The Workers' Observatory

Organising a Worker-Led Survey

How to use Worker Data Science to Challenge Gig Economy Platforms.



Introduction

Platform companies like Deliveroo and Uber are making growing profits. Meanwhile, workers' rates are lower than they ever have been. To have any hope of earning the income we need, we are forced by algorithms to work too many hours at too unsafe a pace. We know this all too well.

When politicians and the public know the facts and figures about our work, they must act. Data-driven platform companies gather the information that the company needs to know to make its profits, but no company or government has used its power to reveal the facts and figures about our work. To demonstrate and prove these realities, we must undertake the research ourselves.

These pages contain a set of steps and a case-study to guide such research. Food-delivery workers in Edinburgh have demonstrated that it is possible in a matter of weeks for a group of fellow workers, who did not know each other before, to illuminate the stealing of tips, the rates of pay, the risk of injury and theft, and the regime of exploitation-by-algorithm.

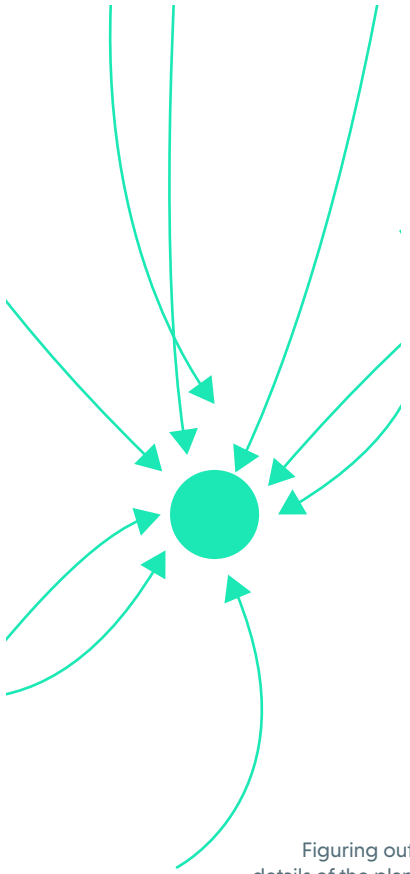
Any workers looking to experiment with these methods are welcome to contact us at any time. You can email us at info@workersobservatory.org

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Step 1: Group Assembly

Before you start speaking to workers on the streets, work out key dates and details of your research project, and get them into an easy-to-read format.



Figuring out details of the plan and taking to the streets armed with a flyer are the seeds of success!

What is it all about?
Explain a bit about the research project, what it's exploring, and why it matters to probe working conditions.

What's going to make riders feel it's worthwhile to get involved?
It might be anger or frustration at their pay rates, curiosity about the project, keenness to meet other riders, or the prospect of guaranteed compensation for their time away from work.

Where and when are you meeting?
Booking somewhere central and easily accessible is essential, at a time when work isn't too busy. These could be a day-long session, but a couple of hours from 2-4pm could work fine too: people can join the session, get a cup of tea and charge their batteries before the evening shift.

Produce a simple flyer setting out some of the key dates and details. It does not need to involve as much as this one that we produced. The main thing is a space and time to meet.



Step 2: Building Trust With Fellow Riders

The next stage is to get fellow riders on board. It all starts by earning trust.

When you invite riders to join the project, it's important that they see you as a fellow worker. Anybody on the street could come up and ask them to get involved in something. But you are a rider like them.

➔ **A simple question** can open the communication – 'How's the day going? Has it been busy?' – maybe followed by a fist bump or handshake. You might say you're a rider and are keen to be in touch with other riders. Maybe they will invite you into a WhatsApp group. Or maybe they are not part of any group, and you can then explain you're involved in a group in the city.

➔ It might be good to give some reasons **why it's good to be part of a group:** to be in touch, share advice, keep each other posted about road closures, police or gangs, or other trouble.

Or you can jump right in and explain that a group of riders is organising training, research and a survey to understand the super low rates, other issues, and things happening in the city.

➔ Then, **swap numbers** if they're willing, give them a flyer about the project with a QR code to join the WhatsApp, Let them know that if they have any issues, they can message any time.

➔ Finally, ask them to be part of the project and check they're **happy to be contacted about it.**

If they are, contact them the following day or at an agreed time the next week, remind them about the meeting, and make it clear that they are welcome to bring anyone else along too.

➔ **Keep in touch** with them up until the date of the meeting – hopefully you'll see them there!



Step 3: Mapping Issues

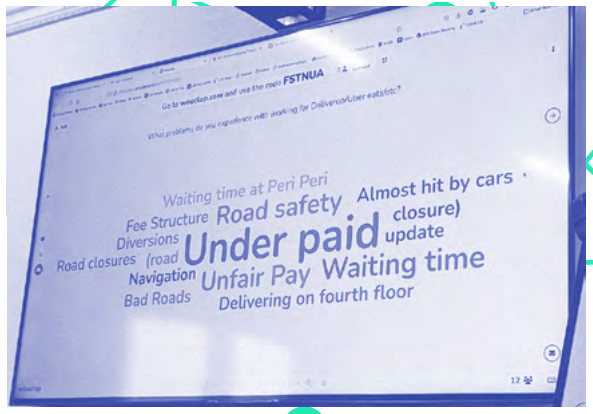
It's meeting time, and riders have arrived. The first step (after some coffee, welcomes, introductions, and housekeeping,) is to bring people's common issues to the table.



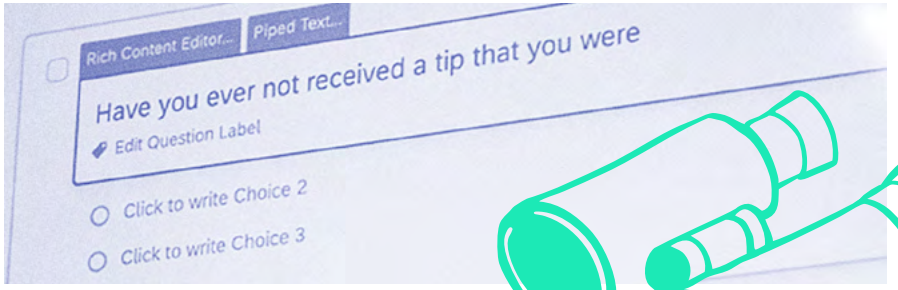
Mapping out issues affecting everyone is a very effective way of building unity of purpose between people who've never met each other.

You can start with an **open discussion** about what people think the problems are with their conditions of work. Through that process you will be able to identify some big themes.

Then, **capture the issues.** Have participants sit at tables in groups with people they don't know, and ask them to write down issues that annoy or affect them. Then ask them to share their issues with interactive visual tools such as in wooclap.* Common issues will emerge, in something like this word cloud.



*you can sign up to wooclap at wooclap.com and make an interactive word cloud for free.



Step 4: Data Exercises

With common issues identified and mapped, before you make your survey, it can be useful to collectively demonstrate the challenge of getting accurate data about conditions and problems.

Here are two exercises you can do that should take about 20 or 30 minutes each:

Fare Monitoring

➔ Get all riders in the room to log onto their app (e.g. Deliveroo) at the same time and look for a ride, then **enter the fares** that are offered, on a live poll (you can use wooclap again).

➔ This makes it possible for everyone to **see the range** of fares you can get even though you are sitting in the same room and looking for rides at the same time.

➔ In our workshop, we also entered the time that each worker thought it would take to complete the ride they were being offered. We could see that although people were being offered different fares or shorter or longer rides, rates were **extremely unpredictable,** and low overall.

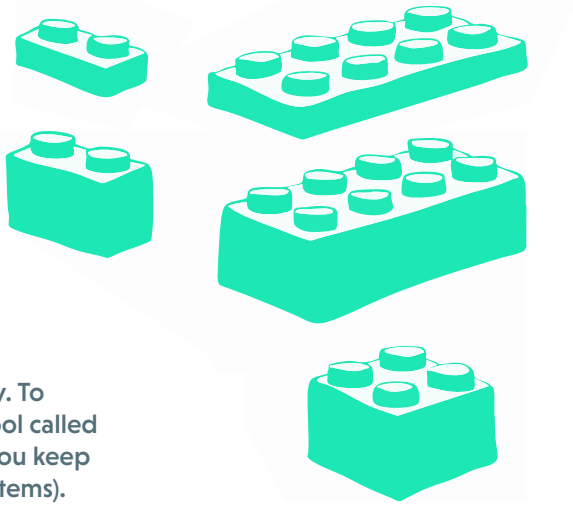
Data Mapping

➔ In groups, think about the **data gathered and generated in the process of work**, from the first time you signed up and signed on, through what happens when you work, to the end of your work for the platform.

➔ On flipchart paper, **draw out what data is gathered by the platform,** where it goes, who is involved in processing it, and what data or analysis would be interesting or useful for you and other riders to know.

➔ Then **draw out the data that you gather as a worker,** how you use it, who you share it with, and what kind of analysis would be interesting or useful. Finish with a discussion about what questions you would like data to answer, and what would be clearer if lots of workers shared data. Don't forget to take a photo of the data maps.

Step 5: Survey Creation



The next stage is to design your survey. To create a digital survey you can use a tool called Qualtrics. It is easy to use, and free if you keep the survey short (under 50 questions/items).

1 **First generate the survey questions.** Separate people into groups, as many as you have identified key themes during the issue mapping (we ended up with 5 groups of around 4 people each). Give each group a theme, and instruct each group to write down three survey questions relating to this theme. Themes will depend on what you identified in step 3: rates and pay, health and safety, etc.

2 Then gather in all the sets of three questions and give each set of three to a different group. Ask them to identify the question that they think is most important and **rewrite it as clearly as possible.** They can also identify other important questions, alter them, add new ones – but avoid going beyond three questions.

3 As you are designing the questions, the conversation will flow and will probably become more specific. More specific questions are a strength. Instead of general questions like 'is this work fair?', it is better to have practical questions that relate to specific experiences (e.g. accidents while cycling, tips disappearing, bike theft). **Be specific** about the frequency, and the timeframe, that you are asking about in the question (e.g. 'in the last 6 months, have you been in an accident – been knocked off your bike or worse – while on a food delivery ride?').

4 You should end up with no more than 15 questions. Once you have a longlist, you need to discuss them as a group and make some tough decisions about what should be included or not. Aim to get it down to **12 questions.** Remember, riders need to be able to complete it on the go.

5 Think about the questions in terms of the information they might gather. Some results might be interesting but have no implications for action. Some might be too similar to other questions. Some might be too complicated to provide quick answers. What are the most important?

6 You then need to make some decisions about the order in which you will put the questions together. Do you want to organise it by themes, or put the most important question first?

7 At the end of the survey, you will need to include **questions about survey participants' contact details** (email / phone numbers) and you may want to add questions on basic demographic details (e.g. age, gender, place of birth, language spoken).

8 You will also need to include **a final question on consent,** to make sure that workers are ok with the data being collected for the purpose of organising and research.

9 Finally, once you think the survey is ready, you need to **test the survey out together** with everyone in the room. That way, everyone can check that all the questions and options for answering them make sense. If you were on the street, would this be straightforward to answer?

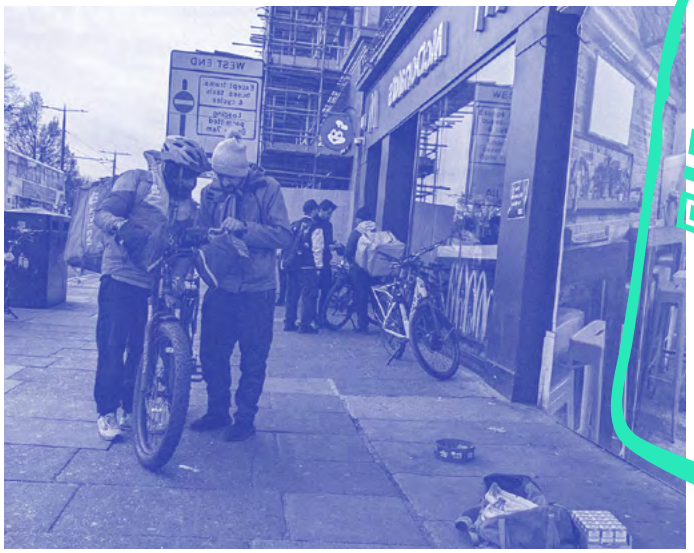
If you are carrying out this process, let us know and we can provide some more guidance.

Step 6: Data Collection

Street Work

➔ Once you have your survey ready and tested, it is time to collect data through **distributing it to other riders.** Produce a QR code that links directly to the online survey that you have created (you can do that with Qualtrics directly). The QR code can be printed directly on flyers or you can have it ready on your phone so other workers can easily scan it.

➔ You can do this data collection work either during your own individual working sessions – using similar methods to those set out in the 'Building Trust' section – or through specific distribution sessions.





Distribution sessions

1 Arrange a time when you will **go out as a group** to a spot in the city where lots of riders are likely to be working, like outside a McDonalds in the centre of the city, or a place where you know they will be waiting for a while, like an e-bike shop. Maybe take some juice and snacks. It is worth wearing your own riding gear to make it clear to other riders that you are a fellow worker. This helps to break the initial barrier when you start to talk and explain what you are doing.

A good time to go is between peak times, such as around midday on a busy weekend day, or an hour before the busy evening session, when riders will be out and about but not too busy to talk.

2 As riders come and go, ask if you can have a quick chat with them. You can talk to them about the project and share a link to the survey. It is good to take some time to **explain why the survey and the data are important:** they are helping us to understand what is going on in the city, and to drive attention towards the issues we have. You can point to the most common issues, such as extremely low rates or long shifts, as problems that all riders are suffering. If they have time, they might **fill it out then and there.**

3 This is not just about gathering data. It is a means of **building community**, because as you talk about the survey, you might also have a conversation about working conditions. Through the survey you are also collecting people's details and permission to be in contact. You can also ask them to join your own WhatsApp group at the same time, if you have one.

4 Go for a coffee together after the session and **talk through what went well** and what you can do better next time.

Step 7: Results Analysis

Once you have survey responses, the next stage is data analysis. Qualtrics allows you to see the results in an easy-to-read format.

Qualtrics survey data

➔ It can be good to have **a first look at the raw data** together, right after you have designed and tested it with workers. You get a glimpse of answers for questions and problems you have been discussing together – for instance we looked right away at which restaurants workers present in the room had said treated riders badly, and it was quite fun to see immediately in the data that almost everyone ze-roed-in on the same couple of offending restaurants.

➔ **Much of what is revealed will already be known by people.** That is good news. This process is about illuminating and validating what we already know to be the reality. It gives us confidence that the intui-tions we have about the work we do are not specific to us but apply widely to most workers.

➔ Once you have collected data (give it a couple weeks from when you went out with the survey to talk to other riders and help them fill it out), you can analyse it a bit more. You can do this directly in Qualtrics: it automatically produces simple statistics and plots based on the data you collected (see plot on page 11). Then arrange another meeting or work-shop where you will discuss the survey results. The important thing at this stage is to **come together and analyse the results together.**

➔ This is when you use the data that you've col-lected to get a shared awareness of the scale and the problems that your data identifies or helps you identify. It's the moment you see personal, individual problems, as being **part of collective problems** that you can do something to address.

➔ One thing to keep in mind is that **data is not useful or powerful on its own**. It can become useful if it helps us to identify our common problems as groups of workers, and map and prioritise issues that we can fight against. In that sense, this kind of data can help us make decisions as a group and it can give us arguments if we need to convince other people (e.g. other riders, the media, policymakers) that the problems we are faced with are really serious and widespread. In other words, data or data analysis is useful if we **make it a part of organising and cam-paigning together,** but otherwise it is just toothless knowledge – it won't achieve anything by itself.

How many responses?

➔ In general, it is good to get **at least 50 people** to participate in the survey so that you have enough data to draw sound conclusions. More data (e.g. over 100 participants) will further strengthen your survey and the statistical power of your analysis but it is a trade-off. Running a large survey requires a lot of effort and, beyond a certain point, more participants does not bring new or better information. More data is not always much better.

➔ Some of it depends on your environment. In a small town, getting 50 participants might already be hard work. In a city, this might be much more manageable. It is also good to think about who your survey has successfully involved and whether some groups might be more involved than others.

➔ Often surveys will **spread through social groups,** such as groups of people with particular languages or ethnicity. Perhaps your respondents are mostly Hindi or Spanish speakers, while other groups did not participate. That is not a problem as such, but it may be worth mentioning when you write out results that you think your data better represents some groups than others.

➔ Remember – there is a difference between the number you aim for and the number that is enough. You can **set an ambitious target but don't worry if you end up with a smaller sample** than you hoped. It is still generating important data and, more impor-tantly, it is involving workers in the collective project to discuss and expose conditions.



Graphic automatically produced by Qualtrics



Step 8: Data Visualisation

Data analysis is a moment you can make decisions together about what is most important and should be focused on. You may decide to do further analysis to answer important questions or to lay out the data in ways that are clear to everyone.

It is easier to understand a simple plot than a list of data. Data visualisation can be useful to turn data into something that **helps you explain the problems you face** and to convince other peo-ple about the issues.

For this you can decide to use more technical tools than Qual-trics, for instance R or Python. This is not necessary, but it gives you more options as to the kind of analysis you can run and the kind of data visualisation (e.g. plots, tables) that you can create to share your results. So, if some of you have experience or interest in data science tools like R or Python, you can decide to use those to visualise the data that you gathered.

You can even **use our code if you want!** We wrote R code for the data analysis of the Edinburgh riders survey, and we have made it publicly available on Github – a collaborative developer platform (https://github.com/workers-observatory-edi/Work-ers-Observatory-Edinburgh-Riders-Survery).

Step 9: Sharing Your Results

Once you have analysed your data, prepare the results for sharing with survey participants, other workers, and any wider audiences. You can also share the code you used to analyse it.



➔ Being open with your insights contrasts with how tech giants work: **platform companies like Uber or Deliveroo hide their algorithms** and conceal the way they analyse and use data. This makes it harder for workers to understand how rides are allocated or how rates are decided.

➔ As workers, **we have every interest in doing the opposite**. If we are totally transparent about how we analyse our data, nobody can dispute our analyses and other workers can also use them. Sharing code and knowledge can give our analyses more weight and it opens opportunities for all of us to build our skills.

➔ It is important to remember, however, that while there are good arguments to widely share your code and your results, you should **be cautious about sharing your raw data.** Your raw data identifies workers individually and it includes personal information and contact details. That should not be shared publicly.

➔ You should **always start by anonymising the data:** remove names, emails, phone numbers, etc. Don't delete that information but keep it in a separate secure dataset that you only use if, for instance, you need to contact all the workers who filled out the survey. The rest of the anonymised data is what you will need for your analyses, and you can share it with the people who will be working on that together.

➔ When the time comes to share your results, and you decide to make your code publicly available on Github, make sure you include only the code, not the data.

One of the great merits of using code-based tools like R or Python, in combination with tools like Github, is that you can work on the data analysis collectively with anyone inside or out of the group. You can use other people's code, and you can share your own code, so it is totally clear how you went from your data to your results and your graphics.

Step 10: Publicity Campaign

One of the things you might want to do with the results is to publicise them.

75 words	Context (when, who, where, what) and sharpest finding (e.g. accidents and theft)
100 words	Explanation of key insight (e.g. account deactivations)
100 words	Quotes from workers backing up key insight
75 words	Summary of other key findings (e.g. tips, name and shame worst restaurants)
100 words	Next steps – aim to report, publicise, organise
100 words	Quote from organiser/worker about significance of the work

Sympathetic newspapers are able to treat these kinds of data insights as 'news'. It is not news to us, but it is news to the public. Write a 400-600 word piece and ask them to print it.

➔ You can use this outline as a guide and look up the article we wrote for one of the Scottish daily newspapers: 'Delivery rider survey reveals 'exploitative' system in Edinburgh'.

You can also write to politicians, hold a launch event, and speak at political meetings. For more ideas about how to spread the word, get in touch with us and we can talk it through.





Future Steps: Organisation and Action

The data, the analysis, and the publicity are important, but the most important thing is what you do next as a group.

Now you have been through this process together, identified common issues, taken to the streets, and studied the results, you will have a clearer picture of your priorities and **what you can do** as a group of riders.

This is the point when you use the data you've collected together, your shared awareness of the reality, and the group you've built through this, to **shape a campaign** that you're going to carry out together.*

You might want to formalise your group by choosing a **name,** designing a **logo**, and developing a **leaflet** to keep promoting the survey so that you can get more data and more riders

Campaigns on Rates

It might be clear from the data that rates are low, and that there is a particular aspect of the work that you feel contributes especially to low rates. If you asked about how much people tend to earn from add-ons, you might decide that this is an exploitative function of the platform, and decide to stop accepting **add-ons lower than a certain price,** and build a campaign around that.

Campaigns on Restaurants

It might be very clear from the data that there are some ***restaurants which everyone thinks are awful*** *because they make you wait for ages or treat you disrespectfully. If you asked about these in the survey, you will see these issues very clearly in the data, and now you have a very easy way to justify why you should go after them. You can shape a campaign around those restaurants.*

** This guide does not set out steps for building up a rider campaign. For advice on shaping a rates campaign, get in touch with us. You might want to check out the story of the* **Dunfermline Just Eats union**, *who decided on a minimum rate they would accept, and won a local rate-rise, and* **Edinburgh ROOM,** *which formed after undertaking a survey process like the one described in this guide. You can find these stories on the Workers' Observatory Youtube Channel, @WorkersObservatory.*

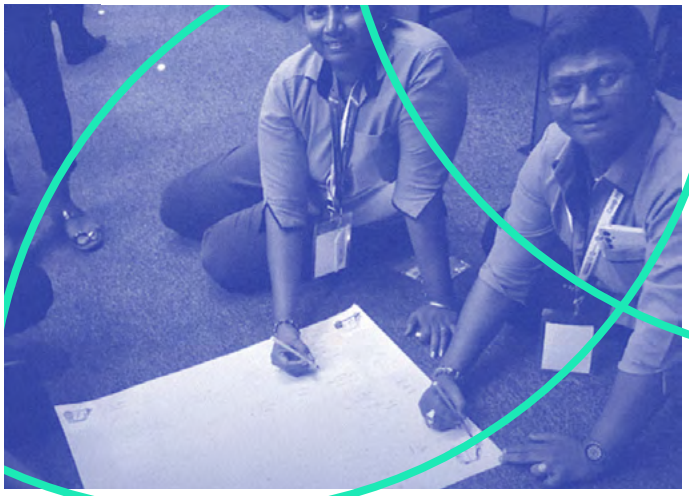
Step 12: Cross-City Cooperation

Sometimes food delivery work can feel like an isolated job. But there are thousands of us doing the work in Scotland, and millions doing it around the world. The methods we use to organise can help each other.

➔ **Link up with others** elsewhere who are doing surveys and exposing conditions. We are all part of the international initiative to illuminate the situation facing platform workers.

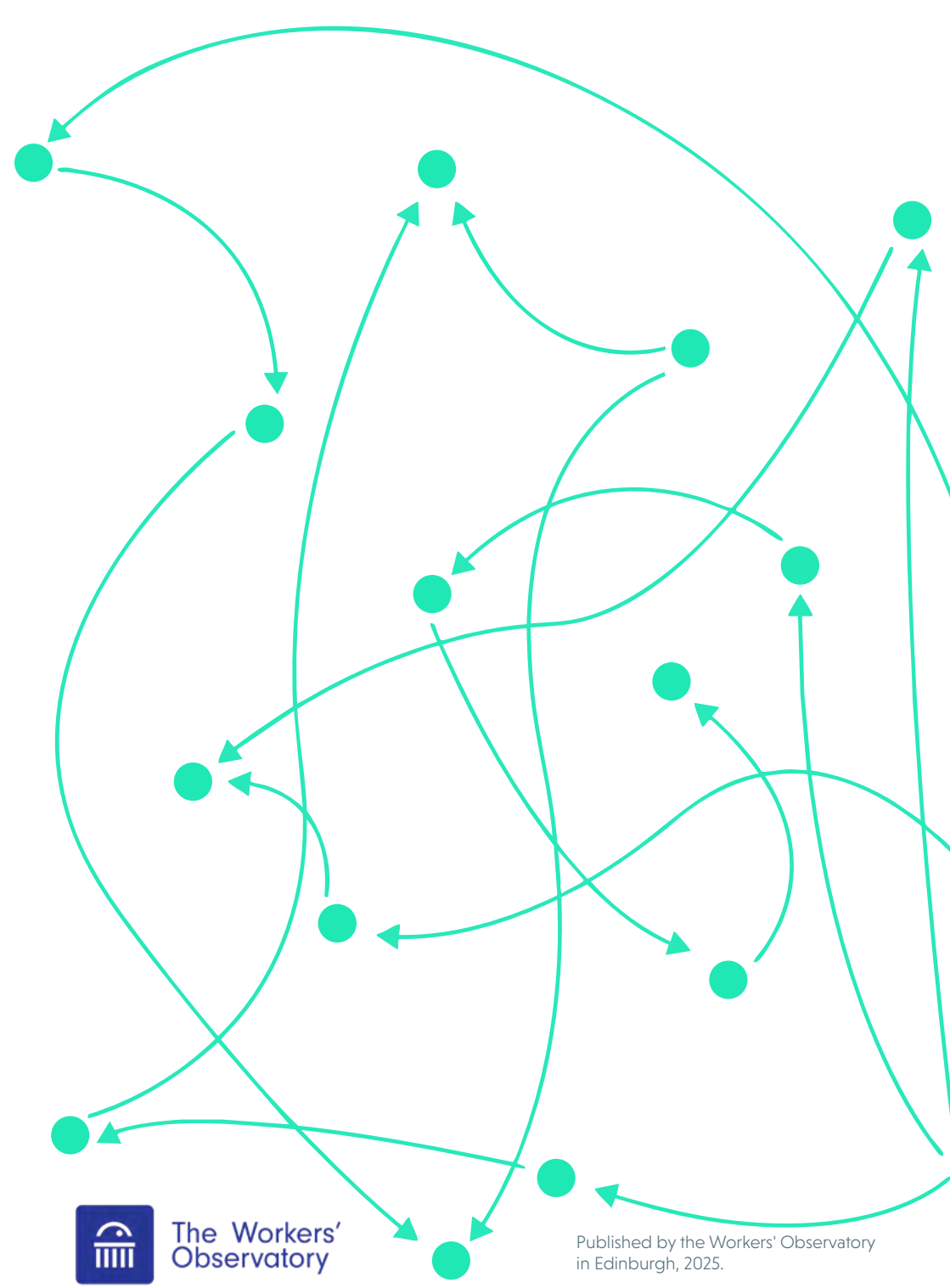
➔ For Instance: the Workers' Observatory and ROOM in Edinburgh are in touch with auto drivers in Chennai, who are also using issue mapping and surveys to build up strength for their campaigns.

➔ Similar things are happening across the world and Edinburgh is part of that global movement. It is when workers have become organised and communicate across continents that we **build power on a global level.** Each survey, group, and campaign we run is part of that power.





Some of the 400 women auto drivers in Chennai who are organising to win better working conditions.



The Workers' Observatory

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