DECODE AND DEFY
BRIEFING PAPER

Initiatives for Workers Solidarity in Asia Pacific

Driving Towards Change

Positioning Indonesian Riders in the Workers' Movement in Asia Pacific

This briefing paper is an outcome of IWSAP's webinar held in April 2026 entitled, "Driving Towards Change: Positioning Indonesian Riders in the Workers' Movement in Asia Pacific." The webinar is part of the Decode and Defy webinar series which aims to deepen understanding of the situation of Indonesian platform workers, specifically online riders, in the context of heightened exploitation by corporations, as well as to discuss how they are resisting unjust practices. The webinar gathered other groups from the Philippines and Thailand who shared their own situations and efforts to fight unequal economic structures.

The webinar was led by Sujak Supriyadi of SEPETA Indonesia, Prapaporn Phonin of Central Region Rider Association in Thailand, and Ka Mody Floranda of PISTON Philippines. The webinar was hosted by Joanne Cesario of Kilusang Mayo Uno.

Background

Like many Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia is saturated with jobs concentrated in the gig economy. Data shows that there are around 430,000 to 4,000,000 gig workers[1] in Indonesia as of 2025, many of whom are employed in ride-hailing and delivery services for Grab and Gojek. A bulk of these platform workers are supporting families, including women and youth.

Despite the flexibility brought by the modern labor mechanisms implemented by gig work companies, platform workers are in concerning conditions of exploitation. Research by SEPETA, a union of platform workers in the ride-hailing and delivery sector in Indonesia, exposed how thousands of riders only earn Rp 100,000 (roughly USD 6) for working 8 hours a day, an amount that can purchase only a couple kilos of rice.

Algorithmic management[2] makes the lives of riders more difficult because the metrics used by applications lack transparency and performance ratings do not accurately reflect the ground realities of workers. Because of this, many are only able to take home smaller earnings and are also at risk of account suspensions that put their livelihoods at risk.

Platform workers are also excluded from Indonesia's labor laws, leaving them without access to benefits and social protection. Additionally, platform workers do not enjoy the right to organize and hold protests to demand changes in the world of work.

[1] International Trade Union Confederation, 'Long silenced, gig workers in Indonesia are organising and fighting for their rights,' ITUC-CSI, March 19, 2025, https://www.ituc-csi.org/long-silenced-gig-workers-in

[2] Li, Feifei, Xiaohui Zhan, and Yun Liu, 'The double-edged sword effect of algorithmic management on work engagement of platform workers: the roles of appraisals and resources,' Frontiers in Psychology 16, June 25, 2025, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1522088

A concerning trend in the increasing prominence of gig work in Indonesia is the involvement of the state officials in exploiting their own workers. SEPETA found out, for example, that Nadiem Makarim – the former minister of education, culture, research, and technology – was the founder of Gojek, one of Indonesia's largest ride-hailing and delivery platforms. Many politicians are also shareholders in Gojek. The merging of corporate and political interests is a reflection of the continuing monopolization of power by big businesses and political elites. Meanwhile, workers continue to be sidelined despite making the largest contribution in profit gains.

Just like in Indonesia, platform workers in Thailand and the Philippines experience similar conditions. Online riders in both countries are economically insecure and face daily exposure to dangerous situations.

Confronted with such realities, there is an obvious need to organize workers and build solidarity within Indonesia and other countries where platform workers experience the same things. Grassroots-focused education and actions are crucial in building the strength and political power of workers. With a more defined unity among workers, they will be able to engage more in asserting their demands for better treatment and compensation, as well as share in bolstering the workers' movement in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and in the whole Asia Pacific region.

Situation of Riders across the Asia Pacific Region

During the webinar, speakers from Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand highlighted a consistent reality of platform workers facing difficult economic issues with minimal state protections or institutional support.

In Indonesia, SEPETA represents a workforce of approximately seven million online drivers across ride-hailing, goods delivery and food delivery services, a significant part of Indonesia's transportation sector. Major platforms operating in Indonesia include Gojek, Grab, Shopee, Lalamove, inDrive, Maxim, and the newer Green GSM, which focuses on online taxi services. The dominant platforms, Grab and Gojek, are backed by major international investors. Grab draws investment from Chinese companies, BlackRock and Tiger Global, and various multinational corporations. Indonesia's Lippo Group is also embedded through its involvement in Ovo, Grab's digital payments platform. Meanwhile Gojek, which merged with Tokopedia to form GoTo in 2021, is backed by Alibaba, SoftBank, Google, Temasek, and ByteDance.

Despite this large concentration of capital, drivers face shrinking incomes and rising operational costs. Independent research by IDEAS across 57 cities and regencies, involving approximately 1,118 drivers, confirmed widespread economic hardship. A pressing concern is the heavy reliance of many drivers on loans, which they call *pinjol*, just to meet household needs, a financial vulnerability that remains unaddressed by the state.

In the Philippines, approximately 120,000 riders are currently within reach of organizing efforts, working under platforms such as Grab and other ride-hailing and delivery apps. According to the presentation of PISTON, a national federation of public transport associations in the Philippines, platform companies take approximately 25% of each transaction completed by riders, leaving riders with very little take-home income after fuel and other operational costs are deducted. Rising fuel prices under the current administration have worsened conditions considerably, with small subsidies insufficient to meet the real needs of riders. Riders are also largely unrecognized as formal public transport workers, meaning they receive no adequate compensation or support when accidents occur.

In Thailand, riders face declining incomes alongside increasing workload, which has negatively affected their health. Organizing groups, such as the Central Region Riders Association have highlighted how platform workers bear the full costs and risks of their work, with social security systems and labor protections still failing to cover them. Thai rider groups have also drawn attention to the diversity within their membership, including LGBTQIA+ riders who face additional layers of social discrimination on top of economic precarity.

How Riders are Organizing and Building Political Power

Despite these conditions, platform workers across all three countries have been building collective political power through a range of strategies.

SEPETA in Indonesia began organizing in 2022 and was officially registered as a labor union on January 24, 2024, becoming a recognized organization under Indonesian law .Registration took nearly a year due to repeated rejections stemming from platform workers' legal classification as "partners" rather than employees.

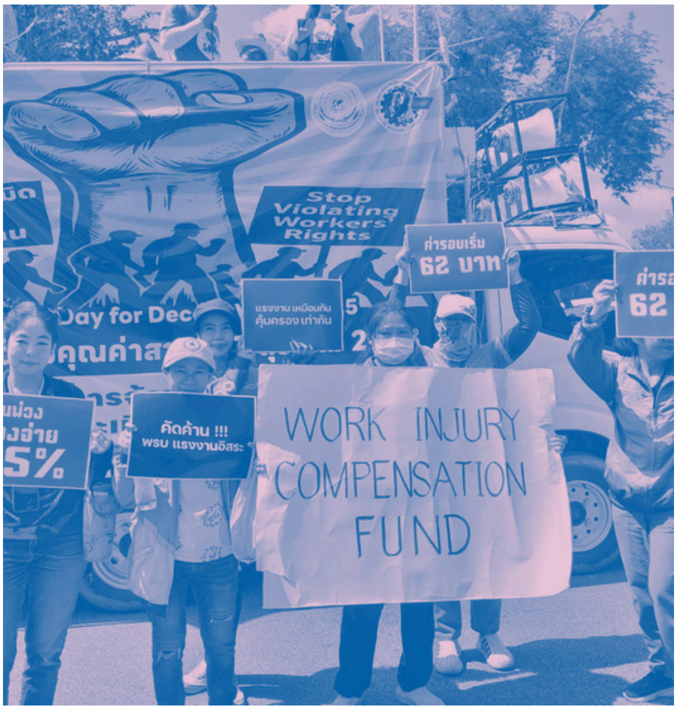
SEPETA eventually succeeded by invoking provisions under Indonesian Law No. 21 of 2000, which permits unions to form outside of a single company, and by applying sustained pressure on the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM). However, the right to collective bargaining does not yet exist in practice, as no clear regulations governing it have been established.

SEPETA organizes on a territorial basis rather than a company-by-company basis, recognizing that drivers often live in one area but work across multiple cities. The union has established organizing committees in Tangerang City, South Tangerang and Tangerang Regency, with expansion into Jakarta underway. Each committee typically has 10 to 13 organizers. The long-term goal is to build a labor union at each company. Key demands include capping platform commission fees at 10%, abolishing app-based discount or "savings" schemes that reduce driver income, and securing formal recognition of platform workers as employees entitled to social protection.

Beyond the International Labor Organization (ILO) process, SEPETA has been pushing the national platform worker bill (PE Poleknas), which remains under deliberation in the House of Representatives (DPR), and previously campaigned for recognition under presidential regulation. SEPETA continues to work with national labor coalitions on a new labor law expected later this year.

One of SEPETA's notable achievements has been its multi-year campaign for holiday bonuses, such as during Eid. In 2026, the campaign secured bonus amounts ranging from IDR 150,000 to IDR 900,000, with the number of recipients growing from around 350,000 drivers in 2025 to approximately 900,000 in 2026, though questions remain about the transparency of how these payments are determined and distributed.

SEPETA has also made women's leadership a deliberate organizational priority. Women hold leadership positions at both the central and regional levels and the South Tangerang regional committee is chaired by a woman. The union has also established a women's wing that holds monthly discussions on women's rights and the dual burdens faced by female riders, and what can be done to support them in balancing their responsibilities.



SEPETA combines workplace organizing with public campaigns, particularly on social media, and provides social services such as administrative assistance and support for drivers involved in accidents, efforts that also help in recruiting new members. The union is also tracking global developments with local implications. For example, rising global oil prices are expected to increase fuel costs in Indonesia, directly increasing drivers' operational costs, and SEPETA has been preparing a campaign in response.

In the Philippines, riders have been building organizations and alliances to collectively assert their rights, demand fair compensation and oppose high commission rates. Broad coalitions with other transport groups and alliances in the Philippines have been built to push back against rising fuel prices and the exploitative practices of platform companies.
In Thailand, rider groups have expanded into regional networks and have engaged directly with government agencies, submitting policy proposals that call for worker recognition, access to social security, health and safety protections, and transparency in algorithmic management. Mutual aid networks have also been developed, with riders supporting one another during accidents and crises, filling gaps left by absent state protections.

Because forming a union is not legally permitted in Thailand, rider groups register as associations instead. The organizing process involves identifying riders with shared problems and engaging them in discussion. Community-building activities including sports, meet-ups and group gatherings, have served as important spaces for building the trust essential for strengthening collective organizing. Rider groups have also collaborated with health organizations to build knowledge around occupational safety, safe driving practices, and basic health, a gap that advocates argue should be the responsibility of the state and platform companies, not workers themselves.

Thai organizers stress that legal recognition, while important, is not the only measure of collective power. A strong membership base can shift policy without formal status, and collaboration with major trade unions has provided additional leverage in negotiations with government and in international forums such as the ILO.

Groups working with LGBTQIA+ riders have prioritized creating safe spaces and pushing for gender equality to be included in policy demands, grounded in the recognition that platform workers face complex vulnerabilities rooted in both their informal employment status and the social discrimination many of them experience. Organizing in this context, Thai groups argue, must address not only economic concerns but broader social justice issues as well.

Key Demands

Across Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, the key demands of platform workers include:

- Formal recognition of riders as workers rather than partners or contractors
- Access to social security and health and safety protections
- Transparency in how algorithmic systems determine income and account status
- Reduction of platform commission fees
- The right to organize and bargain collectively

Building regional and international solidarity

SEPETA has been engaging with national labor coalitions on new legislation expected to address platform work. The anticipated International Labor Organization (ILO) convention on decent work in the platform economy (ILO C193)[3], which has been recently recognized by member states at the 114th Session of the International Labor Conference (ILC), was a significant moment, as it formally defined the platform work profession and laid the groundwork for implementing protections in countries like Indonesia where the legal framework remains underdeveloped. Internally, SEPETA hopes to develop its campaign strategy with a particular focus on Grab as a key issue across Southeast Asia for building regional alliances and strengthening solidarity.

A short intervention from the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) during the webinar pointed to countries such as Spain, which has begun extending protections to platform workers, as models that organizing groups in Southeast Asia can reference when pushing for domestic legislative change.

The struggle of riders in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand is part of a broader regional and global movement of platform workers resisting structural exploitation. Through sustained organizing, international solidarity, and targeted advocacy, workers are pushing for a more just and protected future for all those who drive the gig economy forward.

[3] International Labour Organization, 'Convention concerning decent work in the platform economy, 2026 (No. 193),' ILO, June 15, 2026, https://www.ilo.org/resource/record-decisions/convention-concerning-decent-work-platform-economy-2026