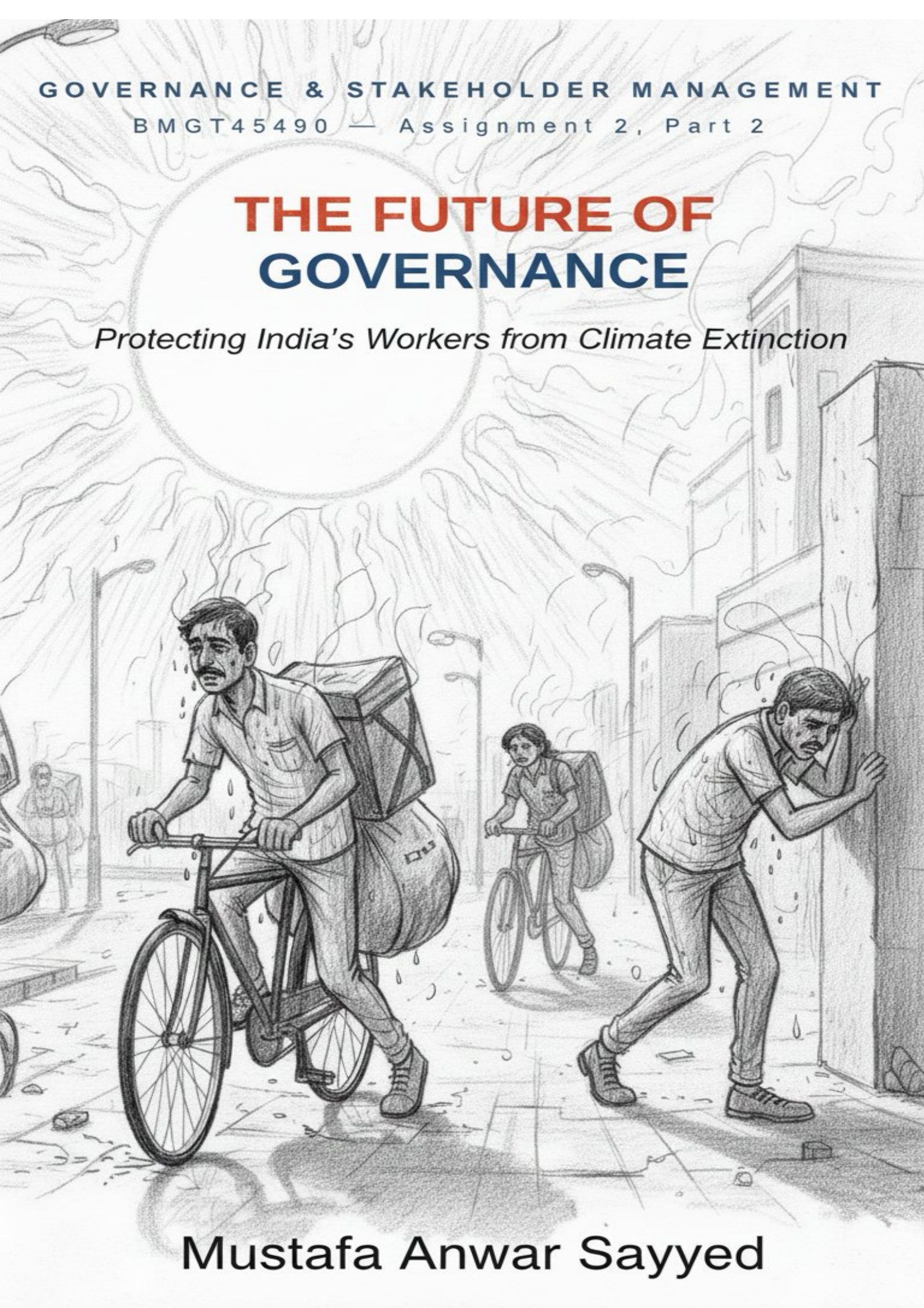


GOVERNANCE & STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT  
BMGT45490 — Assignment 2, Part 2

# THE FUTURE OF GOVERNANCE

*Protecting India's Workers from Climate Extinction*



Mustafa Anwar Sayyed

## Executive Summary

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AITUC's governance model is structurally obsolete. Built for the formal-employment, stable-climate economy of 1920, it has never been redesigned for the informalised, algorithmically managed, climate-disrupted economy of 2026, and it will not survive the intermediate scenario of 2040 without fundamental transformation. This report analyses how AITUC directs and controls the governance of India's labour environment today, evaluates the robustness of that model against the selected intermediate scenario of 2°C warming and 23.5 million gig workers, and provides four benchmark criteria for a governance framework capable of protecting the workers the current model systematically abandons.

The evaluation is unambiguous. AITUC's membership architecture, heat protection advocacy, and tripartite dialogue function are each inadequate when tested against the conditions the intermediate scenario will create. Two pillars fail outright; one is in managed decline. The framework proposed in this report is grounded in the ILO (2019) heat stress framework, the OECD (2022) climate governance roundtable, the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023, and the documented experiences of gig worker unions in Rajasthan and Telangana. The framework is not aspirational. It is the minimum necessary to prevent AITUC from becoming, by 2040, an institution that protects nobody while claiming to protect everybody.

## PART 2: HOW: Governing the Climate-Exposed Workforce in 2040 and Beyond

### How AITUC Governs Now: A Current State Analysis

| Governance Pillar               | Designed For  | Structurally Excludes   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Membership Architecture</b>  | Permanent employees with identifiable employers in registered workplace units                             | Gig workers, casual labourers, self-employed, and all contract workers classified as independent partners   |
| <b>Collective Bargaining</b>    | Stable employer-employee relationships in the organised sector: manufacturing, ports, railways            | Platform workers with no employer to bargain with; sub-contracted and daily casual labour   |
| <b>Legislative Advocacy</b>     | Parliamentary engagement through CPI affiliation; formal labour law framework covering registered workers | Informal gig workers, piece-rate workers, and casual labourers whose conditions fall entirely outside existing legislation; 380 million informal workers unrecognised by the OSH Code |
| <b>Tripartite Participation</b> | Indian Labour Conference and sectoral wage boards: government, employers, and organised labour            | Informal workers with no employer representative; gig economy entirely absent from forum design   |

Table 3: AITUC's Four Governance Pillars: Mechanism and Structural Exclusion. Source: Author's own, drawing on Badigannavar, Kelly and Kumar (2021); Ray and John (2025); IndustriALL (2026).

AITUC's governance architecture fails the workers it claims to represent not because of mismanagement but because of structural design: four interlocking pillars, each built for a formal employment economy that has largely dissolved. AITUC was selected as the subject of this analysis because, as India's oldest trade union federation with 14.2 million members and CPI parliamentary affiliation, it possesses the institutional scale and political access that no nascent gig worker union can replicate, making its failure to adapt the most consequential for India's 380 million informal workers. As Badigannavar, Kelly and Kumar (2021, p. 373) document, AITUC's own national secretary has acknowledged that traditional workplace-based methods no longer reach the workers who most need protection.

The legal framework governing AITUC systematically excludes platform workers by design, not by oversight, because every instrument AITUC operates within was built for an employment relationship that platform capitalism has eliminated. The Trade Unions Act 1926, consolidated under the Code on Industrial Relations 2020, grants legal recognition to unions meeting membership thresholds but requires the employer-employee relationship that gig platforms have deliberately dismantled. The Code on Wages 2019 sets the minimum wage framework AITUC advocates within; the OSH Code 2020 defines the safety standards it is mandated to enforce. None of these instruments reaches the workers this report examines, and AITUC has never successfully advocated for their extension to those workers. AITUC's membership exclusion is

structural, not incidental: the direct product of an affiliation architecture built on the employer-employee relationship that platform capitalism has deliberately dismantled. Table 4 below presents the six principal categories of India's climate-exposed informal workforce, their employment classifications, the specific nature of their heat exposure, and their current legal protection status.

| Worker Category  | Employment Classification   | Heat Exposure Type   | Legal Protection (current)   | AITUC Eligible? |
|--|---|--|--|-----------------|
| <b>Platform Delivery Rider (Zomato / Swiggy / Ola)</b>     | Independent contractor; self-employed; no employer of record                            | 8–12 hrs/day on two-wheeler in open sun; heat index regularly 48–52°C; algorithm ignores temperature           | None. OSH Code 2020 excludes self-employed; platform ToS classifies rider as partner; no sick pay, no heat compensation    | No              |
| <b>Construction Labourer (Delhi / Mumbai sites)</b>        | Daily wage casual hire; no written contract; sub-contractor expires with building       | 8–10 hrs at ground level; concrete raises ambient temp 3–5°C; no mandatory shade, cooling water or rest breaks | None. No formal contract triggers OSH Code; sub-contractor has no continuing safety liability                              | No              |
| <b>Municipal Sanitation Worker (Chennai / urban areas)</b> | Monthly rolling contract with private agency; terminable without notice                 | Pre-dawn to mid-morning outdoor work; direct sun; waste handling raises physiological heat load                | Nominally covered by OSH Code as agency employee, but agency contract excludes grievance mechanisms in practice            | No              |
| <b>Sugarcane Harvester (Maharashtra)</b>                   | Piece-rate seasonal contract; paid per tonne cut; no employer of record between seasons | All-day in dense crop rows; no shade; piece-rate means heat slows earnings directly; no right to stop          | None. Piece-rate work falls outside Minimum Wages Act enforcement; no income floor on heatwave days                        | No              |
| <b>Brick Kiln Worker (Rajasthan)</b>                       | Peshgi advance wage bonding; accepts cash upfront; works off debt through firing season | Beside kilns reaching 70°C; peshgi bond prevents leaving; no legal mechanism to refuse dangerous conditions    | None. Bonded labour prohibition exists but unenforced; OSH Code does not apply to kiln workers classified as self-employed | No              |

Table 4: India's Climate-Exposed Informal Workforce - Employment Classification and Legal Protection Status. Source: Author's own, drawing on Ray and John (2025); ILO (2019); PreventionWeb (2024); Changoiwala (2024).

The pattern it reveals is consistent and damning. A Zomato or Swiggy delivery rider classified as an independent partner has no contractual right to stop working when the heat becomes dangerous. Ray and John (2025) document this arrangement as 'digitally organised informality': a deliberate legal architecture in which platforms systematically deny the employer-employee relationship that would trigger labour law protections. A sugarcane harvester paid per tonne cut sees her earnings fall directly as heat slows her speed, with no floor wage and no heatwave supplement. A brick kiln worker bonded under the peshgi advance wage system has no legal standing to refuse working beside kilns that can reach 70°C. What these workers share is not merely their heat exposure. It is the deliberate construction of an employment relationship designed to ensure they bear that exposure alone, with no employer on record, no union able to reach them, and no law that compels anyone to protect them. When the workers most devastated

by heat have no employment relationship that grants them union entry, AITUC's governance reach stops precisely where India's climate crisis begins.

Collective bargaining is structurally impossible for workers who have no employer to bargain with, rendering AITUC's primary governance tool is obsolete for the informal economy. AITUC's affiliated unions negotiate with identifiable employers in stable employment relationships, a model with genuine historical strength where contracts exist and terms of employment are legible. Its limitation is not tactical but architectural. Independent gig worker unions, including the Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union, have partially filled this gap, influencing state-level welfare legislation in Rajasthan and Telangana (Ray and John, 2025), but they are state-level, nascent, and dependent on electoral cycles rather than institutional mandates. Badigannavar, Kelly and Kumar (2021, p. 376) demonstrate that only 15.82 per cent of casual workers were union members in 2011-2012, before the gig economy reached its current scale. When there is no employer, there is no bargain. AITUC's most powerful governance instrument is therefore inaccessible to the majority of workers who most urgently need it.

Legislative advocacy without workforce reach is influence without power, and AITUC's parliamentary presence cannot compensate for its absence from the workers it claims to represent. AITUC's CPI affiliation has produced genuine historical influence on minimum wage legislation, the Factories Act, and social security frameworks, but the OSH Code 2020, the instrument most critical to climate-exposed workers, was passed without substantive union consultation (Badigannavar, Kelly and Kumar, 2021, p. 381) and does not recognise ambient heat as a workplace hazard. AITUC can lobby parliament but cannot compel the OSH Code to cover Priya, the construction labourer, or the sugarcane harvester, because those workers do not appear in the legislative framework that AITUC was designed to engage with. In the intermediate scenario, the decisions being made without these workers at the table are the decisions that will determine whether 380 million informal workers are protected or abandoned.

Tripartite governance is structurally incapable of including workers who have no employer representative and no defined workplace, making the forum itself a mechanism of exclusion rather than inclusion. AITUC's participation in the Indian Labour Conference and sectoral wage boards follows the classic model of twentieth-century labour governance: government, employers, and organised labour at one table. The Indian Labour Conference has not met since 2015 (New Indian Express, 2025). A governance forum designed for stable organised employment that has not convened in a decade is not an inactive institution. It is an extinct one, preserved in the legal architecture of a labour governance system that has moved on without it.

Across all four pillars, the verdict is the same: a governance architecture designed without the workers who most need it is not protection. It is the architecture of abandonment.

## Evaluating Robustness: AITUC's Governance Under the Intermediate Scenario

It is 2040. Priya is a 34-year-old Swiggy delivery rider in Hyderabad. The city's mean summer temperature has risen by 1.8°C above the 2024 baseline. On a Tuesday in May, the heat index reaches 52°C by 11am. Priya's app shows 23 active orders in her zone. The platform's algorithm does not register temperature as a variable. It registers unfulfilled orders, rider ratings, and delivery times. If Priya pauses, her rating drops. If her rating drops below threshold, the platform deactivates her account. She has no sick pay, no heat compensation, and no legal right to stop. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code still does not recognise ambient heat as a workplace hazard. The National Disaster Management Authority issued a heat advisory in 2039 recommending that platforms suspend outdoor work above 45°C, but compliance remains voluntary, and Swiggy's terms of service classify Priya as an independent contractor, not a worker to whom any safety obligation attaches. AITUC has 14.2 million members. Priya is not one of them, has never been eligible to be one of them, and in 2040, under AITUC's current governance model, never will be. This is not a failure of implementation. It is a failure of institutional design. In the intermediate scenario, it is the defining feature of Indian labour governance.

AITUC's governance model will collapse under the weight of informalization and climate exposure, not because its individual pillars are weak, but because they were designed for a workforce that no longer exists. The intermediate scenario does not test AITUC's governance. It exposes its irrelevance.

Table 2 below summarises the robustness evaluation across all four governance pillars.

| Governance Pillar                        | Current Mechanism  | Robustness Under Intermediate Scenario (2°C, 2040)   | Verdict               |
|--|--|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Membership Architecture</b>           | Employer-mediated affiliation through registered workplace units | 23.5 million gig workers classified as self-employed by 2029-30 (Malhotra and Agrawal, 2025); 85% of casual workforce already excluded (Badigannavar et al., 2021) | <b>Fails outright</b> |
| <b>Heat Protection Advocacy</b>          | Legislative submissions to parliament; OSH Code engagement       | OSH Code (2020) does not recognise ambient heat as a workplace hazard; no legal enforcement mechanism for 380 million informal workers (PreventionWeb, 2024)       | <b>Fails outright</b> |
| <b>Platform and Tripartite Exclusion</b> | Indian Labour Conference and sectoral                            | Indian Labour Conference not   | <b>Fails outright</b> |

|                            |   |  |                        |
|----------------------------|---|--|------------------------|
|                            | wage boards: government, employers, and organised labour only | convened since 2015; tripartite model excludes all informal, gig, and platform workers by design               |                        |
| <b>Tripartite Dialogue</b> | Indian Labour Conference and sectoral wage boards             | Forum dormant since 2015; model excludes all informal, gig, and platform workers by design (IndustriALL, 2026) | <b>Managed decline</b> |

Table 2: Governance Robustness Evaluation: AITUC Under the Intermediate Scenario (2°C, 2040). Source: Author's own evaluation drawing on Badigannavar, Kelly and Kumar (2021); Malhotra and Agrawal (2025); Ray and John (2025); IndustriALL (2026); PreventionWeb (2024).

AITUC's membership architecture will not hold under the intermediate scenario. With 23.5 million gig workers projected by 2029-30, each classified as self-employed and therefore outside the employer-employee relationship AITUC requires (Malhotra and Agrawal, 2025), the architecture that already excluded 85 per cent of casual workers in 2011-2012 (Badigannavar, Kelly and Kumar, 2021, p. 376) will exclude a larger proportion as informality deepens. AITUC has responded by shifting toward community organising (Badigannavar, Kelly and Kumar, 2021), but community organising cannot deliver the collective bargaining agreements, heat safety protocols, or income replacement mechanisms that Table 4 demonstrates these workers require. The verdict is unambiguous: AITUC's membership system, applied without fundamental redesign, will become structurally irrelevant as the workers it most needs to reach multiply beyond its reach.

AITUC's heat protection function fails the same test. The OSH Code 2020 does not recognise ambient heat as a workplace hazard, leaving 380 million informal workers without legal protection (PreventionWeb, 2024). Yet AITUC possesses no tool to change this for the workers who need it most. It cannot compel Swiggy or Zomato to suspend operations above the ILO (2019) physiological risk threshold, because platforms classify riders as independent contractors to whom no duty of care attaches. It cannot trigger income replacement for piece-rate workers whose earnings collapse on heatwave days, because no compensation mechanism exists for informal workers. It cannot enforce rest periods on construction sites where no employment contract ever existed. AITUC cannot advocate effectively for workers it cannot count, in a legal framework that does not recognise the hazard killing them.

The most damaging evaluation concerns platform governance. Under the intermediate scenario, gig work will reach 23.5 million workers by 2029-30 (Malhotra and Agrawal, 2025), each governed not by a contract or a union agreement but by an algorithm that registers delivery times, rider ratings, and order volumes, not temperature. Ray and John (2025) document that gig workers in Varanasi who organised to demand shade and hydration breaks during heatwaves had their platform accounts blocked within hours: digital termination for asserting basic rights, administered

automatically, with no appeal mechanism and no legal remedy. This is the governance vacuum that will define the intermediate scenario. Platforms are not passive intermediaries in this failure. They actively construct the legal architecture of non-employment, classifying workers as independent partners to avoid the duties of an employer, and then deploy algorithms that enforce the productivity expectations of an employer without any of the obligations. AITUC cannot reach these workers, cannot count them, and cannot invoke a legal framework that does not recognise them. By 2040, under the intermediate scenario, this exclusion will have compounded: the gig workers AITUC could never reach will outnumber the formal sector members it can, making the federation structurally irrelevant to the majority of India's urban workforce.

The intermediate scenario does not require AITUC to abandon the values on which it was founded: collective representation, worker solidarity, and democratic voice in the governance of labour. It requires AITUC to recognise that those values are hollow when the workers they are meant to serve are structurally excluded from the institution that claims to represent them. Collective representation without access to the collectively unrepresented is not a value being upheld. It is a value being performed. An AITUC that retains its founding rhetoric but loses its institutional reach is not a union that has preserved its purpose. It is an institution that has preserved its identity at the expense of its mission. The practices must change precisely because the values must not. The overall evaluation is clear and damaging. AITUC will not collapse under the intermediate scenario. It will persist, retaining its formal sector membership, its parliamentary presence, and its institutional identity. But persistence without reach is not governance. It is managed decline: a union that continues to exist while the workers it was founded to protect are systematically excluded from every framework that will determine their survival in a 2°C world: employment law, occupational safety, and platform accountability. Diana Junquera Curiel, director for industrial policy at IndustriALL Global Union, captured the stakes with precision: 'Without clear protections and planning, the transition risks creating more precarious work than it replaces' (IndustriALL, 2026). Under AITUC's current governance model, that is not a risk, it is a certainty.

## **Governance Recommendations: Four Benchmarks for 2040**

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The most compelling objection is that AITUC's CPI affiliation provides parliamentary leverage no nascent gig worker union can replicate. This argument does not survive the evidence. Badigannavar, Kelly and Kumar (2021, p. 381) document that the BJP government consolidated 44 labour laws into four codes without substantive union consultation, and that Indian unions have already learned that political patronage cannot secure recognition deals or collective bargaining outcomes. A reform strategy premised on CPI leverage in a BJP-dominated parliament is not a plan. It is a deferral.

The four benchmarks proposed here are grounded in three governance principles that the intermediate scenario makes non-negotiable. The first is ethical accountability: platforms that exercise employer-like control over workers' livelihoods must bear employer-like duties of care, regardless of how those workers are legally classified. Classifying a delivery rider as an independent partner while algorithmically controlling every aspect of their working day is not a legal technicality. It is an ethical abdication, and governance frameworks that permit it are not neutral. They are complicit. The second is distributive responsibility: the economic cost of climate-driven heat exposure cannot be borne solely by the workers least able to absorb it. The ILO (2019) Decent Work framework is explicit that shared social risk is a foundational principle of just labour governance, and a system in which a 40 per cent earnings collapse on heatwave days falls entirely on the piece-rate harvester violates that principle directly. The third is institutional sustainability: a governance model that cannot reach the majority of the workforce it exists to represent is not sustainable as a democratic institution. OECD (2022) governance principles require that governance bodies be accountable to those whose interests they claim to advance. A union accountable only to the 15 per cent of the informal workforce it can currently reach is not meeting that standard. Each benchmark that follows translates one of these principles into a specific, enforceable governance change. Four benchmark criteria define the minimum governance architecture AITUC must achieve by 2040. Each flows directly from the failures identified in the above sections is grounded in evidence of what works, and represents not an aspirational target but a structural condition for relevance.

| Benchmark                                  | Governance Failure Addressed  | 2040 Target State   | Governing Principle   | Legal Anchor   |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <b>B1<br/>Open Membership Architecture</b> | AITUC membership requires an employer-employee relationship. Platform riders, piece-rate harvesters, agency sanitation workers and peshgi-bonded kiln workers are excluded by design. | Open membership covering all workers regardless of employment classification. Automatic registration via digital footprint. Tripartite welfare board financed by cess on platform transactions. Modelled on Rajasthan Gig Workers Act (2023). | <i>Ethical accountability: platforms exercising employer-like control must bear employer-like duties of care.</i> | <i>ILO (2015), para. 18, social partners must promote active participation of all affected workers at every level.</i> |
| <b>B2<br/>Mandatory Heat</b>               | OSH Code 2020 does not recognise  | Mandatory WBGT standard in OSH Code   | <i>Distributive responsibility: the cost of climate-driven heat</i>   | <i>ILO (2019) Working on a</i>   |

|   |  |  |   |  |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Protection Standard</b></p>   | <p>ambient heat as a workplace hazard. 380 million informal workers have no legal entitlement to rest, shade, or income replacement. AITUC has no enforcement mechanism.</p>   | <p>covering all workers regardless of classification. Heatwaves classified as notified disasters under Disaster Management Act 2005. Automatic income replacement triggered by temperature threshold.</p>  | <p><i>exposure cannot fall solely on the workers least able to bear it (ILO Decent Work, 2019).</i></p>                                       | <p><i>Warmer Planet; ILO (2015), para. 26 — governments must adopt OSH prevention measures for climate risks.</i></p>                            |
| <p><b>B3 National Informal Worker Registry</b></p>  | <p>India has no comprehensive register of gig or platform workers. e-Shram enrolled fewer than 340,000 of 12 million gig workers by mid-2025. Platforms classify workers as self-employed to avoid registration.</p> | <p>Mandatory registry embedded in Social Security Code 2020: all platforms and labour-hire contractors must register every engaged worker using transaction-level digital footprints. AITUC as named enforcement advocate.</p>                       | <p><i>Institutional sustainability: a governance body must be accountable to those whose interests it claims to advance (OECD, 2022).</i></p> | <p><i>Ray and John (2025) — digital footprint already technically available through platform transaction records.</i></p>                        |
| <p><b>B4 Algorithmic Accountability Standard</b></p>  | <p>Platform algorithms enforce employer-like productivity expectations with no employer-like duty of care. Workers asserting safety rights face account deactivation — digital termination with no legal remedy.</p> | <p>Algorithmic accountability standard in OSH Code and Social Security Code 2020: mandatory platform suspension above heat thresholds, automatic compensation, platform-funded climate risk insurance pool. AITUC as named enforcement advocate.</p> | <p><i>Ethical accountability: algorithmic management without accountability is governance without responsibility.</i></p>                     | <p><i>ILO (2015), para. 27 — OSH impacts of informality must be addressed; transition to formal economy facilitated through legislation.</i></p> |
| <p><b>Sequencing: B1 (Open Membership) is the prerequisite for B2, B3 and B4. Without it, AITUC has no mandate to advocate for a heat protection standard, no standing to demand a worker registry, and no enforcement role for algorithmic accountability. The governance logic is sequential, not parallel.</b></p> |  |  |   |  |

Figure : AITUC 2040 Governance Benchmark Framework. Source: Author's own, drawing on ILO (2015); ILO (2019); OECD (2022); Ray and John (2025); Malhotra and Agrawal (2025).

### Benchmark 1: Open Membership Architecture

Priya, the Swiggy delivery rider introduced in the above section, will never join AITUC under its current membership architecture because she has no employer to affiliate through. This is not Priya's failure. It is AITUC's. The benchmark for 2040 is an open membership system that extends eligibility to all workers regardless of employment classification: the platform delivery rider classified as an independent partner by her app and therefore excluded from every labour protection triggered by employment status; the construction labourer hired on daily wage terms

by a sub-contractor with no obligation to return tomorrow; the sugarcane harvester paid per tonne on a seasonal basis with no written contract and no employer of record between harvests; the sanitation worker engaged through a private cleaning agency on a monthly rolling basis, dismissed without notice and without recourse to any union. The evidence base for this benchmark is direct and precedented. Ray and John (2025) document the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023 as a functioning model: a tripartite welfare board financed through a cess on every platform transaction, where workers are automatically registered through their digital footprint rather than through employer affiliation. The board provides social security, grievance redressal, and formal representation, without requiring the employer-employee relationship that AITUC's current system demands. AITUC must advocate for the national adoption of this model and reconstitute its own affiliated membership to include workers organised through welfare board structures rather than exclusively through workplace units. An AITUC that cannot count Priya as a member in 2040 is an AITUC that has chosen institutional comfort over institutional purpose.

### **Benchmark 2: Mandatory Heat Protection Standard**

A mandatory wet bulb globe temperature standard is the minimum necessary to prevent the 40 per cent earnings collapse that heatwaves inflict on informal workers, yet AITUC currently possesses no mechanism to compel its adoption. The ILO (2019) establishes that heat stress sets in above 35°C in high humidity, and that without regulatory intervention, informal workers bear the full physiological and economic cost of climate-driven exposure. Das and Somanathan (2024) measured that cost directly, surveying launderers beside open-air steam vats, cycle-rickshaw drivers whose pedalling effort compounds heat strain, construction workers pouring concrete in direct sun, and street food vendors standing over cooking fires. Across all these groups, gross earnings fell 13 per cent per 1°C temperature rise, net earnings fell 19 per cent, and on heatwave days earnings collapsed by 40 per cent. For the piece-rate sugarcane harvester or the daily wage construction labourer, that collapse is not a statistic. It is the difference between eating and not eating that day. Under 2°C of warming, those losses will compound annually across India's 380 million heat-exposed informal workers. The benchmark for 2040 is a mandatory wet bulb globe temperature standard embedded in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, applying to all workers regardless of employment classification, with heatwaves classified as notified disasters under the Disaster Management Act (2005), a change that would unlock budgetary allocations for worker protection that are currently legally unavailable (TERI, 2025). The standard must include an automatic income replacement mechanism triggered by temperature thresholds, so that workers who cannot work during heat events are compensated without requiring them to navigate complex claims processes they cannot access. The ILO (2015, para. 26) guidelines require governments to conduct assessments of increased occupational safety and

health risks from climate change and to adopt adequate prevention and protection measures, a standard that India's current governance framework fails by every measurable criterion. AITUC's role in delivering this benchmark is as the named legislative advocate before parliament: the body that compiles the earnings data, the mortality figures, and the physiological thresholds, and translates them into a campaign for mandatory standards that protect every outdoor worker, not only those with formal contracts.

### **Benchmark 3: National Informal Worker Registry**

AITUC cannot advocate for workers it cannot count. This is not a rhetorical observation. It is a structural barrier: every legal challenge, every parliamentary submission, and every claim to representational legitimacy rests on the ability to name the workers being represented. India currently has no comprehensive register of informal, gig, or platform workers. The e-Shram portal, launched in 2021, had enrolled fewer than 340,000 of India's estimated 12 million gig workers as of mid-2025 (Ray and John, 2025), and confers no direct welfare entitlements on those who do register. Platform workers are invisible to the state not by accident but by design: platforms classify them as self-employed to avoid employer obligations, and the state has accepted that classification without requiring registration or data disclosure. The benchmark for 2040 is a mandatory national informal worker registry, embedded in the Social Security Code 2020 enforcement architecture, requiring all platforms and labour-hire contractors to register every worker they engage on a transaction-by-transaction basis, using the digital footprint that Ray and John (2025) demonstrate is already technically available. AITUC's role is as the named enforcement advocate with standing to challenge non-compliant platforms and contractors. A union that cannot count its constituency has no constituency to represent. Without the registry, AITUC is making claims on behalf of workers it cannot identify, in a legal framework that does not recognise them, to a government that has no obligation to respond.

*The technical architecture for delivering this benchmark is developed in full in Appendix A of this report: the Platform Labour Disclosure Standard (PLDS). Drawing directly on CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) implementation methodology, the PLDS proposes a mandatory XBRL-tagged monthly disclosure framework requiring all platforms operating above a defined transaction threshold to submit structured worker data to a central government registry. The architecture mirrors the four-stage Diagnose-Design-Build-Embed pipeline I made for CSRD compliance infrastructure: platforms define the data taxonomy, inventory their source systems, build automated submission pipelines, and submit machine-readable structured files that a government validation engine accepts or rejects on receipt. India already holds the foundational components, the Aadhaar identity infrastructure, the IMD heat advisory data feed, and the Rajasthan Gig Workers Welfare Act 2023 as legal precedent. The PLDS is the specific technical instrument that makes Benchmark 3 operational rather than aspirational. See Appendix A.*

### **Benchmark 4: Algorithmic Accountability Standard**

Algorithmic management without accountability is governance without responsibility, and platforms that exercise employer-like control over workers' livelihoods must bear employer-like duties of care regardless of legal classification. Ray and John (2025) document exactly what governance without accountability produces: gig workers in Varanasi who went on strike to demand shade and hydration breaks during heatwaves found their platform accounts blocked, digital termination for asserting basic rights, administered by an algorithm that recognises no labour law obligation whatsoever. This is the governance vacuum that the intermediate scenario will expand: as gig work grows to 23.5 million workers by 2029-30 (Malhotra and Agrawal, 2025), the platforms managing their labour will face no legal obligation to protect them from heat, to compensate them for heat-related income losses, or to acknowledge any duty of care during extreme weather events. The benchmark for 2040 is an algorithmic accountability standard embedded in the expanded OSH Code and the Social Security Code 2020 enforcement architecture, requiring platforms to suspend operations and compensate workers automatically when heat advisories are in force, with AITUC designated as the named enforcement advocate with standing to bring legal challenges against non-compliant platforms. The standard must require platforms to register all workers with the national labour database, creating the digital footprint that Ray and John (2025) show is already technically available through transaction records, and to contribute to a platform-funded climate risk insurance pool that provides income replacement without requiring workers to file individual claims. An algorithm that sends a delivery rider into 52°C heat without legal consequence is a governance failure. AITUC's benchmark for 2040 is to make that failure impossible.

## **9. Conclusion**

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AITUC's founding mission was to protect Indian workers from exploitation. In 2040, under the intermediate scenario, those workers will be riding through 48°C heat on platforms that classify them as partners, cutting cane with no right to stop, and bonded to kilns that will not pause for heat advisories, with no legal protection that AITUC's current governance model can deliver.

The analysis in Sections 6 and 7 is unambiguous. Three of AITUC's four governance pillars fail outright under the intermediate scenario. These are not peripheral weaknesses. They are structural failures that will compound as informality deepens and gig work expands without the workers inside the room.

The four benchmarks proposed in Section 8 are not a wishlist. They are a minimum. Open membership architecture, a mandatory heat protection standard, a national informal worker registry, and algorithmic accountability for platforms represent the governance conditions under

which AITUC can credibly claim to represent India's climate-exposed workforce in 2040. Each benchmark is achievable. The Rajasthan Gig Workers Welfare Act (2023) demonstrates that tripartite welfare boards for informal workers can be legislated. The ILO (2019) and ILO (2015) frameworks provide the international governance standards that anchor every recommendation. The evidence base is overwhelming and growing.

The four benchmarks are not of equal urgency, and sequencing matters. Open membership architecture is the prerequisite on which the other three depend. Without it, AITUC has no mandate to advocate for a mandatory heat protection standard, because the workers that standard must protect are not its members. It has no standing to demand a national worker registry, because the workers that registry must count have no institutional relationship with AITUC. It cannot designate itself as the enforcement advocate for algorithmic accountability, because the delivery riders and gig workers subject to platform management have no institutional relationship with AITUC whatsoever. The governance logic is sequential, not parallel: a union that cannot count Priya as a member in 2026 cannot credibly claim to represent her interests in 2040 through any of the frameworks this report proposes. Benchmark 1 is therefore not one of four priorities. It is the condition of possibility for the other three. AITUC's leadership must understand that without architectural reform of its membership system, the remaining benchmarks are policy positions without a constituency, and a union without a constituency is not a governance institution. It is a historical artefact.

What is required is institutional will: the willingness of AITUC's leadership to declare that a union which cannot reach the delivery rider, the construction labourer, the harvest worker, and the sanitation worker is not a trade union federation for India's workers. It is a federation for a minority of India's workers, watching the majority suffer from a position of well-organised irrelevance. The moment for that declaration is now. The intermediate scenario is not a projection. As this report has demonstrated from Section 1 onward, it is a description of the present, extrapolated forward. AITUC cannot govern the future with the tools it designed for the past. The workers it was founded to protect cannot afford to wait for AITUC to discover this on its own.

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## Appendix A: Platform Labour Disclosure Standard

*A Technical Policy Proposal for Mandatory Platform Labour Disclosure in India, Drawing on CSRD Implementation Architecture*

# PLATFORM LABOUR DISCLOSURE STANDARD

*A Proposed Governance Framework for India's Gig Economy*

Drawing on CSRD Implementation Architecture | April 2026

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## 1. The Governance Problem This Proposal Addresses

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India's 380 million informal workers are invisible. Not metaphorically invisible — invisible in the technical sense that no system collects, standardises, or discloses structured data about who they are, what they do, what they are paid, or what happens to them when it is too hot to work. A Swiggy delivery rider completes 23 orders on a day when the heat index reaches 52°C. That fact is recorded nowhere in any government system. No regulator can query it. No court can subpoena it. No union can cite it. It does not exist, as far as the state is concerned, because the platform classified the rider as an independent partner rather than a worker, and no law requires any disclosure about what happens to independent partners.

This is not a data collection problem. The data exists. Swiggy knows exactly how many hours Priya worked, what she was paid, when heat advisories were in force, and whether she continued working through them. The problem is that no law requires Swiggy to disclose that data to anyone. The Platform Labour Disclosure Standard (PLDS) proposed here would change that, not by building a government surveillance system, but by mandating that platforms disclose structured, machine-readable, auditable worker data to a central government registry on a monthly basis. It is, in design and logic, a CSRD for labour.

## 2. Why CSRD is the Right Model

The EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which came into force in 2024, requires large companies to report non-financial data, environmental impact, social conditions, governance structures — in a structured, machine-readable format called XBRL (eXtensible Business Reporting Language). Every data point is tagged with a machine-readable label so that regulators, investors, and researchers can compare figures across companies automatically, without reading individual PDF reports.

Before CSRD, European companies reported sustainability data voluntarily, inconsistently, and in formats that made verification difficult. After CSRD, the data must be tagged, structured, and filed in a format that a regulator can query with a database command. A company that misreports Scope 1 emissions cannot hide the discrepancy when a regulator runs a cross-company query on a Tuesday afternoon. The architecture makes consistent evasion computationally difficult at scale.

India's platform economy has exactly the same structural problem that CSRD was designed to solve: the data exists inside private systems, it is never standardised, it is reported voluntarily and selectively, and it cannot be verified without access to proprietary systems. The PLDS applies CSRD's solution — mandatory structured disclosure in machine-readable format — to labour data rather than environmental data.

| Dimension                | CSRD (EU)  | PLDS (Proposed, India)   |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| <b>What is disclosed</b> | Environmental, social, governance sustainability data          | Gig worker identity, hours, pay, heat exposure, safety incidents         |
| <b>Who discloses</b>     | Large companies above revenue/employee thresholds              | All platforms and labour-hire contractors above transaction threshold    |
| <b>To whom</b>           | European Single Access Point (ESAP) — public registry          | National Platform Labour Registry — government-held                      |
| <b>Format</b>            | XBRL-tagged structured data — machine-readable, queryable      | XBRL-tagged structured data — same architecture, different taxonomy      |
| <b>Frequency</b>         | Annual report with quarterly indicators                        | Monthly submission — near-real-time for heat advisory data               |
| <b>Enforcement</b>       | Regulatory penalty for non-filing or material misreporting     | Regulatory penalty; platform operating licence conditional on compliance |
| <b>Assurance</b>         | Third-party limited assurance (moving to reasonable assurance) | Automated validation on submission; periodic third-party audit           |

Table 1: CSRD vs PLDS — Structural Comparison. Source: Author's own.

### 3. What the Platform Labour Disclosure Standard Would Require

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Drawing on the ESRS (European Sustainability Reporting Standards) taxonomy as a model, the PLDS would require platforms and labour-hire contractors to submit the following structured data points monthly for every engaged worker, regardless of employment classification. The monthly cadence — more frequent than CSRD's annual cycle — reflects the time-sensitivity of heat exposure data: a heat advisory period in June is irrelevant to enforcement by December.

#### 3.1 Worker Identity and Registration Data Points

- Unique worker identifier (linked to Aadhaar or equivalent national ID)
- Platform name and operating entity registration number
- Worker employment classification as reported by the platform (independent contractor, agency worker, direct employee)
- Date of first engagement and date of most recent engagement in the reporting month
- Geographic zone(s) of operation during the reporting period

#### 3.2 Working Time and Earnings Data Points

- Total active hours worked in the reporting month (platform-recorded, not self-reported)
- Total gross earnings in the reporting month, in Indian Rupees
- Effective hourly rate derived from hours and earnings (calculated field, not platform-submitted)
- Number of days on which the worker was active
- Number of transactions, deliveries, or tasks completed in the reporting month
- Any deductions applied by the platform (equipment rental, cancellation penalties, insurance contributions)

#### 3.3 Heat Exposure and Safety Data Points

This is the section that does not exist in CSRD — it is specific to the Indian informal labour context and is the most operationally significant part of the proposal. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) already issues Heat Action Plan advisories designating heat alert days by city and zone. These alerts are already digital. The PLDS requires platforms to cross-reference their own operational data against the IMD advisory record.

- Number of heat advisory days in the worker's operating zone during the reporting month (sourced from IMD record, not platform-reported)
- Number of hours the worker was operationally active on heat advisory days — platform-recorded
- Whether the platform suspended operations in the worker's zone during heat advisory periods: yes, partial, or no
- Number of heat-related illness incidents reported by the worker through the platform during the reporting month
- Whether income replacement was provided for hours lost due to voluntary or mandatory heat-related work suspension: yes, partial, or no — with amount
- Worker account status at end of reporting month: active, suspended, or deactivated — and if deactivated, the reason code

### 3.4 The Account Deactivation Reason Code

This single data point deserves specific explanation because it addresses the most insidious feature of platform governance: the ability to terminate a worker's livelihood instantly, silently, and without any recorded reason that a regulator or court could examine. Ray and John (2025) document workers in Varanasi having their accounts blocked within hours of organising for shade and hydration during heatwaves. Under the PLDS, every account deactivation would require the platform to submit a reason code from a standardised taxonomy: performance (rating below threshold), inactivity, fraud, safety violation, background check, or worker request. A deactivation occurring within 48 hours of a heat advisory period, coded as 'performance', becomes a data point that a labour inspector can query with a single database command. It does not prove retaliation. But it makes systematic retaliation visible in aggregate — and visible retaliation patterns are what force regulatory and legal responses.

## 4. Technical Architecture — Applying the Expleo CSRD Model

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The four-stage Diagnose-Design-Build-Embed delivery model developed for CSRD compliance infrastructure translates directly into the technical architecture needed to implement PLDS at national scale. The parallel is not superficial: both involve extracting structured data from private systems, validating it against a defined taxonomy, loading it into a central registry, and building the governance layer that makes the data trustworthy rather than merely present.

## **Stage 1: Define the Taxonomy (equivalent to CSRD Double Materiality Assessment)**

Before any pipeline is built, the Ministry of Labour must define the PLDS data taxonomy: the complete list of required data points, their formal definitions, their measurement units, their calculation methods, and their reporting period. This is the equivalent of the ESRS data model. It is also the stage where the critical definitional battles are fought — what counts as a 'heat advisory day', what constitutes 'active hours', how earnings are defined when platforms use dynamic pricing. Getting definitions wrong at this stage means the data collected is incomparable across platforms and therefore useless for systemic analysis.

## **Stage 2: Platform Data Source Inventory (equivalent to CSRD Data Source Mapping)**

Every platform operating above the transaction threshold must complete a structured data source inventory: identifying which internal system holds each required PLDS data point, in what format, at what granularity, and with what update frequency. For Swiggy and Zomato, the operational management system holds active hours and transaction counts. The payment system holds earnings. The HR or partner management module holds registration dates and account status. The inventory establishes whether each platform can produce each required data point and identifies gaps requiring remediation before the first submission.

## **Stage 3: Submission Pipeline and Validation Engine**

Each platform builds or procures a data pipeline that extracts the required data points from its source systems, transforms them into XBRL-tagged format against the PLDS taxonomy, and submits the resulting structured file to the National Platform Labour Registry via a secure API on a monthly schedule. The government registry runs a validation engine on receipt: checking that all required data points are present, that values fall within plausible ranges, that heat advisory hours do not exceed total active hours, and that worker identifiers resolve against the national ID database. Submissions failing validation are rejected with a specific error code and must be corrected and resubmitted within a defined window. Failure to resubmit within the window is treated as non-filing.

This is precisely the architecture Expleo builds for CSRD clients — the pipeline from source systems to central warehouse, with a validation layer that rejects data that fails quality checks rather than accepting it silently. The only difference is that the 'central warehouse' is a government registry rather than a corporate sustainability data warehouse, and the 'external auditor' is a government inspector rather than a Big 4 assurance team.

## Stage 4: Government-Side Analytical Layer

Once data is flowing monthly from platforms into the registry, the government analytical layer enables systematic enforcement queries that are currently impossible: How many workers across all platforms worked more than four hours on a heat advisory day in Chennai in June 2027? Which platforms suspended operations during heat advisories and which did not? What is the distribution of effective hourly rates across platforms and cities? Which platforms show deactivation spikes within 48 hours of heat advisory periods? These are not investigative questions requiring individual worker complaints — they are database queries that run in seconds against structured, validated, machine-readable data. This is precisely what made CSRD transformative for environmental enforcement: the shift from reactive individual complaint to proactive systemic pattern detection.

## 5. Precedent: India Already Has the Infrastructure Foundations

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The PLDS is not a proposal to build new infrastructure from scratch. India already has several of the foundational components, making this significantly more feasible than it would be in a country with weaker digital government infrastructure.

### e-Shram: The Precedent That Demonstrates the Gap

The e-Shram portal, launched in 2021, is a government registry for unorganised workers. By mid-2025, it had enrolled fewer than 340,000 of India's estimated 12 million gig workers (Ray and John, 2025). The reason is structural: e-Shram is a voluntary self-registration portal. Workers must choose to register themselves. Platforms have no obligation to report the workers they engage. The PLDS replaces voluntary self-registration with mandatory platform-side disclosure — the same shift CSRD made from voluntary sustainability reporting to mandatory structured disclosure.

### Aadhaar and UPI: Proof of Scalable Digital Government Infrastructure

India's Aadhaar biometric identity system covers over 1.3 billion people and is already used for KYC (Know Your Customer) verification across banking, telecom, and government services. The UPI payment system processes over 10 billion transactions per month. Both systems demonstrate that India has the technical capacity to build and operate digital infrastructure at a scale that dwarfs the PLDS requirement. A monthly submission from 50 to 100 platform operators covering 12 to 23 million workers is operationally trivial relative to UPI's transaction processing load.

### Rajasthan Gig Workers Welfare Act 2023: The Policy Precedent

Ray and John (2025) document the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023 as the first state-level law in India to mandate platform registration of gig

workers and create a tripartite welfare board financed by a cess on platform transactions. This Act establishes the legal principle that platforms have a duty to register and contribute to the welfare of their engaged workers regardless of employment classification. The PLDS extends this principle from registration to continuous structured disclosure — from knowing who the workers are to knowing what happens to them.

### IMD Heat Action Plans: The Real-Time Reference Data

The Indian Meteorological Department already publishes Heat Action Plan advisories digitally, by city and zone, in near-real-time. The PLDS does not require the government to build a heat monitoring system — it already exists. The PLDS requires platforms to cross-reference their operational data against the IMD advisory record that is already published. This is a data integration task, not a new data generation task.

## 6. What PLDS Makes Possible — The Governance Chain

The PLDS is not, on its own, a worker protection mechanism. This is the most important caveat in the proposal and the one most likely to be lost in political advocacy. A disclosure requirement without enforcement is bureaucracy that benefits consultants and burdens platforms without protecting workers. The PLDS is infrastructure. What it makes possible is the following governance chain:

| PLDS enables...                                    | ...which activates...                                 | ...which delivers...  |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Worker identity database</b>                    | AITUC Benchmark 1: Open Membership                    | AITUC can claim representational mandate over workers it can now count and name   |
| <b>Heat advisory working hours data</b>            | AITUC Benchmark 2: Mandatory Heat Protection Standard | Regulator can identify which platforms violated heat protection obligations with a single database query                                    |
| <b>Earnings and hours data by worker</b>           | OSH Code enforcement for informal workers             | Labour inspector can verify whether platform earnings meet minimum wage obligations without requiring worker complaint                      |
| <b>Deactivation reason codes with timestamps</b>   | AITUC Benchmark 4: Algorithmic Accountability         | Systematic retaliation patterns become statistically detectable; enforcement shifts from individual complaint to aggregate pattern analysis |
| <b>Monthly aggregate data across all platforms</b> | AITUC Benchmark 3: National Informal Worker Registry  | Government knows, for the first time, how many gig workers exist in each city, what they earn, and how they are treated — the               |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | foundational data for any future policy intervention |
|--|--|--|

Table 2: The PLDS Governance Chain — how disclosure infrastructure activates the four AITUC benchmarks.  
Source: Author's own.

## 7. Honest Limitations and Counter-Arguments

### 7.1 Platform Resistance

Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, and Amazon Flex will resist PLDS on the same grounds they resist every worker classification reform: compliance cost, competitive disadvantage if applied unevenly, and the argument that disclosure requirements will raise operating costs and reduce the earnings of the very workers they claim to protect by making the gig model uneconomical. The CSRD precedent is relevant here: every large European company made the same argument about CSRD, and the EU proceeded anyway, precisely because the data asymmetry between companies and regulators was the central governance failure CSRD was designed to correct. The same asymmetry exists in India's platform economy. Disclosure is not optional in CSRD because the voluntary alternative produced nothing useful. The same logic applies to PLDS.

### 7.2 Data Quality and Gaming Risk

Mandatory disclosure in a structured format reduces but does not eliminate gaming. A platform could under-report active hours, reclassify heat advisory working hours as non-advisory hours, or create fictitious deactivation reason codes. Three mechanisms limit this. First, cross-validation: PLDS data can be cross-referenced against IMD advisory records (government-held, not platform-submitted), against payment records where UPI transactions create an independent footprint, and against worker complaints. Second, random audit: the validation engine flags statistical anomalies for human review — a platform with suspiciously low heat advisory working hours in Chennai in June will trigger an audit flag automatically. Third, criminal liability: material misreporting in CSRD is a regulatory offence. PLDS would require the same legal framework — a CEO sign-off on submission accuracy, creating personal liability for the signatory.

### 7.3 Enforcement Capacity

Structured data is only as useful as the enforcement capacity that acts on it. India's labour inspection system is chronically under-resourced. The PLDS does not solve this problem, but it changes the nature of what enforcement requires. Manual labour inspections are resource-intensive precisely because inspectors must visit individual workplaces to gather data that

companies hold privately. When that data is in a structured government database, enforcement becomes a data analysis function rather than a field inspection function. A two-person team with database access can generate more actionable enforcement leads in a day than fifty inspectors can in a month of field visits. This is the transformation CSRD is already producing in EU environmental enforcement.

## 8. What Implementation Would Require

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Implementing the PLDS would require the following specific actions from the Government of India, in sequence:

- **Legislative mandate:** An amendment to the Code on Social Security 2020 or a standalone Platform Labour Disclosure Act establishing the legal obligation on platforms above a defined transaction threshold to submit monthly XBRL-tagged worker data to the National Platform Labour Registry.
- **Taxonomy development:** A Ministry of Labour working group — including platform representatives, AITUC and gig worker union representatives, and technical standards experts — to develop and publish the PLDS data taxonomy (the equivalent of ESRS for labour disclosure). The Rajasthan Act provides a starting framework for worker categories and welfare definitions.
- **Registry infrastructure:** A government-operated National Platform Labour Registry with an XBRL submission API, an automated validation engine, and a query interface for authorised labour inspectors and approved researchers. India's existing digital infrastructure — Aadhaar API, DigiLocker, and the UMANG platform framework — provides ready-made components for this build.
- **Platform compliance support:** A government-provided technical specification and reference implementation (open-source pipeline code) to reduce the compliance burden on smaller platforms and sub-contracting agencies that lack the technical capacity of Swiggy or Zomato. A phased implementation timeline — large platforms first, smaller operators phased in over 18 to 24 months — follows the CSRD phased approach.
- **AITUC institutional role:** AITUC, once it has implemented Benchmark 1 (Open Membership), should be designated as a named enforcement advocate with standing to query the registry on behalf of registered workers, to challenge non-compliant platform submissions, and to bring regulatory complaints based on aggregate data patterns — not individual worker complaints. This is the institutional role the PLDS creates for AITUC that it currently cannot fill because the data does not exist.

## 9. Conclusion

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Priya's situation — riding through 52°C heat on a Tuesday in May 2040 because the algorithm does not register temperature and she cannot afford to stop — is a governance failure with a technical root cause: the data that would make her situation visible to regulators exists inside Swiggy's systems and nowhere else. The Platform Labour Disclosure Standard is the specific technical intervention that changes that. It does not require the government to build a surveillance system. It requires platforms to disclose, in a structured and auditable format, data they already collect about the workers they engage — the same obligation CSRD places on European companies regarding the environmental and social impacts they already measure.

The architecture for building this is not theoretical. It is the same four-stage pipeline — Diagnose, Design, Build, Embed — that we proposed expleo to implement for CSRD clients. The data engineering skills, the XBRL expertise, the validation engine design, the governance framework construction, and the audit trail architecture are all transferable. The difference is that the client is a government rather than a corporation, and the protected asset is a worker's livelihood rather than a company's ESG rating.

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