ministers and government representatives from across the African continent to deliberate on the evolving world of work and the growing platform economy. Discussions focused on building consensus on how African countries can balance innovation, economic growth and social justice while ensuring adequate protection for workers in the digital economy. The high-level engagements also served as a platform for African governments to exchange experiences, explore regulatory approaches and strengthen a common continental position ahead of upcoming international labour discussions on the future of platform work.

Addressing delegates at the High-Level Bilateral Dialogue on the Future of Work in Africa in Johannesburg, Minister Meth described the gathering as a crucial opportunity for African countries to shape international labour standards rather than merely respond to them.

Welcoming Ministers and delegates from across the continent, in her capacity as the chairperson of the ARLAC, Minister Meth said the platform economy had become a lived reality for more than 36 million gig workers in Africa, with the number expected to grow significantly as digital connectivity expands.

“Let us help one another as compatriots and patriotic citizens of our different nations to ensure that as businesses make profits, workers are also protected,” said Minister Meth.

From ride-hailing services in Nairobi and e-commerce in Lagos to delivery services in Accra and online freelancing in Cairo, digital labour platforms are increasingly reshaping employment patterns across the continent.

Minister Meth said that the platform economy presents significant opportunities for income generation, entrepreneurship and labour market access, particularly for young people and women. However, concerns remain over inadequate worker protections, including the absence of minimum wage guarantees, sick leave, social security and collective bargaining rights for many platform workers.

The dialogue comes ahead of the 114th International Labour Conference in Geneva next month, where delegates are expected to deliberate on a proposed binding convention on decent work in the platform economy.

“We cannot afford to swing to either extreme, neither unfettered flexibility that leaves workers vulnerable, nor rigid over-regulation that stifles innovation and job creation,” said Minister Meth.

With nearly 85% of Africa’s labour force operating within the informal economy, minister Meth argued that properly governed platform work could serve as a bridge towards formal employment and decent work.

She further highlighted the importance of adopting a pragmatic and distinctly African regulatory model that protects workers while enabling home-grown digital platforms to innovate and create jobs for the continent’s growing youth population. Minister Meth also revealed that extensive consultations had already taken place with workers and employers in the platform economy. Workers raised concerns over algorithmic management, unstable incomes and limited social protection, while employers called for regulatory certainty and a level playing field.

According to Minister Meth, these engagements have provided valuable insight that will help shape the country’s negotiating position at the International Labour Conference. Delegates attending the dialogue were encouraged to move beyond theoretical debates and gain a deeper understanding of how platform work operates in practice, including the role of algorithmic management, data governance and the differences between local African platforms and global technology companies.



Minister of Employment and Labour: Nomakhosazana Meth

A key focus of the discussions is expected to centre on how the platform economy can help absorb the estimated 10 to 12 million young Africans entering the labour market each year. The meeting also includes site visits, presentations and direct engagements with employer representatives aimed at helping governments better understand the opportunities and challenges presented by digital labour platforms.

Looking ahead to the Geneva conference, the minister warned that while the draft “Blue Report” proposes a flexible and principles-based framework, flexibility should not come at the expense of worker protection.

Delegates have been tasked with identifying Africa’s negotiating priorities, proposed amendments and common positions ahead of the conference, with the ultimate goal of presenting a unified African voice during the international deliberations. African leaders and labour experts have been urged to adopt a balanced and coordinated approach to regulating the rapidly expanding platform economy, as governments prepare for critical global negotiations on the future of digital work.

“The platform economy is fundamentally restructuring work across every corner of Africa. The question is not whether we regulate it, but how,” the minister said.

Digital Platforms Highlight Economic Impact Across Africa

Sukti Dasgupta, Director of the Conditions of Work and Equality Department at the International Labour Organization (ILO) said the rapid growth of the platform economy across sectors and regions has created significant employment and income opportunities, particularly for young people, while also presenting growing concerns around workers’ rights, protection and decent work.

She further highlighted that digital labour platforms have expanded rapidly due to their flexibility and low barriers to entry, allowing more people to participate in the labour market. However, the rise of the platform economy has also exposed workers to challenges linked to labour protections and employment conditions.

The ILO governing body has therefore initiated the development of international labour standards aimed at regulating the platform economy through a double-discussion procedure. The first discussion took place in 2025, while the second is scheduled for June 2026.

Sukti Dasgupta explained that the platform economy relies on digital technologies and automated decision-making systems to organise and facilitate work. This includes both location-based work, such as ride-hailing and delivery services, and online work arrangements, which are often more complex due to the diversity of business models and employment relationships.

As part of the High-Level Bilateral Dialogue, Ministers and government representative visited the Takealot warehouse to gain practical insight into how digital platforms are transforming the world of work across Africa. Leading digital labour platforms presented their perspectives on the future of work on the continent, highlighting their growing economic impact and calling for balanced regulation that supports innovation while protecting workers.

Representatives from Glovo, Bolt and Uber told delegates that digital platforms are increasingly playing a critical role in job creation, entrepreneurship and the digitalisation of local commerce across Africa. The companies outlined the scale of their operations on the continent. Glovo said it has expanded to six African countries since 2019, including Kenya, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda, Morocco and Tunisia, supporting more than 45,000 merchants and 60,000 riders while generating an estimated \$2.5 billion in revenue for businesses operating on its platform.

Bolt reported that it now serves more than 60 million customers across Africa and operates in over 50 cities within six countries, including South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda. The company said it provides earning opportunities for more than 1.5 million drivers and couriers.

Uber, which launched operations in Africa in 2013, said it is now active in eight African countries and has generated an estimated \$2 billion in economic contribution across the continent. According to the company, its 2023 contribution included R17 billion in South Africa, KES 14.1 billion in Kenya and NGN 34 billion in Nigeria. Uber added that it has created more than 200,000 earning opportunities since entering the African market.

A recurring theme throughout the presentations was the role of digital platforms as intermediaries that enable flexible work opportunities and support Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The companies maintained that drivers, couriers and merchants operating on their platforms remain independent contractors who are able to determine their own working hours and level of participation.

Glovo and Bolt also highlighted efforts aimed at helping small businesses digitise their operations and access broader markets through platform technology. In addition, the companies outlined several support initiatives aimed at improving worker welfare. Bolt said it has partnered with financial institutions to provide vehicle financing opportunities for drivers, alongside discounted healthcare and insurance products. Glovo highlighted free upskilling programmes for riders as well as insurance coverage available through the platform.

As deliberations continue ahead of the upcoming International Labour Conference in Geneva, platform operators reiterated that the digital economy remains a significant driver of employment and economic activity across Africa. They urged policymakers to adopt evidence-based and context-sensitive regulations capable of supporting innovation while ensuring decent working conditions for platform workers

Ministers conclude high-level dialogue on future of work

African Ministers and labour experts have concluded the African Regional Labour Administration Centre High-Level Bilateral Dialogue on the Future of Work in Africa with a renewed commitment to shaping a balanced and distinctly African approach to regulating the platform economy ahead of next month's International Labour Conference in Geneva.

Delivering the closing remarks at the dialogue in Sandton, in her capacity as the chairperson, Minister Meth described the platform economy as a "powerful tidal wave" transforming labour markets across the continent and presenting both major opportunities and urgent regulatory challenges.

Over the two-day engagement, Ministers, technical experts, employer representatives and labour stakeholders deliberated on the rapid growth of digital labour platforms and their implications for employment, worker protection and economic development in Africa.

The chairperson said the dialogue had succeeded in deepening collective understanding of the platform economy while helping African governments move toward a pragmatic and coordinated position ahead of the 114th International Labour Conference.

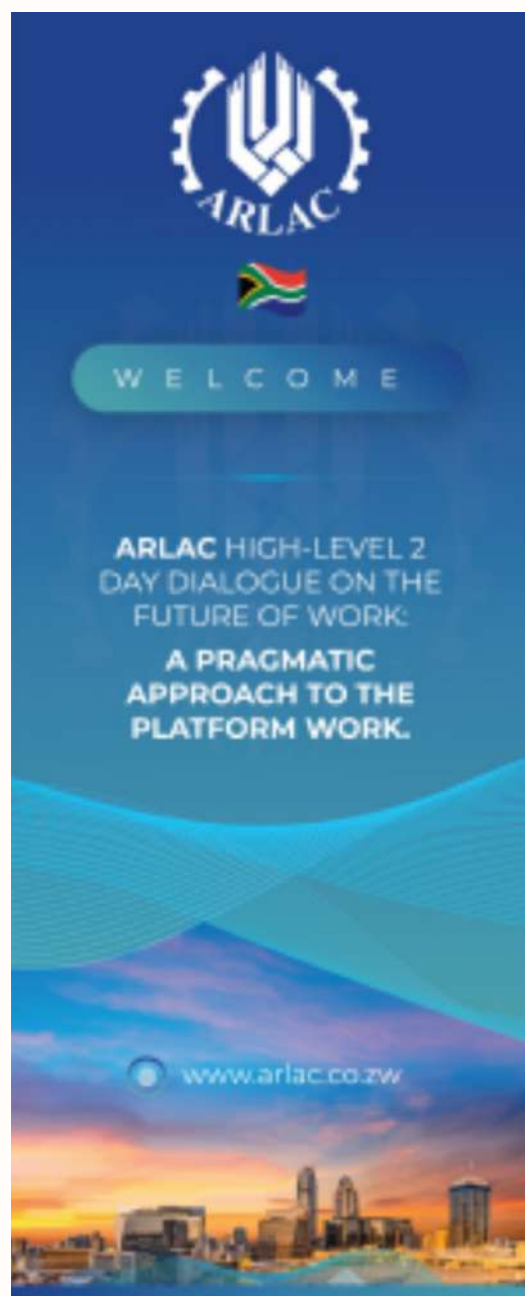
"We have seen clearly that while our contexts differ, our commitment to unity of purpose remains unshaken," said Minister Meth in her capacity as Chairperson

"The protection of platform workers remains a non-negotiable anchor of our position," chairperson Minister Meth stated, adding that every member state retains the sovereign right to determine its own regulatory path while ensuring dignity, fairness and basic security for workers. states to determine appropriate implementation measures according to their national circumstances.

The Chairperson stressed that this flexibility should be viewed as a strategic response to Africa's complex labour realities rather than a weakening of worker protections.

"The platform economy is indeed a tidal wave, but we have the power to shape its direction," the chairperson said. "With wise governance, we can ensure that millions of African workers ride this wave with dignity, stability and hope."

The meeting further reaffirmed the importance of continued social dialogue involving governments, employers and workers in shaping fair labour outcomes in the digital economy. While delegates welcomed the direct engagement with employers and platform companies during the dialogue, the chairperson emphasised that workers themselves must continue to be afforded equal opportunities for meaningful participation in future engagements.



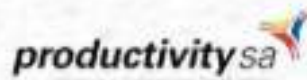






employment & labour

Department:
Employment and Labour
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National Economic
Development and
Labour Council



**ONE DEPARTMENT
COMMUNICATING IN ONE VOICE**

Physical Address:

Laboria House: 215 Francis Baard Street, PRETORIA

Postal Address:

Private Bag X117, PRETORIA, 0001