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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Platform Labor: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are key concerns in labor platforms and the gig economy because the work flexibility they offer is often accompanied by new forms of inequality for workers. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, this systematic literature review (SLR) synthesizes the literature on DEI in the context of labor platforms. Articles were collected from Scopus, Google Scholar, forward citation searching, and reference-list screening. After deduplication and title, abstract, and full-text screening, 64 studies were analyzed using descriptive and thematic approaches. This study examines various forms of DEI-related inequality, the platform mechanisms that shape them, and the contextual factors that support or hinder DEI implementation. The findings suggest that although labor platforms can expand access to work, they may also reinforce inequality through algorithmic control, rating-based discrimination, unclear employment status, income instability, and limited social protection. Key issues identified include gender, race, ethnicity, migration, disability, algorithmic bias, worker representation, regulation, and employment equity. This study proposes a research and policy agenda to promote fairer, more transparent, inclusive, and sustainable digital labor platforms.

Keywords: DEI; platform labor; gig economy; systematic literature review.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the digital economy has driven the emergence of labor platforms, often associated with the gig economy, as a new form of work organization that mediates relationships between workers and employers through digital platforms. This work model offers flexibility and broader economic opportunities for various groups (Fu, 2025). Labor platforms are also a crucial part of the transformation of the global labor market, as they shift traditional employment relationships toward more flexible, decentralized, and technology-based arrangements (Kumar, 2025). This trend demonstrates that platform-based work is increasingly relevant to understanding the future of work in the digital age.

Despite these opportunities, increasingly pressing empirical issues have emerged. Platform labor does not always create equal opportunities for all workers. Several studies have shown gender-based wage inequality in platform work (Barzilay & Ben-David, 2017), lower earnings among women than men in the gig economy (Dong et al., 2024), and discrimination and economic insecurity experienced by women workers on digital platforms (Anwar, 2022). Furthermore, discrimination may also occur on the basis of race, ethnicity, social status, and other worker characteristics in platform-based work interactions (Joshi et al., 2024).

The urgency of this study is further heightened by the fact that inequality within labor platforms is not only social but also technological. Algorithmic management systems used by platforms to regulate work distribution, performance evaluation, rating systems, and access to income can create power asymmetries between platforms and workers (Dedema & Rosenbaum, 2024). These inequalities are further exacerbated by disparities in access to technology, data, and information within the gig economy ecosystem (Li et al., 2022). Therefore, issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within labor platforms relate not only to worker diversity but also to technological design, regulation, and platform governance.

The concept of DEI initially developed in the context of formal organizations through policies such as Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), which aims to prevent discrimination and increase employment access for vulnerable groups (Burgess et al., 2009). EEO is oriented toward creating equal employment opportunities for underrepresented groups (Westen, 1985) and is driven by compliance with employment regulations (Sutton et al., 1994). However, in the context of labor platforms, the application of DEI becomes more complex because employment relationships do not always take the form of formal organizational arrangements. Instead, they are mediated by applications, algorithms, rating systems, and interactions between workers and users.

Despite the rapid growth of literature on the gig economy, studies that specifically integrate DEI perspectives into platform labor remain limited. Most previous research has focused on specific issues in isolation, such as gender, algorithms, working conditions, worker status, or social protection. Consequently, few studies have presented a comprehensive synthesis of how DEI is implemented, interpreted, and experienced within platform-based work ecosystems.

Based on this gap, this study contributes by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) that specifically integrates DEI perspectives into the study of labor platforms. Unlike previous research, which tends to address inequality in isolation, this study connects social, technological, and contextual dimensions within a single analytical framework. Thus, this research is expected to provide a more holistic understanding of how DEI principles operate within labor platforms and how digital platforms can support a more equitable, transparent, and inclusive work ecosystem.

Therefore, this study addresses the following three research questions:

RQ1: What forms of inequality related to diversity, equity, and inclusion occur in labor platforms?

RQ2: How do platform mechanisms, such as algorithms, work systems, and social interactions, influence DEI implementation?

RQ3: What contextual factors drive or hinder the implementation of DEI in labor platforms?

Overall, these research questions provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the complexities of DEI within labor platforms. By integrating findings from various studies, this review is expected to uncover the relationships among technological structures, social dynamics, and contextual factors in shaping more inclusive work experiences in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Platform Labor

Platform labor, or platform-based work, refers to a form of work mediated by digital technologies, applications, or websites that connect workers with customers, clients, or task providers. In the literature, platform labor is often associated with terms such as the gig economy, online labor platforms, crowdwork, and app-based work on demand. Koutsimpogiorgos et al. (2020) explain the gig economy through four main dimensions: online mediation, workers' status as independent contractors, paid tasks, and personal services. Thus, platform labor refers not only to online transportation work but also to remote work, such as freelancing, microtasking, design, translation, and other digital services.

Vallas and Schor (2020) view platforms as a new form of governance that is not entirely analogous to markets, organizational hierarchies, or traditional labor networks. Platforms are able to regulate access to work, establish reputation mechanisms, manage transactions, and simultaneously shift some formal responsibilities to workers. As a result, platform labor is often perceived as offering flexibility while also creating new forms of dependence on platform algorithms and rules.

Wood et al. (2019) show that platform workers enjoy several benefits, such as temporal flexibility, task variety, and a degree of autonomy. However, these benefits are often accompanied by algorithmic control, low earnings, social isolation, irregular working hours, and burnout. Duggan et al. (2020) add that algorithmic management plays a crucial role in regulating task allocation, performance evaluation, ranking systems, and employment relationships within platforms. Accordingly, platform labor cannot be understood simply as flexible work; rather, it must be viewed as a digital work system controlled through data, rankings, incentives, and automated mechanisms.

Diversity in Labor Platforms

Diversity in labor platforms refers to the variety of identities, backgrounds, and social positions of workers, including gender, race, ethnicity, social class, migrant status, disability, age, and geographic location. Rosenblat et al. (2017) show that Uber's customer rating system can serve as a channel for discrimination because customer bias can enter the worker evaluation system. Ratings that appear technically neutral can have serious consequences for workers from certain groups, especially when they are used to determine access to jobs, bonuses, or account retention. Thus, diversity in labor platforms concerns not only who can access the platform but also how workers' identities influence the digital evaluations they receive.

Cook et al. (2021) found a gender pay gap of approximately 7% among more than one million rideshare drivers in the United States. This gap was explained by platform experience, work location preferences and constraints, and driving speed preferences. These findings suggest that although platforms appear to apply the same rules to all workers, workers' economic outcomes may still differ based on gender and related social conditions.

Ajaiyeoba (2024) emphasizes that women workers and workers from racial and ethnic minority groups may face higher emotional labor burdens in the gig economy. Dependence on algorithms, customers, and ratings requires workers to manage their expressions, communication, and behavior in order to remain accepted within the platform system. Ticona and Mateescu (2018) also point out that care and domestic work platforms create new forms of visibility for workers, but this visibility can reinforce inequalities based on gender, class, and race.

Jackson (2024) adds that worker motivations in the gig economy may differ based on class, gender, and race. Lower-income workers tend to emphasize economic needs, whereas higher-income workers may interpret platform work as a space for exploration or additional flexibility. Therefore, diversity in platform labor must be analyzed intersectionally, as workers' experiences are shaped not by a single identity but by a combination of gender, class, race, location, and economic dependence on the platform.

Equity in Platform Labor

Equity in platform labor refers to the fair distribution of opportunities, income, protection, and treatment for platform workers. In an ILO report, Berg et al. (2018) show that digital work platforms represent a significant transformation in the world of work; however, working conditions on microtask platforms are often characterized by unstable job availability, high work intensity, and a lack of social protection. Graham et al. (2017)

also find that digital labor can provide income opportunities for workers in developing countries, but it can also result in wage pressure, social isolation, and dependence on the global labor market.

Heeks et al. (2021) developed the Fairwork framework to evaluate platform performance based on five principles of decent work: fair wages, fair working conditions, fair contracts, fair management, and fair representation. This framework is crucial because equity in platform labor requires indicators that can measure whether workers receive fair treatment, rather than merely whether platforms provide employment opportunities. Fairwork also emphasizes that fairness on platforms relates not only to income but also to worker safety, transparency, conflict management, and collective voice.

Anwar and Graham (2020) show that gig workers in Africa face risks such as precarious working conditions, algorithmic surveillance, and limited bargaining power. Although workers develop strategies of resistance and adaptation, structural conditions such as informality, limited employment alternatives, and weak social protection maintain their unequal position. Graham et al. (2020), through the Fairwork Foundation, also emphasize that platform workers often struggle to negotiate wages and working conditions because employment relationships are dispersed, individualized, and digitally mediated.

Thus, equity in platform labor can be understood as an effort to ensure that workers not only have access to platform jobs but also receive decent income, transparent contracts, employment protections, grievance mechanisms, and opportunities for representation. Equity is central to this SLR because many inequalities in platform labor are hidden behind narratives of flexibility and individual entrepreneurship.

Inclusion in Labor Platforms

Inclusion in labor platforms refers to the extent to which workers from diverse backgrounds can participate, be accepted, remain engaged, and feel a sense of belonging within the platform work ecosystem. Inclusion is not merely about providing access to the platform; it also involves ensuring that workers can work safely, are valued, receive support, and are not excluded by system design, policies, or algorithmic.

Van Doorn et al. (2023) show that labor platforms in many cities are closely linked to migrant labor. Platforms can provide economic opportunities for migrants, but at the same time, they can reinforce migrants' structural vulnerabilities through unstable working conditions and limited protections. Therefore, migrant inclusion in labor platforms cannot be measured solely by the number of migrants working on a platform but must also consider their quality of work, security, and access to labor rights.

Harpur and Blanck (2020) discuss the opportunities and challenges of gig work for workers with disabilities. The gig economy can create more flexible employment opportunities for people with disabilities, particularly because work can be performed independently or remotely. However, these benefits can only be realized if platforms address accessibility, inclusive work design, legal protections, and support tailored to workers' needs.

Rai et al. (2024) highlight the tension between exclusion for public safety and inclusion for employment opportunities in transportation platforms. Regulations such as background checks may protect the public, but they can also exclude marginalized groups from employment opportunities. This study suggests that inclusion in labor platforms needs to balance safety, social justice, and economic opportunity.

Meijerink et al. (2024) explain that platforms play a crucial role in talent identification, as they are not merely passive intermediaries but also actors that shape who is deemed worthy, visible, and valuable in the digital labor market. Mousa et al. (2023) also show that individual and collaborative job crafting can increase gig workers' sense of organizational inclusion and career satisfaction. Thus, inclusion in platform labor encompasses accessibility, recognition, social support, equitable platform design, and opportunities for workers to shape their work experiences.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study used the systematic literature review (SLR) method to synthesize the literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the context of platform labor, the gig economy, and digital labor. The SLR method was chosen because it allows researchers to identify, select, evaluate, and synthesize previous research in a systematic, transparent, and replicable manner.

The reporting of the review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines. PRISMA 2020 was used as a reporting guideline because it provides items and sub-items that help authors transparently explain the rationale, methods, selection process, synthesis results, and limitations of a review (Page et al., 2021).

This study was guided by three research questions: (1) what forms of DEI-related inequality occur in labor platforms; (2) how platform mechanisms, such as algorithms, work systems, rating systems, and social interactions, influence DEI implementation; and (3) what contextual factors encourage or hinder DEI implementation in labor platforms.

Review Protocol

Before the article search and selection process, the researchers developed a review protocol that outlined the research objectives, research questions, databases used, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, deduplication procedures, screening procedures, data extraction procedures, and thematic synthesis approach. This protocol was used to maintain consistency in the review process and reduce the potential for subjective bias in study selection.

This study was not prospectively registered on a registration platform such as OSF or PROSPERO. However, all stages of the review were documented using a data extraction worksheet that recorded the analyzed articles, bibliographic information, study contexts, platform types, research methods, DEI focus, key findings, and developed themes. A complete list of the 64 articles analyzed is presented in Appendix A.

Literature Search Period and Databases

The literature search was conducted in stages throughout the preparation of the SLR, with the final update of the article matrix completed on April 14, 2026. The search was conducted using two primary databases: Scopus and Google Scholar. Scopus was used because it provides coverage of reputable academic literature and allows structured searches based on titles, abstracts, and keywords. Google Scholar was used as a complementary database to broaden the search scope, particularly to include relevant articles that may not have been identified through Scopus.

No publication year restriction was applied in the search process. This decision was made because DEI in platform labor is an interdisciplinary field that has developed from several bodies of literature, including the gig economy, digital labor, algorithmic management, employment discrimination, and platform regulation. By not specifying a year limit, this study was able to capture both early conceptual developments and recent relevant empirical studies. Nevertheless, only articles that met the inclusion criteria and had substantive relevance were included in the final analysis.

Literature Search Strategy

The search strategy was developed based on two main keyword groups. The first group related to the context of platform-based work, including platform labor, platform work, the gig economy, digital labor, online labor platforms, crowdwork, ride-hailing, and freelance marketplaces. The second group related to DEI and social inequality, including diversity, equity, inclusion, DEI, inequality, discrimination, algorithmic bias, gender inequality, racial discrimination, migrant workers, and disability inclusion. The Boolean operator OR was used to broaden the scope of terms with similar meanings, while the Boolean operator AND was used to specify the relationship between platform labor and DEI.

Table 1. Final Search Strings and Initial Search Results

Database	Search string final	Initial yield amount
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("platform labor" OR "platform labor" OR "platform work" OR "gig economy" OR "gig work" OR "digital labor" OR "digital labor" OR "online labor platform" OR "crowdwork" OR "ride-hailing" OR "freelance marketplace") AND ("diversity" OR "equity" OR "inclusion" OR "DEI" OR "inequality" OR "discrimination" OR "algorithmic bias" OR "gender inequality" OR "racial discrimination" OR "migrant workers" OR "disability inclusion"))	412

Google Scholar	("platform labor" OR "platform labor" OR "platform work" OR "gig economy" OR "gig work" OR "digital labor" OR "digital labor" OR "online labor platform" OR "crowdwork" OR "ride-hailing" OR "freelance marketplace") AND ("diversity" OR "equity" OR "inclusion" OR "DEI" OR "inequality" OR "discrimination" OR "algorithmic bias" OR "gender inequality" OR "racial discrimination" OR "migrant workers" OR "disability inclusion")	685

A total of 1,097 articles were initially identified through database searches. In addition to these searches, this study used forward citation searching and reference-list screening to identify additional relevant articles. These supplementary search processes yielded eight articles through forward citation searching and seven articles through reference-list screening, resulting in a total of 15 additional articles.

Table 2. Keyword Development for Search Strings

Keywords	Synonym	Related Terms	Variation
Labor platform	Platform-based work, platform work	Gig economy, digital labor, online labor platform	Platform labor, platform worker
Gig workers	Gig workers, freelancers	On-demand workers, freelancers, crowdworkers	Gig workers, gig labor, gig labor
Diversity	Diversity, differences in identity	Gender, race, ethnicity, class, migrants, disability	Workforce diversity, social diversity
Equity	Justice, substantive equality	Fair work, decent work, income inequality	Labor equity, workplace equity
Inclusion	Inclusion, employee	Accessibility,	Inclusive work, digital
	engagement	participation, representation	inclusion
Algorithmic bias	Algorithmic bias	Rating system, algorithmic management	Algorithmic control, automated decision-making
Discrimination	Discrimination	Customer bias, unequal treatment	Platform discrimination
Inequality	Inequality	Gender gap, racial inequality, digital divide	Labor inequality, platform inequality

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before the screening process to ensure that the articles analyzed were directly relevant to the research focus. These criteria were applied consistently throughout the title-and-abstract screening and full-text screening stages.

Table 3. Article Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Types of literature	Scientific journal articles and academic articles that have empirical or theoretical contributions	Systematic review, book chapter, proceedings, non-scientific report, popular article
Accessibility	Full text is accessible	Full text not available
Language	English or Indonesian	Besides English and Indonesian
Topics	Discussing platform labor, gig economy, digital labor, crowdwork, ride-hailing, food delivery platforms, or other forms of platform-based work	Not focused on platform-based work
Focus of study	Discussing DEI, social inequality, discrimination, algorithmic bias, gender, race/ethnicity, migrant workers, disability, social protections, employment status, or worker representation	Only discusses the technical aspects of the platform without the social or employment dimensions.
Study contribution	Have clear empirical findings and/or theoretical contributions	Lacks relevant empirical findings or theoretical contributions
Duplication	Unique articles by title, DOI, author, and year	Duplicate articles from different databases

Deduplication Process

All search results from Scopus and Google Scholar were exported in RIS/BibTeX and spreadsheet formats and then managed using Zotero. The deduplication process was carried out in two stages. First, duplicates were automatically identified based on similarities in DOI, title, author name, and publication year. Second, a manual check was conducted to detect articles with different title spellings or metadata that referred to the same publication. Of the initial 1,097 articles, 287 duplicates were removed. After deduplication, 810 articles entered the title-and-abstract screening stage.

Article Screening and Selection Process

The article selection process consisted of three main stages: title-and-abstract screening, full-text screening, and final inclusion. In the first stage, 810 articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts. Articles that were irrelevant to DEI, did not discuss labor platforms, or were not aligned with the research focus were excluded. This

process resulted in the exclusion of 642 articles, leaving 168 articles for full-text screening.

In the second stage, 168 articles were screened in full based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Of these, 119 articles were excluded because they did not meet the eligibility criteria. The reasons for exclusion were as follows: 52 articles did not focus on DEI, 39 articles did not focus on labor platforms, and 28 articles lacked sufficient empirical findings or theoretical contributions. After full-text screening, 49 articles from the database search results met the criteria. In addition, 15 additional articles were obtained through forward citation searching and reference-list screening. Thus, the final number of articles analyzed in this study was 64.

Reviewer Screening and Conflict Resolution

The initial screening was conducted by the first author and then verified by other members of the author team. Selection decisions were based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. If differences arose in the assessment of article eligibility, they were resolved through team discussion until consensus was reached. This procedure was used to improve the consistency of the selection process and reduce the potential for subjective bias in determining which articles were included in the analysis.

Data Extraction

Data from articles that met the criteria were extracted using a structured extraction sheet. The extracted information included article number, author(s) and year of publication, country or research context, platform type, research method, DEI focus, key findings, and key themes. The extraction sheet was used to ensure the consistent analysis of each article. A complete list of the 64 articles analyzed is presented in Appendix A.

Assessment of Study Quality

Because the articles analyzed included qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, conceptual, and empirical studies, the quality assessment was conducted using a minimum quality screening approach tailored to the objectives of the narrative-integrative SLR. This assessment was not intended to serve as a risk-of-bias meta-analysis, but rather as a mechanism to ensure that the included studies had sufficient relevance, methodological clarity, and contribution.

Table 4. Minimum Quality Assessment Criteria for Included Studies

Quality aspects	Assessment indicators	Decision on use
Relevance of the topic	The study discusses platform labor, gig economy, digital labor, or other forms of platform-based work.	Articles are retained if they are directly relevant to the context of the labor platform.

Relevance of DEI	The study addresses diversity, equity, inclusion, social inequality, discrimination, algorithmic bias, social protection, or worker representation.	Articles are excluded if they do not have a social/DEI dimension.
Clarity of method	The study adequately explains the research design, data sources, analytical approach, or theoretical arguments.	Articles are retained if the method or conceptual contribution can be traced.
Contribution of findings	The study has empirical findings or theoretical contributions that can be mapped to RQ1, RQ2, or RQ3.	Articles are excluded if their contribution is insufficient
Full text access	Full texts can be checked to ensure compliance with the inclusion criteria.	Articles are excluded if the full text is not accessible.

Data Synthesis and Analysis

This study employed descriptive and thematic analyses. Descriptive analysis was used to map the characteristics of the studies, including year of publication, country or research context, platform type, research method, and DEI focus. Meanwhile, thematic analysis was used to identify patterns, similarities, differences, and relationships among the findings of the analyzed articles.

The thematic analysis process involved four steps. First, the researchers read the main findings of each article. Second, the findings were initially coded based on emerging DEI-related issues, such as gender, race/ethnicity, migrant workers, disability, rating systems, algorithms, social protection, employment status, and worker representation. Third, these codes were grouped into broader themes. Fourth, the resulting themes were compared with the research questions to ensure that the synthesis addressed the focus of the study.

The main themes generated included employment equity and working conditions, worker diversity, gender inequality, racial and ethnic discrimination, migrant workers, disability inclusion, social protection, employment status and classification, algorithmic bias and rating systems, worker representation, and platform regulation and governance.

Summary of SLR Method Transparency

Table 5. Summary of SLR method transparency

Transparency aspect	Information
Reporting guidelines	PRISMA 2020

Main database	Scopus and Google Scholar
Final update of the article matrix	May 9, 2026
Publication year limit	There is no publication year limit.
Reasons without year limit	To capture the early to recent developments related to DEI, platform labor, gig economy, digital labor, algorithmic
	management, and digital work inequality.
Language	English and Indonesian
Total Scopus results	412 articles
Total Google Scholar results	685 articles
Total initial articles	1,097 articles
Duplicates removed	287 articles
Articles for title/abstract screening	810 articles
Articles issued on screening	642 articles
Full-text assessed articles	168 articles
Articles are published in full-text	119 articles
Articles from the database that passed	49 articles
Additional articles from forward citation	8 articles
Additional articles from the screening reference list	7 articles
Total final study	64 studies
Deduplication software	Zotero and manual inspection of spreadsheets
Reviewer screening	First author, verified by the author team
Conflict resolution	Writing team consensus discussion
SLR Protocol	Not prospectively registered; procedures are documented in the extraction methods and matrix.
Article attachment	Appendix A: Extraction matrix of 64 articles
PRISMA Attachment	Appendix B: PRISMA 2020 summary checklist

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Article Selection Process

The article selection process for this study was conducted systematically through several stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. These stages were used to ensure that the articles included in the review were directly relevant to the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in labor platforms.

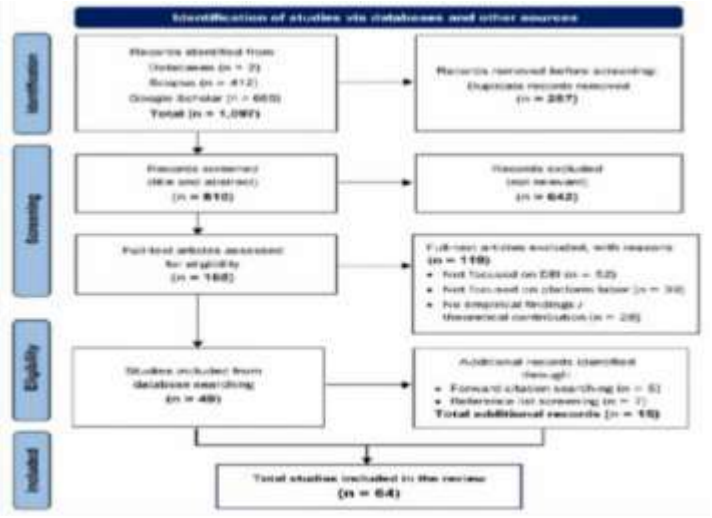

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flowchart in the article selection process

In the identification stage, articles were collected from two academic databases: Scopus and Google Scholar. Scopus yielded 412 articles, while Google Scholar yielded 685 articles. Thus, the initial number of identified articles was 1,097. Before the screening stage, duplicate articles were removed. At this stage, 287 duplicate articles were removed from the list. After deduplication, 810 articles remained for title-and-abstract screening.

During the screening stage, 810 articles were assessed based on the relevance of their titles and abstracts to the research focus. This process resulted in the exclusion of 642 articles because they were inconsistent with the research topic. Articles excluded at this stage generally did not address DEI, were unrelated to labor platforms, or did not align with the focus of the SLR. After the screening stage, 168 articles were deemed suitable for further assessment through full-text review.

The next stage was eligibility assessment, in which the suitability of articles was evaluated based on full-text review. At this stage, 168 articles were thoroughly reviewed to ensure that they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Of these, 119 articles were excluded for specific reasons: 52 articles did not focus on DEI, 39 articles did not focus on labor platforms, and 28 articles lacked sufficient empirical findings or theoretical contributions. After full-text screening, 49 articles from the database search results met the criteria and were included in the review.

In addition to articles obtained from database searches, this study identified articles through supplementary search strategies. Eight additional articles were obtained through forward citation searching, and seven were obtained through reference-list screening. Thus, 15 additional articles were identified and deemed relevant. In the final inclusion stage, 64 articles were included in the SLR. This total consisted of 49 articles from the database searches and 15 additional articles from forward citation searching and reference-list screening. Therefore, a total of 64 articles were analyzed in this systematic literature review.

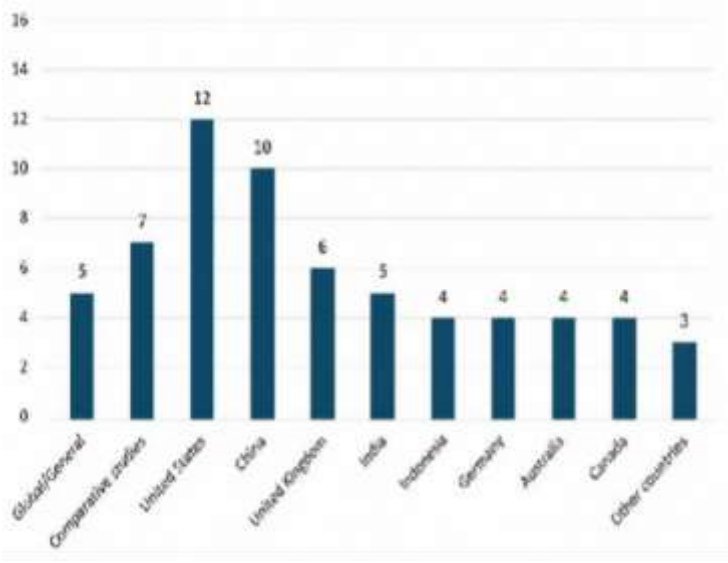

Figure 2. Distribution of studies by country/region

Figure 2 shows the distribution of studies by country or research region. Adding all categories together yields a total of 64 studies analyzed. The largest number of studies came from the United States (12) and China (10). This demonstrates that DEI studies on the labor platform still focus largely on developed countries, but also encompass global contexts and developing countries.

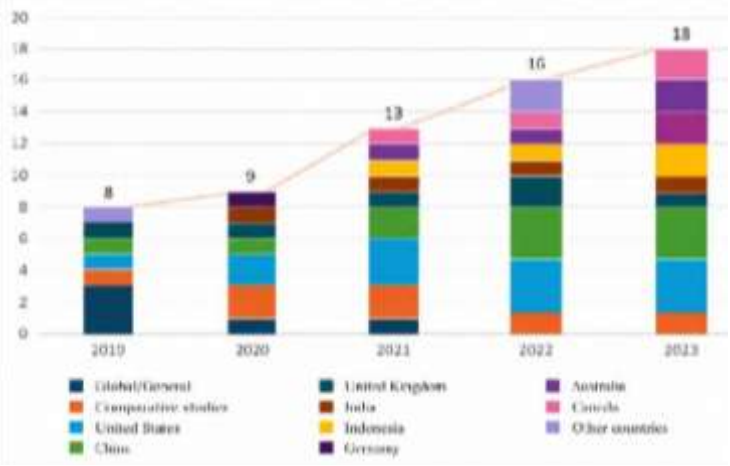

Figure 3. Distribution of studies by country/region and year of publication (n=64)

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the 64 studies by country/region and year of publication. The number of publications increased from 8 studies in 2019 to 9 studies in 2020, 13 studies in 2021, and 16 studies in 2022, reaching a peak of 18 studies in 2023.

This increase demonstrates that studies on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in labor platforms have received growing attention in recent years. The studies are not limited to a single country but cover various contexts, including the United States,

China, the United Kingdom, India, Indonesia, Germany, Australia, and Canada, as well as global/general contexts, comparative studies, and other countries.

The dominance of studies from a few countries indicates that the literature on DEI in labor platforms has largely developed in the context of developed countries, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as in comparative research contexts. However, the emergence of studies from China, India, Indonesia, and other countries suggests that DEI issues in labor platforms are also gaining attention in developing countries and the Global South.

Thus, this figure demonstrates both an increasing publication trend and an expanding geographic scope of research. This finding supports the urgency of the SLR, as DEI issues in labor platforms are increasingly relevant globally but still require more comprehensive cross-national investigation.

Table 6. Research design characteristics of the analyzed studies

Study Method	Category	Number of Studies (n)	Study in %
Types of Studies	Qualitative	29	45.3
	Quantitative	18	28.1
	Mixed methods	7	10.9
	Conceptual/theoretical	10	15.6
Point in Time	One time / cross-sectional	42	65.6
	Some time / longitudinal	10	15.6
	Comparative across time	5	7.8
	Unclear	7	10.9
	Individual / platform worker	32	50.0
	Platform / organization	13	20.3
	Country / regulation	8	12.5
	Certain social groups	7	10.9
	Multi-level	4	6.3
	Platform worker interview	18	28.1
	Platform worker survey	14	21.9
	Platform data / digital data	10	15.6
	Documents, reports, or	9	14.1

	policies		
	Secondary data / public dataset	8	12.5
	Digital observation/ethnography	5	7.8
	Likert Scale	16	25.0
	Nominal category	18	28.1
	Ratio / numeric data	10	15.6
	Thematic analysis without a numerical scale	15	23.4
	Not explained	5	7.8

Table 6 shows the research design characteristics of the 64 studies analyzed in the SLR on diversity, equity, and inclusion in platform labor. Based on study type, the most common approach was qualitative, comprising 29 studies (45.3%), followed by quantitative studies, comprising 18 studies (28.1%). This indicates that DEI studies in platform labor place greater emphasis on an in-depth understanding of workers' experiences, discrimination, inequality, and inclusion practices in platform-based work.

In terms of time frame, most studies used a single-point or cross-sectional design, comprising 42 studies (65.6%). This means that most studies observed the conditions of platform workers at a specific point in time rather than over the long term. Meanwhile, only 10 studies (15.6%) used a longitudinal approach. At the level of analysis, the largest focus was on individual workers or platform workers, comprising 32 studies (50.0%). This suggests that DEI research in platform labor largely addresses workers' lived experiences, such as job access, income, customer treatment, algorithmic bias, and sense of inclusion.

In terms of data sources, most studies used interviews with platform workers, comprising 18 studies (28.1%), followed by surveys, comprising 14 studies (21.9%). Regarding measurement scales, the most dominant category was nominal measurement, accounting for 28.1%, followed by Likert scales at 25.0% and thematic analysis without numerical scales at 23.4%. This indicates that research on this topic relies substantially on qualitative data and social categorizations, such as gender, race, migrant status, platform type, and forms of inequality.

General Findings and Background of the Study

The analysis yielded several key themes related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in labor platforms, namely gender inequality, customer rating-based discrimination, algorithmic bias, income inequality, employment protection, migrant workers, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. The literature shows that labor platforms encompass various forms of digital labor, such as gig work, ride-hailing,

crowdwork, and online labor platforms mediated by applications or other digital platforms (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020; Vallas & Schor, 2020).

In the context of DEI, previous studies have shown that platform-based work is not always neutral. Customer rating systems can serve as channels for discrimination, while platform algorithms can influence job access, income, and worker evaluation (Rosenblat et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Furthermore, research has identified a gender pay gap within ride-hailing platforms, as well as working conditions that do not fully meet decent work principles (Cook et al., 2021; Berg et al., 2018; Heeks et al., 2021).

Based on the SLR article selection process, 64 studies were included in the final analysis. These studies covered various types of platforms, such as ride-hailing apps, food delivery platforms, freelance marketplaces, and online work platforms. Overall, the literature shows that DEI issues in labor platforms are multidimensional and are influenced by technology, algorithms, customer–worker relationships, regulations, and workers' socioeconomic conditions.

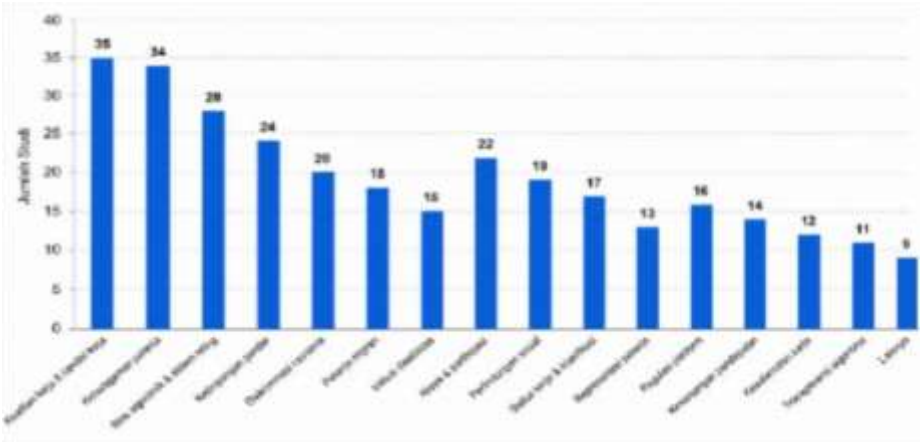

Figure 4. Most researched aspects of DEI

Figure 4 shows the most frequently examined DEI aspects in labor platforms across the 64 studies included in the SLR. The most dominant aspect was employment equity and working conditions, identified in 35 studies, followed by worker diversity in 34 studies and algorithmic bias and rating systems in 28 studies.

These findings indicate that the literature on DEI in labor platforms focuses primarily on issues of workplace equity, worker diversity, and the impact of platform technologies on workers' experiences. Furthermore, aspects such as gender inequality, racial/ethnic discrimination, migrant workers, disability inclusion, access and participation, and social protection are also important areas of study. Overall, this figure demonstrates that DEI issues in labor platforms are multidimensional and encompass the social, technological, economic, and regulatory aspects of digital work.

Main Findings

1. Employment Equity and Working Conditions

The theme of employment equity and working conditions is one of the most prominent issues in the DEI and platform labor literature. Platform labor is often promoted as a form of flexible work, but numerous studies show that this flexibility is accompanied by income uncertainty, long working hours, algorithmic control, and weak employment protections. Wood et al. (2019) find that platform workers enjoy a degree of autonomy but also experience algorithmic control, social isolation, low earnings, and burnout. Berg et al. (2018) also show that workers on digital platforms often face unstable working conditions and a lack of social protection.

Additional literature supports these findings. Lehdonvirta (2018) shows that temporal flexibility on online work platforms is not always fully under workers' control, as it is influenced by job availability and workers' economic dependence on the platform. Goods et al. (2019) also find that job quality on food delivery platforms in Australia is affected by economic insecurity, limited autonomy, and unstable working conditions. Schor et al. (2020) add that platform workers' experiences vary widely, but dependence on platform income can exacerbate workers' vulnerability. Therefore, this theme addresses RQ1 because it demonstrates forms of inequality in working conditions, and it addresses RQ2 because these inequalities are influenced by platform work mechanisms.

2. Workforce Diversity

Labor platforms involve workers from diverse backgrounds, including gender, race, ethnicity, social class, migrant status, disability, age, and geographic location. Koutsimpogiorgos et al. (2020) explain that the gig economy is characterized by digital mediation, workers' status as independent contractors, and task-based work. These characteristics make labor platforms accessible to diverse groups of workers. However, access to platforms does not always result in equal work experiences. Jackson (2024) shows that the motivations and experiences of gig workers may differ based on class, gender, and race.

Sutherland and Jarrahi (2018) explain that digital platforms play a strong mediating role in connecting workers, customers, and markets; therefore, worker diversity is closely linked to platform design and governance. Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019) also show that crowdwork comprises various platforms and forms of work, ranging from microtasks to skill-based professional work. This suggests that platform worker diversity is related not only to social identity but also to the type of work, skill level, and position within the platform ecosystem. This theme addresses RQ1 because it demonstrates both the forms of diversity and the potential inequalities experienced by platform workers.

3. Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a form of inequality frequently identified in the literature. Platforms are often perceived as providing flexibility that benefits women, especially workers with family responsibilities. However, this flexibility does not always translate into equality. Cook et al. (2021) find a gender pay gap among rideshare drivers, influenced by work experience, work location, and work behavior. Ticona and Mateescu

(2018) also show that care and domestic work platforms can reinforce inequalities based on gender, class, and race.

Chan and Wang (2018) demonstrate that online labor markets can contain gender-based hiring bias, although the forms of this bias may differ from those found in traditional labor markets.

Hannák et al. (2017) also identify gender and racial bias in freelance marketplaces such as TaskRabbit and Fiverr, which can influence worker evaluations, ratings, and placement in search results. Thus, gender inequality in labor platforms arises not only from worker behavior but also from how platforms display worker profiles, manage reputations, and match workers with clients. This theme addresses RQ1 because it demonstrates the forms of gender inequality in labor platforms, and it addresses RQ3 because such inequality is influenced by social norms and labor market structures.

4. Racial and Ethnic Discrimination

Racial and ethnic discrimination in labor platforms often emerges through interactions between workers and customers, particularly through ratings, reviews, and digital reputation systems. Rosenblat et al. (2017) show that customer rating systems can introduce social bias into worker evaluations. Ajaiyeoba (2024) also emphasizes that women workers and workers from racial and ethnic minority groups may experience higher emotional labor burdens in the gig economy.

Hannák et al. (2017) corroborate these findings by showing that gender and racial perceptions on freelance platforms correlate with worker evaluations and can affect job opportunities. Curchod et al. (2020) also show that customer evaluations in online work environments can create vulnerability and anxiety for workers because negative reviews can affect their visibility and reputation. Thus, racial and ethnic discrimination occurs not only directly but also through digital reputation systems. This theme addresses RQ1 because it demonstrates forms of discrimination on labor platforms, and it addresses RQ2 because such discrimination can be reinforced by rating mechanisms and customer–worker interactions.

5. Migrant Workers

Migrant workers are a crucial group in DEI discussions on labor platforms. Van Doorn et al. (2023) show that platform work in many cities is closely linked to migrant labor. Platforms can provide economic opportunities for migrants, but they can also reinforce structural vulnerabilities because of constraints related to legal status, language, access to social protection, and bargaining power.

Rani and Furrer (2021) show that digital work platforms in developing countries often offer flexibility but also rely on algorithmic management, which can limit workers' control over their work. This finding is relevant to migrant workers and workers from the Global South, as they often have weaker bargaining positions in the digital labor market. Therefore, this theme addresses RQ1 because it highlights the forms of inequality experienced by migrant workers, as well as RQ3 because migrant workers' experiences are strongly influenced by regulations, legal status, and local labor market conditions.

6. Disability Inclusion

Labor platforms can create employment opportunities for workers with disabilities because they offer flexibility in time, location, and type of work. Harpur and Blanck (2020) explain that gig work can provide opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the workforce, but it also presents challenges related to legal protection, accessibility, and job security.

In a broader context, Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019) suggest that the diversity of crowdwork forms needs to be understood based on the types of tasks, coordination patterns, and working relationships formed within platforms. This is crucial for disability inclusion because not all platforms provide the same levels of accessibility, flexibility, and protection. Therefore, disability inclusion should not be viewed solely in terms of platform access but also in relation to platform design, work support, and protection from discrimination. This theme addresses RQ1 and RQ3 by highlighting barriers to inclusion and policy factors that influence the participation of workers with disabilities.

7. Social Protection

Social protection is a crucial issue because many platform workers are classified as independent contractors. As a result, workers often lack health insurance, employment-related insurance, paid leave, or income protection. Berg et al. (2018) show that digital platform workers often face unstable incomes and a lack of social protection. Heeks et al. (2021), through the Fairwork framework, emphasize the importance of five principles of decent work: fair wages, fair working conditions, fair contracts, fair management, and fair representation.

Rani and Furrer (2021) show that platform workers in developing countries face forms of work flexibility that are often combined with algorithmic control and limited protections. Goods et al. (2019) also show that platform-based food delivery workers face economic insecurity because of contractor-based employment relationships and task-based payments. This theme addresses RQ3 because social protection is strongly influenced by platform regulations and policies.

8. Employment Status and Classification

Employment status and worker classification are important themes because many platform workers occupy an ambiguous position between self-employment and platform-controlled employment. Vallas and Schor (2020) explain that platforms create new forms of labor governance that differ from markets and traditional organizations, yet retain significant power to regulate workers. This ambiguity in employment status affects workers' access to social protection, employment rights, and collective representation.

Schor et al. (2020) show that workers' experiences in the platform economy are significantly influenced by their level of dependence on platform income. Veen et al. (2020) also show that food delivery platforms exert strong control over work processes, even though workers are classified as independent contractors. Hall and Krueger (2018) show that platform work is often positioned as flexible, but this flexible status still raises questions about workers' rights and protections. This theme addresses RQ2 because

worker classification is part of platform work-system mechanisms, and it addresses RQ3 because it is influenced by labor regulations.

CONCLUSION

This SLR demonstrates that DEI in labor platforms is a complex and multidimensional issue. The analysis of 64 studies shows that labor platforms can expand access to work and provide flexibility, but they can also create inequalities, such as rating-based discrimination, algorithmic bias, gender inequality, migrant worker vulnerability, barriers for workers with disabilities, and weak social protection. These findings answer the three research questions. First, DEI-related inequalities manifest in gender, race/ethnicity, migration, disability, income, and working conditions. Second, algorithms, rating systems, task allocation, and customer–worker interactions can influence DEI implementation. Third, regulation, social protection, technology access, and worker representation are important factors that promote or hinder DEI. Therefore, greater algorithmic transparency, stronger employment protection, and more inclusive platform governance are needed.

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