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From Solidarity to Strategy: African Trade Unions Step Up Organising for Platform Workers Ahead of ILC 114

Nairobi meetings signal a turning point for cross-border organising and a unified African voice

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In late April 2026, Nairobi became a critical hub for Africa's labour movement as trade unions, rider representatives, and organisers gathered for two back-to-back regional meetings shaping the continent's strategy on platform work.

The Africa Riders Network (ARN) meeting (28 April) and the ITUC-Africa Regional Meeting on the Roadmap to the 114th International Labour Conference (29–30 April) marked a decisive shift—from dialogue to coordinated action—on one of the fastest-growing and most precarious sectors of work in Africa.

Supported by FES TUCC, these meetings reinforced a shared message; organising platform workers is no longer optional—it is central to the future of the trade union movement.

Platform Work: Growth Without Protection

Across both meetings, participants highlighted the rapid expansion of platform work across transport, delivery, and digital services—driven largely by young and increasingly educated workers.

Yet this growth has come with deep structural challenges:

- ❖ Informal, app-controlled work arrangements
- ❖ Long working hours and unstable incomes
- ❖ Lack of social protection (health insurance, pensions, paid leave)
- ❖ Algorithmic control over access to work and earnings
- ❖ Widespread worker misclassification

At the ARN meeting, riders described working 10–12 hour days, often providing their own motorcycles, fuel, and smartphones, while facing constant risks of deactivation and income loss.

Women workers face even greater barriers, including safety risks, harassment, and restricted working hours, pointing to the urgent need for gender-responsive protections.

From Fragmentation to Collective Power

A central theme emerging from Nairobi was the fragmentation of platform workers—and the urgent need to overcome it.

Despite different national contexts, experiences from Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, Tanzania, and South Africa revealed strikingly similar challenges:

- ❖ Weak or absent legal frameworks
- ❖ Limited bargaining power
- ❖ Harassment from authorities
- ❖ Lack of recognition as workers

These shared realities are now driving a shift towards cross-border organising.

The ARN meeting explicitly focused on moving: “from solidarity-building to concrete cross-border organising”

Participants agreed that multinational platform companies require regional responses, not isolated national struggles.

Building an African Strategy Ahead of Geneva

The ITUC-Africa meeting built on these grassroots realities to define a coordinated continental strategy ahead of the 114th International Labour Conference (ILC).

The meeting aimed to:

- ❖ Consolidate a unified African trade union position
- ❖ Strengthen organising and advocacy strategies
- ❖ Advance legal and policy reforms
- ❖ Operationalise the African Platform Workers Support Network (APW-SupNet)

A key message was clear:

Africa must speak with one voice in Geneva. With the ILO process already set to adopt a Convention and Recommendation on platform work, the focus is now on ensuring these instruments deliver real protections for workers.

Organising Works: Lessons from the Ground

Trade unions and worker organisations shared practical organising strategies that are already making an impact:

- ❖ Formation of rider unions and associations
- ❖ Use of WhatsApp and digital tools for mobilisation
- ❖ Social media campaigns to pressure companies
- ❖ Worker education and rights awareness
- ❖ Partnerships with civil society and national unions

These approaches are helping to build worker identity and collective power in a sector deliberately designed to fragment workers.

However, participants emphasised that organising remains a long-term process, requiring sustained effort, coordination, and resources.

Priority Demands: Towards Decent Work in the Platform Economy

Both meetings converged on a set of key demands that will shape African engagement at the ILC:

- ❖ Recognition of platform workers as workers
- ❖ Fair and transparent contracts, including protection from arbitrary deactivation
- ❖ Access to social protection (health insurance, pensions, paid leave)
- ❖ Occupational safety and health protections
- ❖ Gender-sensitive measures addressing safety and discrimination
- ❖ Data transparency and algorithmic accountability

Importantly, workers are demanding recognition of their “tools of trade” as they bear the full cost of vehicles, equipment, and connectivity.

Revitalising Trade Unions Through New Sectors

The discussions also placed platform work within a broader challenge: declining trade union density across Africa. With up to 80% of workers in the informal economy, platform work represents both:

- ❖ A major organising challenge
- ❖ A strategic opportunity to revitalise unions

As one key takeaway highlighted, organising platform workers is essential to rebuilding worker power on the continent.

From Networks to Structures: The Role of APW-SupNet

A major outcome of the ITUC-Africa meeting was the advancement of the African Platform Workers Support Network (APW-SupNet). The network aims to:

- ❖ Strengthen worker representation and leadership
- ❖ Coordinate advocacy and policy engagement
- ❖ Facilitate research and data sharing
- ❖ Build continental solidarity

Together with the ARN, this signals a move towards structured, sustained, and coordinated organising at the African level.

The Road Ahead: From Nairobi to Geneva—and Beyond

The Nairobi meetings made clear that the upcoming ILC is a historic opportunity.

Immediate priorities include:

- ❖ Intensifying national-level lobbying
- ❖ Aligning positions with governments and employers
- ❖ Strengthening organising at grassroots level
- ❖ Coordinating regional advocacy efforts

But participants were equally clear: the real work begins after Geneva. Winning international standards is only the first step—implementation at national level will determine whether platform workers in Africa see real improvements in their lives.

Conclusion

The Nairobi meetings marked a turning point.

African trade unions and platform workers are no longer approaching the platform economy as a fragmented, national issue but as a continental struggle requiring collective power, shared strategy, and sustained organising.

With momentum building from the ground up, Africa is positioning itself not just to participate in global negotiations but to shape the future of work in the platform economy.