



• RESEARCH REPORT 2024-25 •

THE INVISIBLE WORKFORCE

Understanding the Lives and Labor of Gig Workers in the Urban Economy



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Credits & Acknowledgement

Published by **Shri Ram Consulting and Research Centre** in 2025

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We are grateful to Shri Ram College of Commerce for giving the ecosystem that helped us prosper. We are thankful to our society, Shri Ram Consulting and Research Centre, for encouraging us to take up this project- Apratim Tiwari and, Sarang V for their continued guidance and support through the course of this study.

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Executive Summary

India's gig economy has rapidly emerged as a defining feature of the nation's labor market, bridging formal and informal employment. Spanning sectors from logistics and food delivery to IT freelancing and creative services, gig work now plays a critical role in job creation, especially in urban areas. Fuelled by digital platforms, flexible work arrangements, and shifting worker preferences, the sector is projected to expand from 2.6% of the non-agricultural workforce in 2021 to over 23 million workers by 2029–30.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** accelerated platform-based employment, but also exposed structural weaknesses, highlighting issues around social security, earnings instability, and algorithm-driven labor management.

Through a field survey of delivery gig workers in Delhi, this report sheds light on ground realities

. Key findings include:

- Gig work serves as a primary livelihood source for many, not just a side hustle
- Earnings are highly variable, with limited safety nets
- Access to benefits like insurance or pensions remains scarce
- Workers experience algorithmic pressure, leading to physical and mental stress

There are limited avenues for collective negotiation. Most platform workers are classified as independent contractors, which legally bars them from forming traditional trade unions. While grassroots collectives and WhatsApp groups exist, they have little formal influence. As such, workers have fewer collective voices, reducing their ability to impact and influence policy decisions that affect their very own livelihood.

Recent policy moves have begun to address systemic vulnerabilities:

- The Code on Social Security (2020) legally recognizes gig and platform workers
- The e-Shram Portal aims to register informal and gig workers for targeted welfare

Yet significant gaps persist in enforcement, wage regulation, legal clarity on employer-employee relationships. International comparisons with countries like **Canada, China, and the United Kingdom** show a spectrum of regulatory responses to gig work. While Canada has made strides in portable benefits and minimum earnings thresholds, China's platform regulation is evolving rapidly, often through administrative directives. The UK's judicial system has expanded the rights of gig workers by reclassifying them as "dependent contractors" in key legal cases.

These models underscore the importance of balanced regulation—one that protects workers without stifling innovation. India can draw from global best practices while tailoring solutions to its unique labor market, which remains heavily informal and fragmented. India's labor market is undergoing profound change, and gig workers are at the heart of this transformation. The promise of gig work lies in its flexibility and reach, but its risks are equally significant. Building a fair, future-ready labor ecosystem requires balancing flexibility with strong legal protections, institutional support, and worker-centric policymaking.

If tackled with caution, the gig economy's refinement and improvement indeed has the potential to improve lives of millions.



Introduction: The Gig Economy and Its Emerging Importance in India

Chapter 1

Global Context: The Rise of the Gig Economy

The gig economy has emerged as a significant force reshaping labor markets worldwide, and its influence is particularly profound in India, where it is redefining traditional employment structures and creating new economic opportunities.



Gig economy refers to an open marketplace system where entities hire independent individuals for a small, temporary task or service deployment. On a global scale, the gig economy has redefined the job landscape, transforming how companies and employees interact. The gig economy market in India is on a robust growth trajectory, expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17%. It reached a gross volume of \$455 billion by the end of 2024, led by online platforms.

The gig economy represents a significant shift in how work is structured, moving away from traditional, full-time employment towards more temporary, flexible, and task-oriented arrangements. This model allows companies to tap into specialized expertise on a needs basis, paying for specific outcomes or tasks rather than ongoing roles, often reducing overhead. Simultaneously, it offers workers unprecedented flexibility, allowing them to decide when, where, and often how they complete assignments, appealing to those seeking autonomy or supplementary income.

From freelance software engineering, content creation, and graphic design to ride-sharing services, food delivery, and professional consulting, the gig economy is rapidly transforming employment patterns across the globe. Digital platforms like Fiverr, TaskRabbit, Uber, and Upwork are at the forefront, acting as marketplaces connecting workers directly with clients or tasks. The growth has been substantial: nearly 36% of the American workforce was engaged in some form of gig work in 2022, contributing significantly to the nation's economic activity. Likewise, there has been a consistent increase in platform work in Europe, with gig workers making up to 11% of the total workforce in certain nations, particularly in urban areas.

This global trend is deeply rooted in factors like the pervasive expansion of digital services, the ubiquity of mobile technology enabling remote work and instant connections, and crucially, shifting worker demand for greater flexibility and autonomy. Projections indicate this trajectory will continue, with the sector expected to employ a significant number of gig workers globally by 2030.

Overview of the Indian Gig Economy:

The gig economy has, in recent years, become a defining feature of India's changing employment market, disrupting traditional employment styles and providing alternative ways for economic expansion. It is marked by contractual, flexible employment for short durations and has made tremendous progress in the nation, with several service providers such as Zomato, Ola, Uber, and Urban Company generating immense employment opportunities across various fields. Current estimates suggest that by 2030, the gig economy will contribute approximately 1.25% to India's overall GDP. With a growing number of businesses and consumers shifting towards on-demand services, gig work is proving to be a key job creator and driver of economic growth in the country.

The statistics reflect its increasing importance: in 2020-21, around 7.7 million employees were engaged in gig work, and that number is expected to hit 23.5 million by 2029-30, accounting for 6.7% of the non-agricultural labor force. The industry is forecasted to expand at a CAGR of 17%, with a gross volume of \$455 billion(2024).

In the post-liberalization era, contract labour became a pivotal component of the workforce strategy across both traditional and emerging industries, driven by a push for efficiency, global competitiveness, and the need for greater operational agility. Manufacturing companies, especially in labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, automobiles, and construction materials, started relying significantly on temporary workers. These workers were often engaged through contractors or directly on short-term arrangements to manage fluctuating market demand, respond to seasonal production cycles, or handle specific production bottlenecks. Their roles frequently involved assembly line tasks, material handling, and auxiliary support functions.

The construction sector, historically a major employer of millions of migrant workers, has traditionally been deeply dependent on this model of contract labour. This dependency meant that workers often moved from one project site to another, undertaking demanding physical labour without the security of a permanent job and standard benefits.

Shifts in Employment Dynamics:

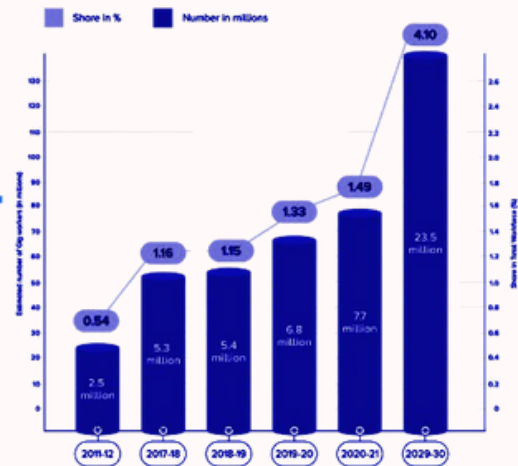
In stark contrast to conventional employment arrangements that typically revolve around long-term contracts, predictable fixed wages, and structured formal work schedules with designated hours and locations, gig work fundamentally operates on a different paradigm. It relies instead on fragmented, task-oriented engagements, often allowing for highly flexible work schedules, and generally positions individuals as independent contractors rather than employees. This model is significantly enabled by pervasive digital infrastructure, particularly expanding smartphone accessibility, with approximately 650 million smartphone users nationwide facilitating seamless connections between workers and available tasks or clients.

While this arrangement undeniably grants workers a degree of freedom to select their projects, dictate their own hours, and manage personal obligations alongside work, it also fundamentally alters the traditional employer-employee dynamic in terms of responsibility. Crucially, it transfers key responsibilities – such as managing social security contributions, arranging and funding health care coverage, and undertaking their own long-term financial security planning, including retirement savings – directly from the entities engaging the labour (the platforms or clients) onto the individual workers themselves. This greater operational convenience for companies, reducing their overheads and statutory obligations, can potentially encourage more hiring by making labour acquisition more adaptable and less costly.

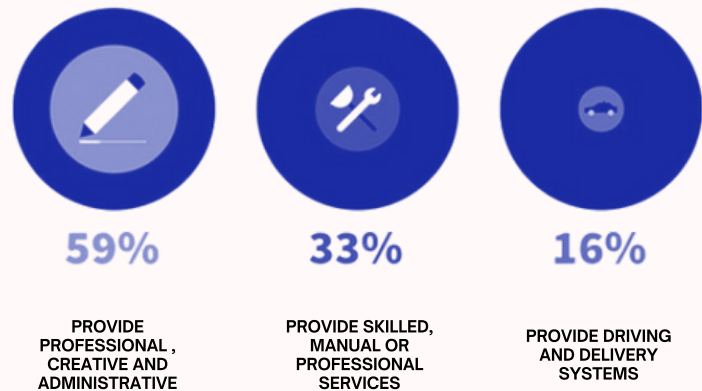
Although this greater convenience for companies might encourage more hiring, it simultaneously introduces significant risks for workers, since gig work fundamentally lacks the predictable security and benefits of conventional jobs. However, beyond the individual level, gig work is having broader societal impacts; across metropolitan cities to smaller towns and rural villages, it is making livelihood opportunities possible and driving local development by allowing people to tap into income streams.

Despite these genuinely positive effects on equity and reducing regional disparities, the gig economy's rapid expansion still poses major and complex challenges that require careful consideration and innovative solutions from policymakers. A core issue lies in the classification of these workers; since gig workers operate under highly flexible contracts and are often designated as independent contractors, they do not possess anywhere near the same level of legal security, labour rights protection (like minimum wage guarantees, limits on working hours, or protection against unfair dismissal), and collective bargaining power that regular, permanent employees typically have. They are also generally more geographically dispersed and lack a shared physical workplace, making collective organization and unionization significantly more difficult, and consequently reducing their ability to negotiate for better pay, working conditions, or benefits. With the gig economy growing and becoming a more integral part of the overall labour market, it is fundamentally reimagining the nature of work itself – effectively combining the benefits of flexibility and technological innovation with inherent threats to job security, significant income unpredictability, and vulnerabilities in the social safety net for a growing segment of the population. Policymakers worldwide have been compelled to react to these new and evolving changes; initial legislative responses, such as India's Code on Social Security, 2020, signal a recognition of the need and an initial attempt toward expanding social security coverage and basic protections for gig and platform workers. However, devising effective regulation in this space remains a highly complex and nuanced issue. Policymakers face the delicate task of balancing the imperative to safeguard workers' rights and promote inclusive growth that doesn't leave a large segment of the workforce vulnerable, while simultaneously ensuring that such regulations do not inadvertently stifle the innovation, flexibility, and significant economic potential that the gig economy offers. The path forward requires careful calibration to ensure the benefits of this new work model are shared more equitably.

ESTIMATES OF GIG-WORKFORCE IN INDIA



WHAT SERVICES ARE GIG WORKERS PROVIDING?



Supply-Side Drivers: What Workers Perceive

Most Indian workers prefer gig work because it gives them more autonomy and flexibility. They can choose their work schedule, thus taking care of family obligations, studies, or other work. Gig work, particularly digital work, also gives workers control over where they work, conserving time spent traveling and offering more autonomy at home. Indeed India and BetterPlace surveys have concluded that flexibility and a good work-life balance are some of the primary reasons why Indian gig workers prefer this form of work, particularly the young and working women.

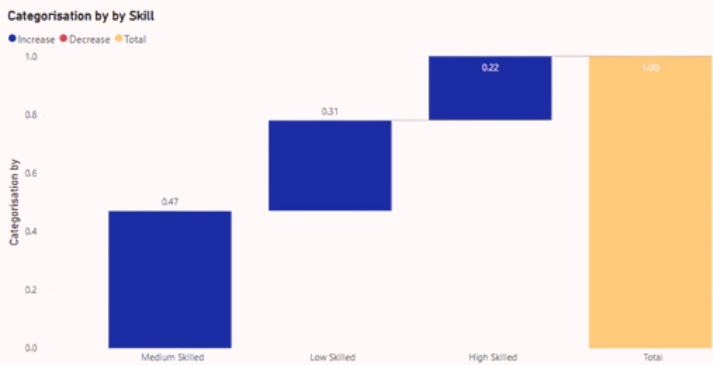
These fundamental aspects of the gig economy and the motivations driving its growth are strongly substantiated by credible facts and figures from leading global research institutions. For example, a prominent McKinsey Global Institute report specifically highlights that flexibility is consistently cited as one of the key, overarching reasons why individuals opt for independent work arrangements, valuing the ability to control their schedules and work environments. Complementing this, a World Economic Forum report documents the significant and rising trend of remote and digital work globally.

The key drivers behind the growing appeal of independent work models like the gig economy, particularly from the perspective of the workforce itself, are strongly substantiated by concrete facts and figures drawn from influential global research institutions. For example, a significant report from the McKinsey Global Institute prominently states that intrinsic flexibility – the ability to choose when, where, and how work is performed – is consistently identified as one of the foremost and most compelling reasons why individuals choose to pursue independent work, valuing the increased control over their schedules and work environments that it affords.

In parallel, a comprehensive report from the World Economic Forum documents the undeniable and accelerating trend of remote and digital work across various industries and geographies, precisely identifying it as a core and enduring characteristic of the evolving global labour landscape, intrinsically enabled and amplified by rapid technological advancements and widespread digital connectivity.

Learning New Skills: Where to Add and Build Your Portfolio

Within the contemporary professional landscape, engaging in project-based or "gig" work represents a profoundly effective modality for facilitating both the accelerated acquisition of novel skills and the strategic construction of a robust, demonstrable professional portfolio. This approach holds particular salience and provides distinct, often crucial, advantages for individuals initiating their professional trajectories as early-career professionals or those navigating significant career transitions and seeking entry into new fields. The inherent structure of gig work, specifically the requirement to undertake a diverse array of project-based assignments and the necessity of engaging in collaborative relationships.



The strategic undertaking of numerous project-based engagements and diverse assignments within the dynamic and evolving landscape of the gig economy offers a substantial, indeed indispensable, benefit to professionals. This benefit manifests primarily in the systematic construction and refinement of a robust, comprehensive, and critically important professional portfolio. This tangible collection of completed work, carefully curated and far exceeding a simple list of roles, serves as compelling empirical evidence. It meticulously documents and highlights the individual's diverse range of acquired, practical, and industry-relevant skills, alongside their proven competencies and accumulated hands-on experience derived from real-world project delivery.

Such a well-developed and readily accessible portfolio becomes an invaluable professional asset, significantly increasing an individual's professional standing and leverage within the job market. This enhanced credibility and visible demonstration of capability are crucial when seeking to secure subsequent, potentially more senior, specialized, or even traditional, employment opportunities, or when navigating future transitions and advancements throughout their long-term professional journey. Concurrent with this practical skill accumulation.

Lack of Secure Job Opportunities: Managing Unemployment

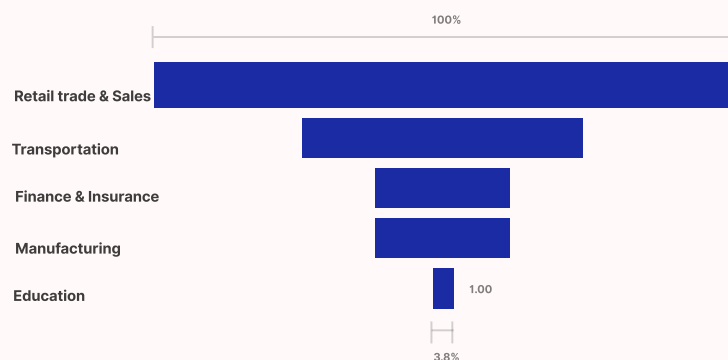
The chronic issue of underemployment and unemployment in India's organized sector compels individuals into the gig economy as a preferable alternative to make a living.

Further, most Indian employees are underemployed, i.e., in unsuited jobs considering their level of qualification or do not provide them with full working hours. Gig economy provides such workers with an opportunity.

Factors affecting growth of gig worker industry

Employer Reasons: What Employers Believe:

A principal impetus for Indian businesses migrating towards the gig model is cost containment. This translates directly into lower wage rates alongside a holistic reduction in other miscellaneous expenses and legal costs.



Firms save 18-35% by avoiding EPF, ESI, gratuity, and office space expenses. For instance, Swiggy and Zomato saved 25% on delivery expenses by employing gig workers. IT services firms save ₹1.2–One of the most compelling motivations for companies to engage gig workers lies in the significant cost efficiencies they offer compared to traditional employment models. Estimates suggest firms can realize savings ranging from 18% to as high as 35% by circumventing direct and indirect expenses associated with permanent employees.

These avoided costs commonly include mandatory employer contributions towards provident fund (EPF), employee state insurance (ESI) – providing health benefits and social security – and gratuity payments, which are lump sums paid after years of service. Furthermore, the reliance on a distributed gig workforce often drastically reduces or eliminates the need for dedicated physical office space per worker and associated overheads.

Flexibility and Scalability: Adapting to Evolving Market Demands

The gig economy provides Indian businesses with unprecedented scalability and flexibility, which are necessary in adapting to the fast-changing nature of market conditions. Gig platforms allow for rapid hiring and onboarding of employees, which allows businesses to scale capacity quickly during high-demand periods of the year or when entering new markets. This flexible workforce adjustment provides a vital buffer against demand fluctuations, preventing overhiring during low-demand periods.

Examples are ride-hailing companies like Uber and Ola, who change the number of drivers they have depending on the number of people who have to be driven. Meal delivery companies like Swiggy and Zomato also increase the number of delivery personnel during high meal times.

Beyond cost savings, a primary driver for the adoption of gig work is the unparalleled operational flexibility and scalability it offers, which is fundamentally challenging to achieve with a traditional, fixed workforce model. Companies can dynamically adjust their labour capacity in near real-time to match fluctuating demand. A prime example of this is seen with platforms like Urban Company, which can swiftly onboard and increase the number of service personnel available in specific locations, particularly when expanding into new cities or experiencing seasonal demand surges.

A level of rapid scaling and contraction that is simply not feasible or cost-effective with a permanent staff base bound by long-term employment contracts and notice periods. with approximately 84% engaging them for work.

Reduced Administrative Work: Streamlining of HR Function

Employing gig workers offers significant advantages that considerably streamline processes and reduce workload for the Human Resources departments within Indian companies. One major area of simplification lies in the recruitment process. Unlike the traditional, time-consuming tasks involved in hiring permanent staff – which include crafting and posting detailed job descriptions, sifting through numerous applications, conducting initial screenings and multiple rounds of interviews, managing reference checks, and processing extensive onboarding documentation – leveraging specialized recruitment platforms makes finding suitable talent much easier and faster.

These platforms often provide access to large pools of pre-vetted or rated professionals, significantly reducing the HR work involved in the initial search, detailed screening, and the administrative effort required to bring new hires onto the company's roster. Furthermore, the complex and compliance-heavy tasks associated with managing employee payroll and benefits are also largely offloaded when engaging gig workers. Unlike permanent employees requiring intricate calculations for salaries, mandatory statutory deductions (like Employee Provident Fund - EPF contributions and Employee State Insurance - ESI premiums), managing leave encashment, processing expense reimbursements, and administration.

Mobile Technology: The Enabling Infrastructure

Mobile internet usage within India has demonstrated substantial growth, primarily driven by telecommunications initiatives such as Reliance Jio's introduction of highly affordable data plans. This development has proven profoundly pivotal to the proliferation and scaling of the Indian gig economy. The resulting widespread adoption and access to mobile devices and data services have effectively brought a significant segment of the Indian population online, thereby substantially expanding the pool of potential gig workers and consumers of digital services.

Commencing operations in 2016, Jio fundamentally disrupted the market by drastically reducing mobile data tariffs, substantially facilitating internet access for individuals across various socio-economic strata.

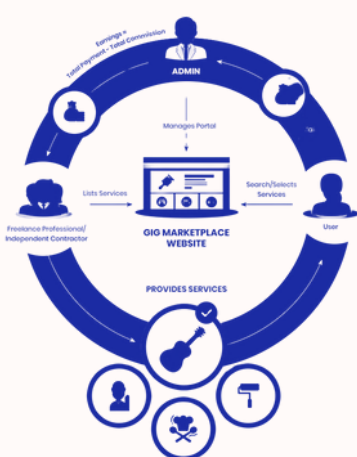
Crucially, this confluence of enhanced affordability and pervasive digital connectivity has profoundly extended the geographical reach of digitally-enabled platforms and services. This development renders them effectively accessible not only to populations within major urban centers but critically also to residents of Tier 2 and Tier 3 urban areas, alongside historically underserved rural towns and remote communities previously marginalized from the digital mainstream.

Consequently, this widespread proliferation of reliable and affordable digital access across the Indian territory, significantly driven by shifts in market dynamics, represents a fundamental, indeed indispensable, prerequisite. It directly underpins and facilitates substantial growth.

Scope of the Report and Its Relevance to Labor Market Trends and Policy Making

This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the gig economy in India, covering various aspects relating to it including employment trends, worker experiences, regulatory challenges, and making policy recommendations on the basis of such analysis. By considering different types of gig work, the role of digital platforms, as well as its economic impact, the report attempts to provide a detailed view of how gig work is reshaping the labor market in the country.

Gig Marketplace Model



A central and crucial element of this report resides in its rigorous examination of contemporary labour market trends and dynamics. Furthermore, it undertakes a critical analysis of the significant impact that the accelerating expansion of the gig economy exerts upon the socio-economic realities and lived experiences of individuals engaged in this form of work. Driven by the substantial increase in internet penetration rates across the nation and the growing salience of digitally-mediated platform work, the operational scope of the gig economy has demonstrably transcended its initial concentration solely within India's major metropolitan centres.

The primary research component of this report is specifically designed to furnish critical empirical insights into the lived experiences & socio-economic realities of individuals engaged in gig work, with a particular focus on those operating within the delivery and service sectors. Employing a mixed-methods approach, which will encompass both qualitative interviews and structured questionnaires, the research aims to systematically ascertain pertinent data concerning prevailing working conditions, the variability and stability of remuneration, access to adequate social security provisions and benefits, and the dynamics of platform-worker relationships. This direct, empirical analysis is anticipated to facilitate the development of a profound and empirically grounded understanding of the complex realities and inherent challenges faced by these workers, generating information often not readily discernible or comprehensively captured within existing secondary data sources or conventional statistical aggregates.

Consequently, these findings are considered critically instrumental in the rigorous identification and precise diagnosis of substantive issues, and in the subsequent formulation of evidence-based policy recommendations designed to effectively address these identified challenges in a realistic and impactful manner.

Adopting a comprehensive policy perspective, the report undertakes a critical evaluation of prevailing legal and regulatory frameworks, existing social security provisions and mechanisms, and the initiatives currently being implemented by industry stakeholders aimed at safeguarding the welfare and rights of gig workers. Acknowledging the inherent informal and often fragmented nature of many gig work arrangements, it is recognized that significant lacunae and deficiencies within existing regulatory paradigms demonstrably persist. This context renders the development of robust labor policies that judiciously balance the promotion of operational flexibility.



Historical Evolution of Gig Work in India

Chapter 2

Emergence of Informal and Contract Labour in India

The nation's economic shifts, social dynamics, and labour market regulations are closely linked to the development of informal and contract labour. Informal employment has always been a significant part of India's workforce, its importance has grown over the years due to several structural changes in the economy, globalization, and due to the rise of flexible work arrangements. Nowadays informal and contract labour dominate the Indian labour market, shaping employment trends across industries. Traditionally, India's workforce was dominated by agriculture, with most of the people relying on farming and agrarian activities for their livelihood. Small-scale industries and handicraft sectors also played a significant role in increasing employment. However, as industrialisation made progress, the structure of employment began to change. Strict labour laws in the formal sector made it difficult for businesses to hire permanent employees, leading to an increase in casual and contract-based work arrangements. The introduction of economic liberalization in 1991 further accelerated this trend, as industries looked for ways to cut costs and measures to remain competitive in the global market.

Rise of the Gig Workforce

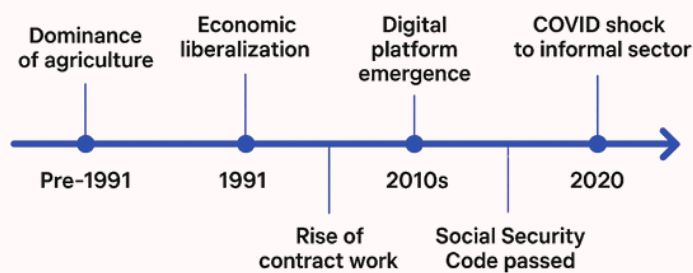
According to industry estimates, India currently has around 17 million gig and platform workers, and this number is expected to grow to 23.5 million by 2029-30. By that time, they will make up about 6.7% of the country's non-agricultural workforce and 4.1% of all livelihoods in India. The services sector, covering retail, hospitality, and IT, has increasingly shifted toward flexible work models, hiring employees on short-term contracts to match project demands. One of the key reasons behind the rise of informal employment in India is the high cost of complying with formal job regulations. Businesses often find it expensive to hire full-time employees due to mandatory benefits like provident fund contributions, gratuity, and paid leave.

In the post-liberalization era, contract labour became a key component of both traditional and emerging industries in India. The sweeping economic reforms of the early 1990s encouraged businesses to prioritize flexibility and cost-efficiency, leading many to shift away from permanent employment models. Manufacturing companies, especially those operating in labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, automobiles, and construction, increasingly relied on temporary and contract workers to adapt to fluctuating market demands and production cycles. The construction sector, which provides jobs to millions of migrant workers across the country, has traditionally been dependent on contract labour, where workers move from one project to another without the security of permanent employment, access to social security benefits, or long-term job stability.

Shift Toward Contractual Employment in Services

- Manufacturing relied on temporary labour.
- Construction sector used migrant contract workers.
- Services sector embraced flexible hiring.
- Freelance and short-term contracts grew.

Evolution of Informal Employment and Gig Economy in India



At the same time, technology and digital platforms have reshaped various industries, making gig work more accessible. The gig economy also gives workers the flexibility to decide when and where they work. To cut costs and avoid legal complexities, many companies prefer hiring contract or informal workers instead of permanent staff. Because trade unions have become less powerful, workers have weaker bargaining power, which increases the scope for companies to exploit informal labor.

Regardless of how India's economy is expanding, gig workers often deal with volatile job opportunities, unstable wages, particularly when platform commissions increase, coupled with the hefty responsibility of raising their families. The COVID-19 pandemic made crystal clear how exposed this workforce is, with contract workers losing their jobs instantly, without any financial provision to rely on. Women and specially-abled face other challenges such as discrimination and fewer opportunities for employment.

India's Gig Economy: New Opportunities and Risks

- Technology platforms give workers greater control over their schedules, driving sector-wide participation.
- Companies prefer gig and contract workers to cut costs linked to formal employment.
- Gig workers face unstable incomes, weak protections, and high financial risks during crises

The Role of Digital Platforms in Gig Work

Digital platforms have completely revolutionised the way people find work and earn a living. Over the past decade, gig work powered by platforms like Uber, Ola, Swiggy, Zomato, and Urban Company has become a major source of employment in India.

These platforms connect workers directly to consumers, enabling them to earn money through short-term, and on-demand tasks. Therefore, this shift has created new job opportunities, but it has also raised concerns about fair wages, job security, and workers' rights.

Evolution of Work Patterns in the Digital Age

- **Rise of Technology-Driven Employment:** Digital platforms have expanded access to flexible and decentralized work opportunities.
- **Shift Towards Independent Work Models:** Gig economy offers workers autonomy over their schedules and work choices. **Business Preference for Contractual Hiring:** Companies favor informal hiring to maintain agility and reduce regulatory burdens.
- **Exposure of Systemic Vulnerabilities:** The pandemic revealed the urgent need for social protection for informal and gig workers.

Impact of Globalization and the Digital Economy on Non-Traditional Employment

Globalization's Transformative Influence: Deepening Integration and Foreign Investment: India's integration into the global economy has been marked by increased foreign direct investment (FDI) and the establishment of multinational corporations (MNCs) across sectors. This influx has not only injected capital but also introduced global business models that prioritize efficiency and flexibility. The demand for adaptable labor structures has surged, leading to the proliferation of gig work, freelancing, and contract employment.

The Pursuit of Cost-Effective and Agile Labor: Global competitive pressures have compelled businesses to optimize operational costs. Employing gig workers allows companies to scale their workforce according to fluctuating demand, avoiding the overhead associated with full-time employment. This trend has been particularly prominent in sectors like IT, customer service, and logistics.

The Surge of Offshoring and Outsourcing: Globalization has facilitated the offshoring of services to India, capitalizing on the nation's skilled workforce and competitive labor costs. The business process outsourcing (BPO) and IT services sectors have witnessed significant growth, with a substantial reliance on contract and freelance workers to fulfill project-based demands.

Multinational Platforms: Setting Global Standards and Adapting to Local Contexts

Uber and Ola have invested heavily in driver training programs, particularly addressing issues like road safety, defensive driving, and passenger interaction. In response to concerns about passenger safety, especially for female riders, they've implemented features like emergency SOS buttons and ride tracking. Ola has also introduced localized training modules that address regional traffic patterns and cultural nuances.

They've also grappled with local regulatory hurdles, negotiating with authorities to establish operational frameworks that align with local laws. This has included discussions on fare structures, driver licensing, and vehicle compliance. Recognizing the vulnerability of gig workers, both platforms have introduced insurance schemes covering accidents and medical emergencies. Uber's "Uber Care" program, for example, provides financial assistance to drivers in case of accidents or medical emergencies. Ola has also established partnerships with insurance providers to offer affordable coverage options.

Amazon and Flipkart: Transforming Logistics and Delivery and Creating Standardized Practices. Both companies offer health insurance and incentive programs to their delivery partners. These initiatives aim to provide a safety net for gig workers and incentivize them to achieve delivery targets. Flipkart, for example, has focused on streamlining its delivery operations and offering incentives linked to delivery speed and customer satisfaction.

Zomato and Swiggy: Revolutionizing Food Delivery and Creating a Delivery Partner Ecosystem. Zomato and Swiggy have invested in training programs that cover aspects like food handling, hygiene, and customer service. They've also established support systems to address delivery partners' grievances and provide assistance in case of emergencies. Zomato has been shown to try and improve conditions through increased insurance offers, after periods of worker protest. They've also focused on building a sense of community among delivery partners through initiatives like partner meetups and recognition programs.

Urban Company: Professionalizing Home Services and Establishing Quality Standards. Urban Company has implemented rigorous training programs for its service providers, focusing on technical skills, customer service, and hygiene. They've also established a robust quality assurance system, including background checks, performance evaluations, and customer feedback mechanisms. Urban Company has made serious efforts to standardize the level of service provided. This has caused it to be viewed as a more trusted platform in the Indian service market.

BigBasket, Grofers (Blinkit), and Dunzo: Expanding Grocery and On-Demand Delivery. BigBasket and Grofers (Blinkit) have focused on optimizing their logistics operations to ensure efficient delivery of groceries. Dunzo, specializing in rapid, on-demand deliveries, has adopted a more flexible delivery model, catering to diverse customer needs.

Challenges of the Gig Economy

- **Regulatory Compliance and Income Volatility:** Ensuring compliance with diverse labor laws remains a significant challenge, and the variable nature of gig work continues to pose income stability issues.
- **Worker Rights and Bargaining Power Disparities:** Gig workers often lack bargaining power, leading to low wages and unfair conditions. The classification of gig workers as independent contractors further erodes traditional worker rights.
- **The Digital Divide and Accessibility Barriers:** Limited access to technology and internet connectivity creates an unequal playing field, excluding many from the gig economy.
- **Mental Health Concerns and Algorithmic Opaque Control:** The uncertainty and isolation of gig work can lead to mental health challenges, and opaque algorithmic control can result in unfair treatment.
- **Data Privacy, Occupational Safety, and Erosion of Standards:** Sharing personal data raises privacy concerns, workers in delivery and transportation face safety risks, and the gig economy may weaken labor standards.
- **Taxation, Compliance, and Social Isolation:** The nature of gig work complicates taxation and compliance, and many gig workers experience social isolation,

Regulatory Responses and the Future of Informal Labour

India has been steadily working to extend social protection to gig and platform workers, recognising their growing contribution to the economy. Over the years, the government has introduced several measures aimed at regulating contract labour and improving worker conditions:

- **The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970,** This Act was an early attempt to ensure better treatment of contract workers by regulating their employment terms and guaranteeing fair wages. It sought to prevent exploitation by setting minimum standards for working conditions, although its impact has been mixed due to challenges in enforcement.
- **The Social Security Code, 2020,** Recognising the emergence of new forms of work, the government passed the Social Security Code, which explicitly introduced "platform work" as a category under the social security framework. The Code made it mandatory for companies to contribute towards the welfare of gig and platform workers, aiming to provide them access to health insurance, provident funds, and other essential protections.

Despite these legal frameworks, implementation remains inconsistent. A large segment of the gig and informal workforce continues to fall outside the net of formal social protection due to gaps in monitoring, weak regulatory mechanisms, and limited awareness among workers themselves.

Role of Employer and Business Member Organizations (EBMOs)

- EBMOs play a crucial role in addressing the challenges of gig and platform work.
- They act as bridges between businesses, workers, and policymakers, facilitating dialogue on issues like worker welfare, business sustainability, and labour rights.
- Through advocacy, training programs, and best practices sharing, EBMOs support the development of fairer work models and help businesses adapt to new regulatory requirements.

The future of India's informal and gig economy will depend largely on the ability of policymakers, businesses, and civil society to work together in building a more inclusive labour framework. Expanding access to social security benefits, promoting fair wages, and ensuring safe, dignified working conditions for all, including women and specially-abled workers, will be crucial. As platform work continues to grow, it will be important to balance flexibility with long-term stability, creating opportunities for career development and financial resilience. A fair and sustainable approach will help unlock the full potential of India's evolving workforce.

A delivery person wearing a yellow puffer jacket, dark pants, and a grey helmet is standing next to a red and black bicycle. They are carrying a large, teal and grey insulated delivery bag on their back. The background is a modern building with a glass facade. The text "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Gig Work" is overlaid in white, with a horizontal line separating it from the chapter title.

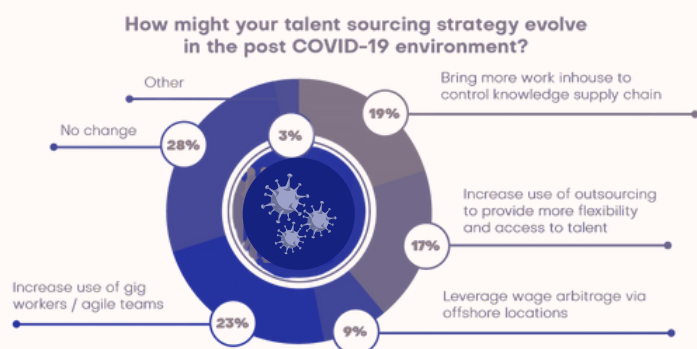
Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Gig Work

Chapter 3

Impact of the COVID-19 on Gig Work

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated the adoption of gig work across Canada and globally. As traditional employment sectors—such as hospitality, retail, and travel—collapsed under the strain of lockdowns and restrictions, gig platforms emerged as vital alternatives for income generation. Individuals who had previously never considered gig work were pushed to register on delivery, transportation, freelance, and home-service apps in response to sudden job losses.

This rapid influx included individuals from diverse backgrounds, including students unable to find traditional part-time work, parents balancing childcare with the need for income, and workers laid off from industries heavily impacted by public health measures. The pandemic revealed the adaptability of gig platforms in scaling up rapidly to meet new market demands.



This scaling was often achieved through streamlined digital onboarding processes that contrasted sharply with traditional hiring timelines, further lowering the barrier to entry. Importantly, the pandemic shifted perceptions: gig work, once seen primarily as supplementary or secondary, became a critical primary source of income for a large segment of the workforce, fundamentally altering individual career paths and household financial strategies.

Moreover, the convenience and low entry barriers of gig platforms—minimal hiring processes, immediate work availability, and flexible scheduling—made them particularly attractive during a time of extreme labor market volatility and uncertainty. For many, the ability to start earning quickly outweighed the inherent precarity. This normalization of gig work during the pandemic fundamentally altered the Canadian employment landscape, embedding platform-based labor more deeply into the economy.



Rise in demand for delivery and healthcare-related gig work

Two sectors witnessed particularly explosive and rapid growth during the COVID-19 pandemic: delivery services and informal or gig-based healthcare work. Food delivery, grocery shopping, parcel drop-offs, and same-day household services quickly evolved from being merely convenient to being indispensable necessities for millions of households adhering to strict stay-at-home orders and striving to maintain social distancing protocols. Major platforms facilitating these services, such as DoorDash, Uber Eats, Amazon Flex, and Instacart, reported unprecedented spikes in both consumer demand and the number of individuals onboarding as active workers on their platforms.

Customers who had previously preferred the experience of in-person shopping or dining out transitioned rapidly and on a massive scale to app-based ordering, creating a sustained boom in delivery work that, for many platforms, persisted even as initial public health restrictions eased, fundamentally altering consumer habits and solidifying the role of delivery in daily life. This surge fundamentally transformed delivery workers from often-overlooked figures into visible, indispensable front-line figures

In parallel, there was a marked and urgent increase in demand for informal and gig-based healthcare and personal support work. Freelance caregivers, independent personal support workers (PSWs), eldercare aides, and home health assistants providing non-medical or basic medical support found their services in significantly greater demand than before the pandemic. This surge was directly and profoundly linked to the immense pressure placed upon the formal healthcare system: hospitals became overwhelmed prioritizing COVID-19 treatment, while long-term care facilities faced severe staffing shortages, implemented strict visitation policies, and, tragically, became epicentres for outbreaks, leading families to perceive them as high-risk environments. Consequently, families increasingly sought private, in-home care solutions as a safer alternative for vulnerable elderly or immunocompromised relatives, dramatically increasing opportunities.

and demand for gig workers capable of providing personal care, companionship, meal preparation, and other essential support services in private homes. as hospitals prioritized COVID-19 treatment.

Vulnerabilities exposed and exacerbated

While gig platforms capitalized on pandemic-driven opportunities, the pre-existing vulnerabilities of gig workers became starkly visible and were often exacerbated by the crisis. The fundamental classification of gig workers as independent contractors meant they were largely ineligible for standard employment benefits. At the height of COVID-19 transmission, delivery and healthcare gig workers continued to work without access to employer-provided personal protective equipment (PPE), paid sick leave to self-isolate, hazard pay recognizing the increased risk, or employer-provided healthcare if they fell ill. They often had to source their own masks and sanitizers, adding an unexpected cost to their work.

Moreover, platform algorithms and customer rating systems continued to function in ways that penalized workers during a time of immense strain. Late deliveries due to overwhelmed systems, cancellations due to health concerns or exposure risks, or low customer ratings based on factors outside the worker's control (like restaurant delays) could still result in immediate account deactivation—cutting workers off from their sole or primary income streams without formal notice, severance, or a meaningful appeal process. This algorithmic management created immense pressure to work regardless of health or safety concerns.

Rise in demand for delivery and healthcare-related gig work

Beyond the immediate risk of infection, the pandemic placed significant physical and mental health burdens specifically on gig workers. As they continued to interact with the public delivering goods or providing care, they faced a higher risk of exposure to the virus compared to those able to work remotely or whose workplaces implemented stricter safety measures. The lack of employer-provided PPE and training on safety protocols forced many to rely on their own limited resources and knowledge. This constant exposure risk generated significant anxiety and stress, not only for the workers themselves but also for their families. The nature of the work also contributed to physical strain. Increased demand meant longer hours, often under pressure from time-sensitive algorithms.

Health & Safety Risks
Gig workers faced increased COVID-19 exposure with limited protection, leading to physical strain, mental stress, and anxiety.

Financial & Emotional Stress:
Anxiety and financial instability intensified burnout, isolation, and feelings of uncertainty and helplessness due to lack of support.

Vulnerabilities Exposed:
The pandemic highlighted rapid gig economy growth but also revealed critical gaps in worker protections, benefits, and support systems.

Financial vulnerability was also profoundly exposed and significantly worsened for gig workers during the pandemic. Most gig workers operated with minimal or no personal savings, a precarious situation often compounded by inconsistent earnings and pay rates that, after accounting for necessary business expenses like fuel, vehicle maintenance, and now potentially PPE, left little surplus for saving. Their fundamental classification as independent contractors meant they were systematically excluded from Canada's standard social safety nets, most notably Employment Insurance (EI).

This left them without access to critical benefits like sickness benefits or regular EI benefits if their work disappeared. While the Canadian government rapidly introduced emergency support programs such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), accessing these benefits presented its own set of challenges for gig workers. Initial eligibility criteria were sometimes confusing, requiring workers to demonstrate a significant drop in income or even stop working entirely, a difficult choice when income was needed immediately and future work was uncertain. Furthermore, the processing time for these benefits meant a delay in receiving funds, while bills and essential expenses continued unabated.

This could lead to exhaustion, increased risk of accidents (e.g., road safety for delivery drivers), and musculoskeletal issues. Healthcare gig workers faced the additional emotional and physical toll of caring for vulnerable individuals during a health crisis, often without adequate support structures or mental health resources typically available to employees in formal healthcare settings. The mental health impacts were particularly acute. Financial precarity, the fear of falling sick and losing income, isolation from lack of traditional workplace interaction, and the stress of navigating confusing aid programs or unresponsive platform support lines contributed to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout among gig workers. The feeling of being essential yet unprotected, and often overlooked in broader public health discussions, added to feelings of frustration and demoralization.

The pandemic of COVID-19 was unequivocally a tipping point for India's nascent yet rapidly growing gig economy. It simultaneously highlighted both the inherent strength and profound vulnerability of the sector—demonstrating an impressive ability to quickly accommodate large numbers of displaced workers from traditional industries while starkly revealing a pervasive lack of institutional protection and basic benefits for these very same individuals. The crisis triggered significant structural changes in work patterns, accelerated policy acknowledgment of the gig economy's scale and importance.

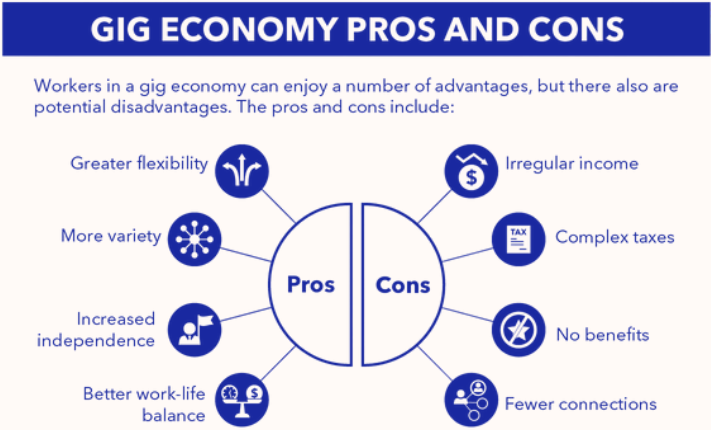
Policy Debates and Emerging Advocacy

The stark vulnerabilities of gig workers exposed during the pandemic catalyzed broader public and policy recognition of the need for reform. The image of delivery drivers and caregivers working essential jobs without basic protections spurred urgent debates about their classification and rights. Policy discussions intensified at both federal and provincial levels in Canada regarding how to extend basic labor protections, such as minimum wage, paid sick leave, and access to benefits, to platform-based workers without necessarily forcing them into traditional employee relationships, which might compromise flexibility.

Concepts like 'portable benefits' – benefits packages that follow the worker across multiple platforms or jobs, rather than being tied to a single employer – gained significant traction in policy discussions as a potential solution. There were also renewed calls to re-examine the legal definition of 'employee' versus 'independent contractor' in the context of algorithmic management and platform control.

Simultaneously, the pandemic fuelled increased organizing and advocacy efforts among gig workers themselves. Facing immediate health and financial risks, workers used social media and nascent organizational structures to share information, demand better pay and safety measures from platforms, and lobby governments for support and recognition.

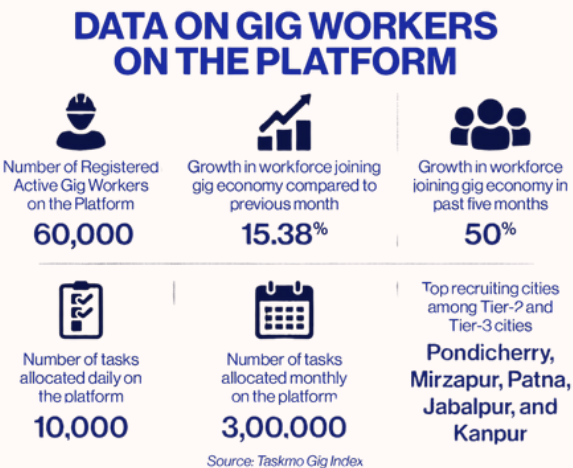
While traditional unionization faced significant hurdles due to the dispersed nature of the workforce and legal classification issues, new forms of collective action and digital organizing emerged, highlighting the growing collective voice of gig workers demanding better treatment and rights in the post-pandemic economy. Despite increased dialogue and advocacy, substantial and consistent reform efforts across Canada have remained slow and fragmented, leaving many of the structural inequalities exposed during the pandemic largely unaddressed in the long term.



The "Essential Worker" Paradox and Public Perception

One of the most poignant and widely discussed aspects of the pandemic's impact on gig work was the emergence of the "essential worker" paradox. As vast swathes of the traditional economy shut down, gig workers – particularly those in delivery, transportation, and informal care – became indispensable. They were the individuals ensuring food reached homes, prescriptions were delivered, vulnerable populations received basic support, and businesses could continue operating through online sales and delivery. Government officials, public health authorities, and the general public frequently lauded these workers as "essential," recognizing their critical role in enabling social distancing, maintaining economic activity.

However, this newfound recognition and 'essential' status for gig workers stood in stark contrast to their continued fundamental lack of basic employment rights, protections, and benefits. While traditionally classified essential workers in sectors like healthcare, emergency services, public transit, or utilities typically have access to crucial workplace safeguards such as paid sick leave, employer-sponsored health benefits, access to workers' compensation schemes for work-related injuries or illnesses, and the ability to engage in collective bargaining, gig workers deemed essential during the pandemic were largely denied these fundamental protections due to their independent contractor classification.



They risked their health daily by continuing to interact with the public, often in high-contact scenarios like deliveries or in-home care, yet lacked guaranteed paid sick leave if they contracted the virus or needed to self-isolate; they navigated potentially dangerous conditions without employer-provided safety training, essential equipment like PPE, or clear protocols; and they faced immediate and severe financial ruin if their work dried up or they were arbitrarily deactivated by the platform's algorithm or customer complaint, without access to traditional unemployment benefits like Employment Insurance (EI).

This profound and striking disconnect between widespread public recognition of their absolutely critical function in keeping society functioning during a crisis.

Primary Research

Chapter 4



Purpose of Primary Data Collection

The primary aim of conducting this survey was to gather first-hand data regarding the lived realities, socio-economic conditions, and working habits of gig economy workers in India. As the gig economy is revolutionizing the job market, especially in cities, information on actual challenges, preferences, and orientations of workers in the gig economy becomes crucial in order to inform effective and responsive policy interventions. Whereas secondary data and macro-level analysis provided in the past have been a general overview, they do not encompass fine detail that would be essential to grasp the complexities that face individual workers.

Our survey aims to complete the gap by collecting micro-level data on income trends, job security, social protection, and awareness of labor rights among gig workers.

This initial collection of data also serves to measure the extent to which existing labor policies are effective and identify the most critical areas where support systems may be lacking. Lastly, this approach contributes to a more grounded and human-centered understanding of how gig workers interact with the platforms they work on and the state policies meant to protect them.

Survey Design and Sampling Strategy

The survey was designed to gain detailed insights into the gig worker's experience in a range of work across the gig economy such as ride-hailing (e.g., Uber, Ola), food delivery (e.g., Swiggy, Zomato), domestic work (e.g., Urban Company), and delivery gigs for e-commerce. Since the gig economy is informal and on-the-move, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted to sample workers who are actively engaged on prominent service platforms and readily accessible in urban public spaces.

We chose to focus our fieldwork in the National Capital Territory of Delhi due to its high-density urban environment, high platform penetration, and high density of gig activity. Survey respondents were selected from high-footfall areas such as transport hubs, marketplaces, malls, and residential zones where workers typically operate. A total of 47 gig workers were interviewed for this survey. The sample aimed to reflect a reasonable cross-section of different types of gig occupations, levels of experience, and demographics.

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Through the use of direct interviews, we were able to ensure that the information we collected was not only contextual and valid but also allowed respondents to provide clarity and elaboration where necessary. This approach also proved appropriate to allow for workers with low digital or language literacy, giving a wider and more representative dataset. It also helped build better rapport with respondents, encouraging more open and honest sharing of experiences.

Questionnaire Design

The survey was carefully designed to gather extensive information pertaining to both the everyday life of gig workers and the general policy context of the gig economy in India. Based on the themes derived from our secondary data analysis and literature review, we selected four main thematic areas: demographic information, work type and choices, legal consciousness and rights, and platform regulation.

The survey combined both structured and open-ended questions to capture a wide range of data. The format was designed to balance quantitative measurability with qualitative depth, so that answers could be readily analyzed but still reflect nuanced views. We made sure the questions were clear and easy to understand, encouraging honest responses. Some sections also used follow-up questions based on initial responses to gather more specific insights. The survey was designed to provide a detailed and realistic understanding of gig workers' experiences and the broader environment they operate in.

Overall, the questionnaire consists of 15 brief but penetrating questions, selected to minimize survey fatigue and maximize clarity while still addressing several aspects of the gig economy. The structured design enables quantitative consolidation of information, and open-ended responses (e.g., "Other: Please specify") provide leeway to accommodate further inputs other than preselected choices. This ensures that less common or unexpected experiences are also captured. The dual strategy of this approach makes the survey both analytically sound and based on actual-life worker views, offering a balance between measurable data and personal narratives.

Here is a breakdown of each section and its rationale:

Demographic Information

This section collects essential background data that can later be used to segment the responses and identify patterns across age, gender, and educational qualifications. These variables are critical for:

Understanding workforce composition: Age groups can reflect generational trends in gig participation — for example, whether gig work is more attractive to younger individuals due to its flexibility or digital-first nature.

Gender analysis: Gender information enables us to gauge inclusivity in gig platforms and identify any differences in opportunities, income, or security.

Education level: This enables us to determine whether gig work is acting as a secondary employment route for less qualified workers or also appealing to highly educated workers who need flexible sources of income.

Work Type & Preferences

Income stability: This has a direct bearing on worker vulnerability. Although gig work may provide fast income, its dependability tends to be uncertain, particularly because of algorithmic determinations, demand patterns on platforms, or cyclical trends.

Access to benefits: A key policy-relevant question, this asks what kind of institutional support, if any, workers are gaining from the platforms -e.g., health or accident insurance. The lack of these benefits points to the need for intervention.

Primary concerns: This enables workers to express the most important issue that they are concerned about, providing a worker-perspective analysis of the most critical challenges in the gig economy. The findings here can be useful for crafting specific policy interventions.

This is the essence of the survey, collecting detailed data on the nature and intensity of gig work.

Type of work: By having respondents choose from a given list (ride-hailing, food delivery, freelancing, etc.), we hope to categorize gig workers by industry. Such classification is important for cross-platform comparison of challenges and advantages.

Length of gig work: This assists in monitoring levels of experience and career paths within gig work. For instance, those working for more than 3 years might have a more predictable routine or might have transitioned to gig work as a long-term career option.

Work involvement: It is crucial to comprehend whether a person is solely relying on gig employment or adding other sources of income. It helps in examining the sector's contribution to income diversification and as a prime source of employment.

Legal Awareness & Rights

This topic assesses the level of awareness gig workers have regarding current legal protections and government programs that apply to them.

Policy awareness: With measures such as the Code on Social Security (2020) that have provisions for gig and platform workers, this question gauges how much such policy initiatives have reached public awareness, particularly among the intended beneficiaries.

Labor law knowledge: This also probes whether workers know their rights under labor law — knowledge that is usually essential in avoiding exploitation and claiming fair treatment.

By pointing to gaps in understanding, this section gives guidance for enhancing policy messaging and outreach strategy.

Platform Regulations

These last questions center on the relationship between platform workers and their platforms, an arena that too often is hidden from view and without adequate monitoring.

Cases of unexpected wage reductions or deactivation: Platform work is significantly controlled by inscrutable algorithms and contractual adaptability that usually serve against the workers' interests. This question tries to measure how frequent such unexpected interruptions are.

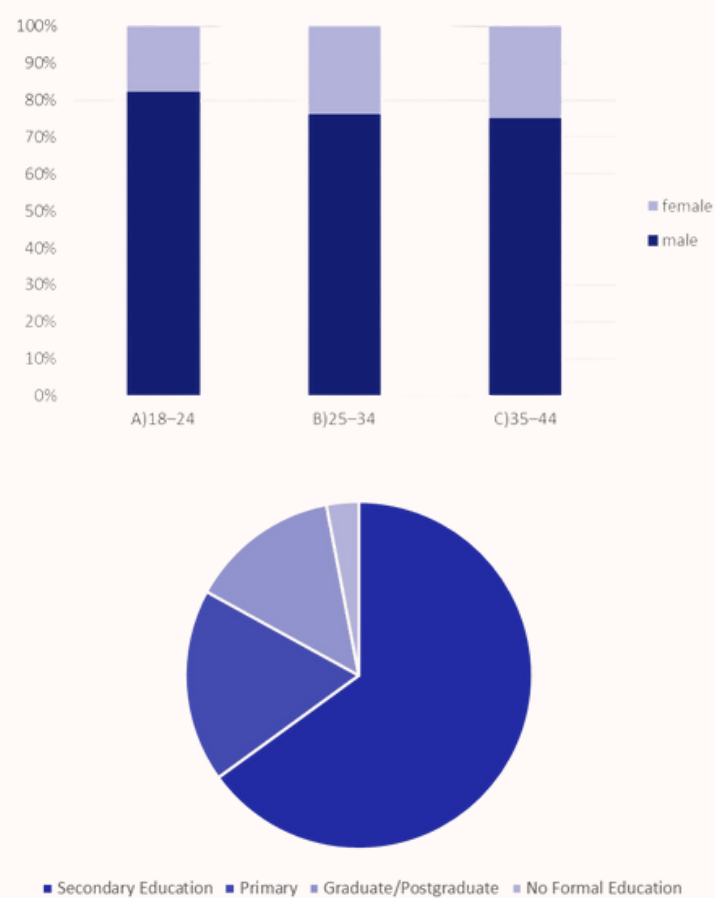
Grievance mechanisms: Having an understanding of whether workers have an effective and reliable mechanism to complain to the platform helps us assess institutional accountability. This is critical in considering the introduction of regulatory environments or labor unions for gig workers.

Number of platforms worked with: This helps understand whether workers are hedging risk by working across platforms, which may indicate income insecurity or lack of loyalty to a single platform due to poor conditions.

Analysis of Responses

Survey Demographics

The survey sample was predominantly male, with 86 percent of respondents identifying as male and 14 percent as female. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were relatively young. Forty-six percent were within the 18 to 24 years age group, while 42 percent were aged 25 to 34 years, and 12 percent were between 35 to 44 years. Education levels were generally modest; 65 percent of respondents had completed secondary education, 18 percent reported having only primary education, and 14 percent had attained graduate or postgraduate degrees. A small fraction, 3 percent, reported having no formal education at all.



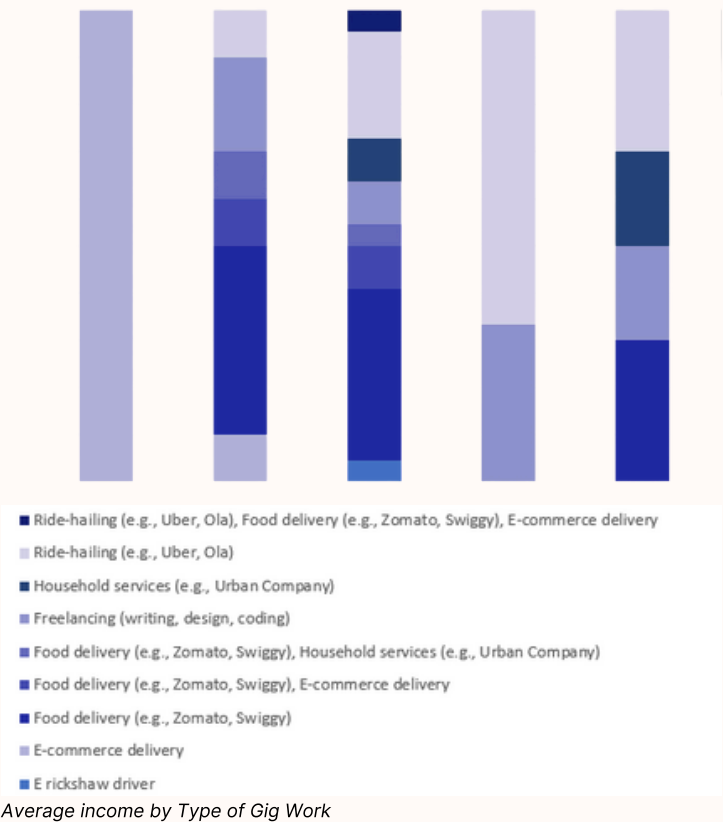
Work Type & Preferences

When it came to employment types, 52 percent of respondents reported working full time, while 30 percent were engaged in part-time work. Another 16 percent worked full time while pursuing other supplementary activities, and a small group, 2 percent, worked on a flexible or occasional basis. Income levels varied notably with employment type. Most full-time workers reported earning between ₹10,000 and ₹20,000 per month, with a few reaching into the ₹20,000 to ₹40,000 range. Part-time workers, on the other hand, were largely concentrated in the ₹5,000 to ₹10,000 range, reflecting the fewer hours and limited earning opportunities available to them.

Those balancing full-time work with side gigs earned slightly more, with incomes spread between ₹10,000 to ₹20,000 and ₹20,000 to ₹40,000, suggesting that income diversification can offer somewhat greater stability and earning potential.

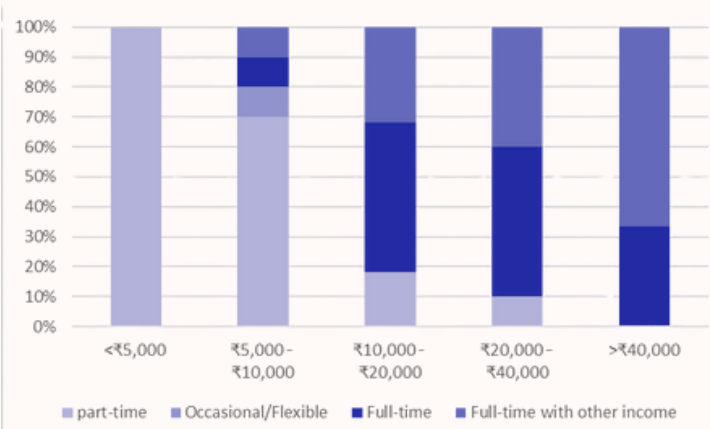
A closer look at sector-specific incomes revealed some patterns. Workers in ride-hailing services typically earned in the ₹10,000 to ₹20,000 range, though top performers occasionally reached ₹20,000 to ₹40,000, particularly during peak seasons. Delivery workers, particularly those involved in food and parcel deliveries, tended to cluster in the ₹5,000 to ₹15,000 range, reflecting fluctuations in order volumes.

Freelancers operating in fields like content creation and digital services reported highly variable incomes, ranging from ₹5,000 to over ₹40,000 monthly, depending heavily on the number and size of projects they secured. Workers involved in miscellaneous gig activities such as home repairs, housekeeping, or tutoring generally reported lower earnings, typically around ₹5,000 to ₹10,000 per month.



Income instability was a major concern for the surveyed workforce. A striking 93 percent of respondents reported significant fluctuations in their monthly earnings. These fluctuations were attributed to factors like seasonal demand changes,

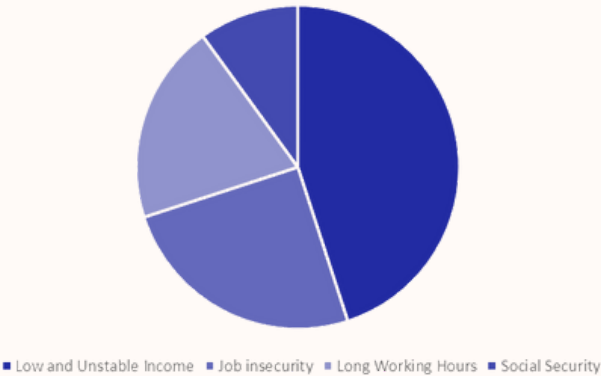
increased worker competition, unpredictable shifts in platform algorithms, and volatile bonus structures. For workers, this instability translated into chronic financial insecurity, often forcing them to work long hours just to maintain a basic standard of living and making it difficult to plan for future expenses or emergencies.



Average income by Level of Involvement

Access to social protections was similarly limited. Only 35 percent of respondents reported having access to benefits such as accident insurance, health coverage, or paid leave, while a significant 65 percent operated without any form of safety net. This lack of protection left workers vulnerable to financial shocks. Even minor accidents or illnesses could result in major setbacks, and the absence of paid leave meant any downtime had an immediate impact on earnings. In contrast, traditional employees typically receive employer-sponsored insurance, sick leave, provident fund contributions, and severance protections, offering a far greater degree of financial security and stability.

When asked about their biggest concerns, 45 percent of respondents cited low and unstable income, followed by job insecurity at 25 percent, long working hours at 20 percent, and lack of social security at 10 percent. Sector-specific concerns varied slightly. Delivery workers and ride-hailing drivers primarily highlighted income volatility and long hours, while freelancers were more concerned about inconsistent work opportunities and the absence of retirement benefits. Overall, the findings underline that while gig work offers flexibility and quick earning opportunities, it often comes with instability, inadequate protections, and a high level of financial risk compared to traditional employment models.

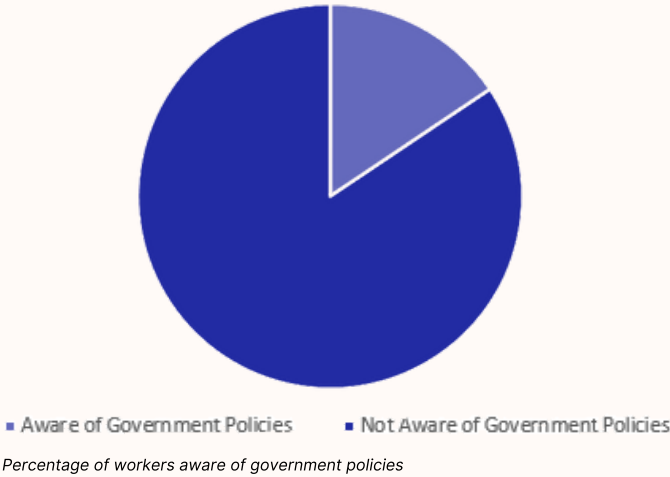


Biggest Area of Concern for Gig Workers

Legal Awareness & Rights

In recent years, Indian policymakers have introduced regulations such as the Code on Social Security 2020, aimed at formally recognizing gig and platform workers and extending social security benefits to them. However, ground-level awareness of these rights remains critically low. According to survey findings, only 14.9 percent of respondents were aware of any government policies related to gig work, leaving an overwhelming 85.1 percent unaware. Similarly, just 17 percent reported any awareness of applicable labor laws. Even among those who had heard of these regulations, understanding was often superficial, with very few able to clearly articulate the protections available or the processes for claiming them.

This widespread lack of awareness presents major challenges. For workers, it limits their ability to advocate for basic rights or demand accountability from platforms. For the government, low legal literacy complicates the enforcement of worker protections, making it harder to hold companies accountable or to intervene effectively in cases of exploitation. As a result, the benefits and protections intended for gig workers often remain out of reach, further entrenching their vulnerability.



Platform Regulations

The regulatory environment across gig sectors remains fragmented and inconsistent. Survey responses revealed that 55.3 percent of workers had faced sudden pay cuts or deactivations, often without prior notice or an opportunity to appeal. This highlights how platforms maintain strict operational control over workers without offering the legal benefits typically associated with employment.

Moreover, only 27.7 percent of respondents reported having access to an effective grievance mechanism, indicating that most workers had little or no support when disputes or issues arose. Freelancers and those involved in informal task-based work were particularly vulnerable, often treated solely as independent contractors with no recourse for delayed payments, unfair terminations, or exploitative client behavior.

Workers in sectors like delivery and ride-hailing also faced sudden shifts in platform policies, such as changes in payment structures or deactivation criteria, with limited ability to challenge these decisions.

Conclusion

The findings of this survey paint a complex picture of the gig economy landscape in India. While gig work offers flexibility, rapid entry into the workforce, and immediate earning opportunities, it is also marked by widespread precarity. Income instability is a persistent reality for the vast majority of workers, exacerbated by limited access to social protections and benefits that could otherwise provide a safety net during periods of financial distress.

Demographically, the workforce remains predominantly young and male, with modest educational backgrounds, highlighting both the accessibility of gig work and the potential barriers to more stable, traditional employment avenues. Income patterns show that although certain segments, such as high-performing freelancers or ride-hailing drivers during peak seasons, may achieve moderate earnings. The skewed nature of the demographics of the workforce is further a reflection of the nature of India's gig work; it is less geared towards freelance oriented remote gig-work, rather, it lays heavy focus on manual gig-work, the likes of which is usually carried out by young male workers.


Legal awareness among gig workers remains alarmingly low, limiting their ability to claim rights and protections already enshrined in policy frameworks like the Code on Social Security 2020. This gap not only hampers individual advocacy but also weakens the government's ability to enforce labor standards and ensure fair treatment within the platform economy.

Moreover, the fragmented regulatory environment means that many workers remain exposed to sudden changes in platform policies, pay cuts, deactivations, and disputes without adequate grievance mechanisms. This leaves workers heavily dependent on platform terms and conditions, often without meaningful bargaining power or institutional support. The majority of workers operate within low to moderate income brackets with significant monthly fluctuations. As is evident by the graphs, the work remains fickle and volatile. The unstable and unpredictable nature of the work further raises concern about the social implications of engaging in the gig-economy because working here often forbids the benefits of social security for workers.

“Working in food delivery gives me flexibility, but it also means living with a lot of uncertainty. Some days I make enough to get by, other days I barely cover my fuel costs. I love the freedom, but I wish there was more stability and support.”

-Food delivery partner, Delhi





Case Studies

Chapter 5

Introduction: Case Studies

To provide a comprehensive and comparative perspective on the gig economy and its multifaceted implications, this section delves into detailed case studies from three diverse yet economically advanced countries: Canada, China, and the United Kingdom. Each country represents a different regulatory stance and cultural attitude toward gig work, offering contrasting lessons in how platform-based employment is managed, protected, and perceived. These international experiences help contextualize India's rapidly evolving gig economy and provide guidance for policy innovation and reform.

Canada: Focus on Legal Classification and Provincial Autonomy

Canada's gig economy has grown steadily, particularly in urban centers like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. The Canadian model is characterized by a federated approach, where labor laws and protections vary significantly by province. In jurisdictions such as Ontario and British Columbia, there have been active debates around reclassifying gig workers as "dependent contractors," a middle ground between employees and independent contractors. This classification acknowledges platform control while stopping short of full employee benefits.

While Canada has strong social safety nets, gig workers often fall through the cracks due to contribution-based access. Reforms like Ontario's "Working for Workers Act" (2022) have introduced minimum wage guarantees for app-based couriers, as well as mandates for algorithm transparency. However, unionization remains a challenge due to fragmented workforces and platform resistance.

China: Algorithmic Control and Emerging Worker Recognition

China's gig economy is the largest in the world by workforce size, with tens of millions engaged in platform-mediated work. Its regulatory framework has recently evolved to address rising concerns over algorithmic exploitation and misclassification. Court rulings in 2024 established the principle of "dominant labor management," under which workers who are closely monitored and managed by platforms are increasingly being recognized as *de facto* employees.

Despite this progress, protections remain uneven across sectors, especially for migrant and informal workers in construction or domestic services. While new policies have introduced minimum wage floors and holiday pay, enforcement remains inconsistent, and many platforms evade responsibility by outsourcing labor.

United Kingdom: Legal Activism and Court-Driven Reform

The UK has been at the forefront of legal activism around gig work, driven by landmark judicial decisions. Most notably, the 2021 UK Supreme Court ruling on Uber held that drivers were "workers," a legal category entitling them to minimum wage, paid leave, and rest breaks—though not full employment benefits. This case sparked broader regulatory debates and led to new requirements around data transparency and algorithmic accountability.

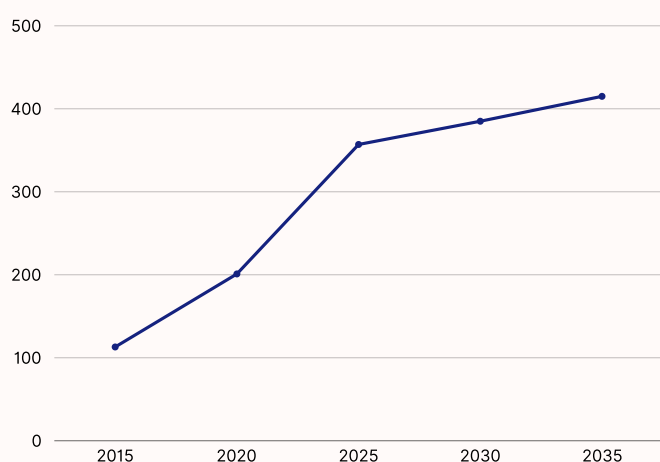
The UK also boasts relatively high union activity within the gig sector. Organizations like the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) have led successful campaigns for platform workers, from cyclists to cleaners. Nonetheless, precariousness remains an issue, particularly for migrant workers and those in lower-paying, less-visible roles.

By incorporating these global lessons and adapting them to India's unique socio-economic landscape, policymakers can lay the groundwork for a gig economy that is inclusive, innovative, and rights-based. This comparative analysis reinforces that equitable reform is not only possible—it is essential for ensuring the dignity and resilience of one of the most dynamic labor forces in the world.



The Gig Economy in China

In recent years, China's gig economy has emerged as a powerful force reshaping the contours of its labor market, economic structures, and social contract. Driven by rapid digitalization, the proliferation of mobile platforms, and shifting employment preferences among the youth, this sector encompasses a wide spectrum of informal, flexible, and task-based jobs—from ride-hailing and food delivery to freelance programming and online tutoring. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, over 200 million people in China were engaged in flexible employment as of 2023, highlighting the sector's significance in sustaining livelihoods and absorbing labor amidst structural economic transitions.



Jobs created by the Gig Economy in China(in millions, along with predicted figures)

Over the past decade, China's gig economy has undergone rapid expansion, becoming a defining feature of its urban labor landscape. Spurred by the proliferation of digital platforms and the evolving demands of a flexible workforce, this sector now accounts for a significant share of urban employment, ranging from food delivery and ride-hailing to domestic services and construction gigs. However, beneath this surface of innovation and adaptability lies a complex and often precarious world of informal labor, fragmented protections, and regulatory gray zones.

In 2024, China's regulatory approach took a pivotal turn with the Supreme People's Court introducing the framework of dominant labor management—a principle that prioritizes the actual degree of control platforms exercise over workers' schedules, compensation, and job autonomy over the presence of formal contracts. This framework has provided long-needed legal recognition for platform-dependent workers, particularly in sectors like logistics and transport, yet left many others, such as construction and manual laborers, outside its protective reach.



Legal Recognition of Gig-Workers

China's regulatory approach to gig work hinges on the principle of "dominant labor management," which assesses the degree of control platforms exert over workers' tasks, schedules, and earnings rather than relying on formal contracts. This framework, established through a series of 2024 Supreme People's Court rulings, has provided clarity for platform-based roles in food delivery and ride-hailing. For instance, delivery drivers subjected to algorithmic performance metrics and income penalties for delays are increasingly recognized as *de facto* employees entitled to labor protections.

However, protections remain uneven across sectors. While platform workers in logistics and domestic services benefit from recent guidelines mandating reasonable workloads and payment transparency, informal laborers in construction and manual trades lack comparable safeguards. These workers—often migrants employed through subcontracting arrangements—fall outside the scope of platform economy regulations, leaving them vulnerable to wage theft and unsafe conditions.

China's social security system, though legally universal, excludes many gig workers due to administrative fragmentation and reliance on employer contributions. Only 23% of gig workers participate in pension or health insurance schemes, primarily those formally classified as employees by platforms. The Ministry of Human Resources' 2024 guidelines attempted to bridge this gap by requiring platforms to extend minimum wage guarantees and holiday pay premiums, yet implementation remains inconsistent. For example, ride-hailing drivers frequently report being misclassified as independent contractors to avoid social security obligations, despite working full-time hours under platform supervision.

Government oversight is hampered by limited resources and jurisdictional ambiguities. While prosecutors handled 420,000 labor disputes involving gig workers between 2019 and 2024, wage recovery remains problematic. A 2023 Supreme People's Procuratorate report revealed that 68% of wage theft cases involved delays exceeding six months.

Worker Demographics

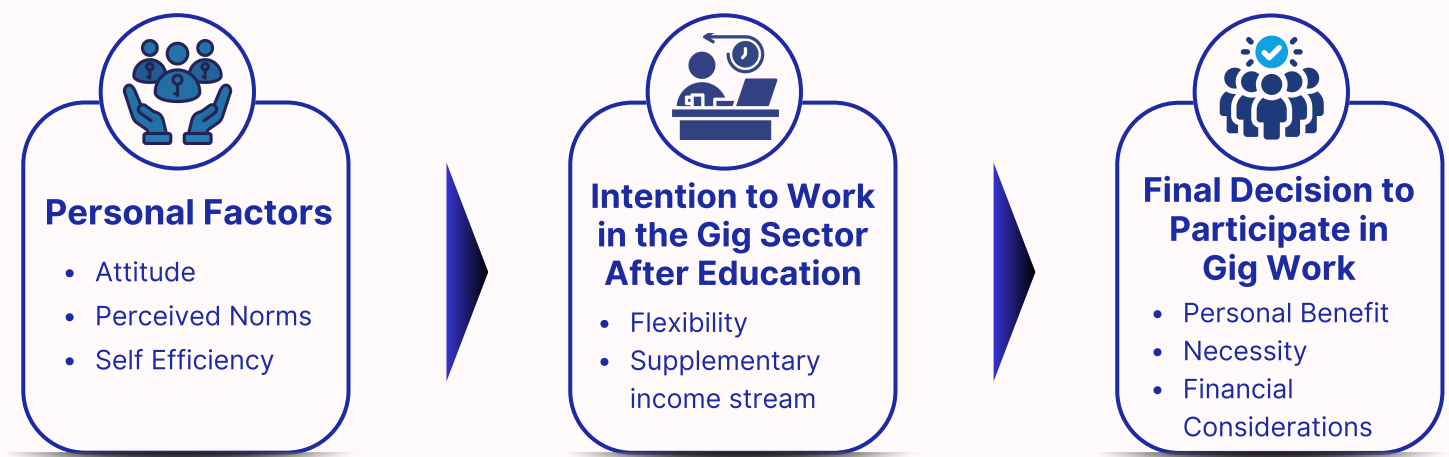
Demographic Composition

- **Gender:** Males dominate high-earning sectors (78% in ride-hailing), while women comprise 68% of domestic gig roles, earning 22% less.
- **Migration:** Rural migrants account for 62% of food delivery riders in Tier-1 cities, often lacking urban hukou and access to public services.
- **Education:** 22% of gig workers hold college degrees—double the 2015 figure—but earn only 8% more than high school graduates due to sectoral pay ceilings.

Motivation for Gig-Work

- Motivations:**
- Flexibility is a key draw for students, caregivers, or semi-retired workers.
 - Economic compulsion and lack of alternatives drive most participation, especially among middle-aged former factory or retail workers.
 - Some workers see gig work as a transitional phase, while others, especially delivery riders and construction laborers-develop long-term dependence due to consistent but unstable income.

Factors Affecting the Decision to Participate in Gig Work



Earnings, Job Security & Vulnerability

Income Instability and Payment Structures

Earnings vary widely by sector: food delivery riders average ¥4,500–¥6,000 monthly (\$630–\$840), while construction gig workers earn ¥200–¥300 daily (\$28–\$42) with no off-day compensation. Platform algorithms exacerbate instability through dynamic pricing; a 2024 study found that ride-hailing drivers’ hourly income fluctuates by up to 40% based on demand surges and commission rates. Piece-rate payment systems, common in logistics, often lead to unpaid overtime, with 32% of couriers working over 12 hours daily to meet targets.

1. Sector-Based Variations

Earnings differ widely depending on the nature of the gig. Delivery riders and ride-hailing drivers typically earn through per-task or commission-based systems, which fluctuate daily. Construction and manual laborers, on the other hand, are often paid in cash on a daily or weekly basis, with little to no transparency around deductions or delays.

2. Platform Algorithms and Dynamic Pay

For app-based work, income is shaped by platform-controlled pricing algorithms. For example, ride-hailing drivers may earn more during peak hours or bad weather, but this is unpredictable and out of their control. Platforms can change commission rates or incentives without notice, leaving workers with little clarity about how their earnings are calculated. This lack of transparency erodes trust and makes long-term financial planning difficult.

3. Piece-Rate and Commission Models

Many workers are paid per order or task, rather than by the hour. While this can offer flexibility, it often leads to unpaid overtime. Delivery drivers, for instance, must meet tight deadlines and cover their own fuel, data, and maintenance costs, meaning that actual take-home pay can be far lower than it appears. Workers are incentivized to complete more tasks to earn a livable wage, which often results in excessive hours.

4. Delayed or Denied Payments

Payment delays and wage theft remain persistent issues.

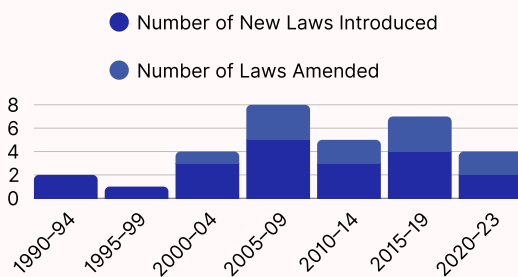
Worker Protections and Wellbeing

Workplace Risks

Gig workers, particularly in industries such as construction and manual labor, experience serious workplace risks such as accidents and insufficient safety standards. The unstable nature of gig work can translate into both physical and emotional health issues. The lack of employer-sponsored health benefits aggravates these problems, restricting workers' access to essential healthcare services.

Gig workers tend to have informal means of resolving disputes. Even while their workplaces may not be subject to traditional labor protections, some jurisdictions are experimenting with novel structures to overcome these obstacles. As an illustration, updates to the Canada Labour Code to include gig workers could extend to the entire federally regulated workforce and redefine collective voice channels.

Landscape of Labour Laws in China



Health Impacts

High Physical Risks:

- Delivery workers and construction gig workers face frequent accidents, including traffic injuries and falls, due to long hours and pressure to meet deadlines.
- Lack of mandatory occupational safety training for platform workers.

Limited Health Insurance Coverage:

- Most platform gig workers are not enrolled in the urban employee health insurance system.
- Workers often need to buy private insurance at their own expense, which many can't afford.

Mental Health Struggles:

- Long working hours, algorithmic surveillance (e.g., delivery time tracking), and customer rating pressures lead to high stress, anxiety, and depression.
- A 2022 survey showed over 70% of food delivery riders reported frequent emotional stress.

No Paid Sick Leave:

- Platform workers who fall ill lose income immediately as there is no provision for paid medical leave.
- Many continue working through illness to avoid financial loss.
- This further inhibits the ability of workers to provide for their families effectively and

Public Perception and Cultural Attitudes

Perception of Types of Gig Work

Public perception of gig work in China is deeply ambivalent, reflecting broader cultural and economic transitions. On one hand, digital platform work is increasingly normalized as a legitimate source of income.

- Tech-embedded gig roles such as livestreaming, digital marketing gigs, or influencer work are often seen as “modern,” aspirational jobs, especially among younger, educated urban populations.
- Manual labor-intensive roles-like food delivery, sanitation, or warehouse packing, carry significant stigma. Workers are often labeled with terms like “waimai xiaoge” (takeout delivery boy), implying menial status despite the essential nature of their work.
- Migrant identity compounds stigma. Many gig workers in cities are rural migrants without local hukou (residency permits), further marginalizing them socially and economically.

- Despite public rhetoric framing gig work as a “flexible opportunity” or “side hustle,” for many workers, it has become a long-term livelihood. Still, societal attitudes often fail to reflect this shift.
- Family and peer perceptions often treat gig work as a phase-a fallback until a “real job” comes along. This is particularly pronounced for college-educated workers who find themselves unable to break into the formal job market.
- For women in domestic care roles, the perception of their labor as “natural” caregiving rather than skilled work further undermines recognition and bargaining power.
- The perception of gig work in China is neither static nor homogeneous. As the sector matures, the clash between economic necessity, technological transformation, and cultural values is becoming increasingly visible. Ensuring dignity for gig workers will require not only legal reforms, but a broader societal reckoning with the value and visibility of labor in the digital age. Thus, there is a stark difference in how gig work is perceived in the Chinese cultural ethos.

Gig Economy in Canada

Over the past decade, the gig economy has become an increasingly prominent feature of Canada's labor market. Enabled by digital platforms like Uber, SkipTheDishes, Upwork, and TaskRabbit, gig work offers short-term, flexible employment opportunities across a variety of sectors, including transportation, food delivery, freelance services, and home-based tasks. This model has appealed to a growing number of Canadians seeking greater autonomy over their schedules and diversified income streams, particularly among students, immigrants, and workers impacted by economic shifts.

However, the rapid growth of gig work has also exposed significant challenges. Issues such as lack of job security, absence of employer-sponsored benefits, unpredictable incomes, and unclear legal protections have raised concerns among policymakers, labor organizations, and workers themselves. Provinces like Ontario and British Columbia have begun exploring legislative frameworks to better regulate gig work and safeguard worker rights, reflecting a broader debate on how to balance flexibility with fairness in the evolving economy.

The gig work economy by its very nature is incredibly multifaceted, covering a broad range of employment types and structures. However, a notable point is that Canada's gig work has an orientation towards technology related gig roles, as opposed to manual gig work.

This case study delves into the multifaceted rise of the gig economy in Canada, examining the technological, economic, and social forces that have fueled its rapid expansion. It investigates the motivations that draw workers into gig roles -such as the need for flexible schedules, supplementary income, and greater autonomy- while also highlighting the structural vulnerabilities they face, including income instability, lack of health benefits, and limited legal protections.



By centering the lived experiences of gig workers across various platforms and industries, the study provides critical insights into the opportunities and hardships embedded within this new model of work. Additionally, it evaluates the regulatory efforts currently underway at both provincial and federal levels, assessing how governments, courts, and advocacy groups are responding to the challenges of precarious employment.

Legal Recognition of Gig Workers

Gig workers in Canada are generally classified as independent contractors rather than employees, which means they are traditionally exempt from many standard employment protections such as minimum wage guarantees, overtime pay, unemployment benefits, and access to workplace safety regulations. This classification has been a major point of contention, as it leaves many gig workers without the financial security and social protections afforded to traditional employees, despite often working under conditions that mirror those of dependent employment. Recognizing these gaps, recent legislative efforts have aimed to address the unique vulnerabilities faced by gig workers.

Notably, the Ontario Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act, 2022, set to come into effect on July 1, 2025, introduces a set of minimum rights and protections specifically tailored for workers engaged through digital platforms. This new law mandates entitlements such as a guaranteed minimum wage for "engaged time" (the period when workers are actively performing tasks), enhanced transparency around how digital platforms assign work and determine payment structures. The sheer variety of gig-work in Canada, from "choice" gig-work to "compulsion" gig-work, curating a comprehensive legal landscape for the same remains a precarious task.

The Ontario Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act marks a significant policy shift by recognizing that while gig work offers flexibility, it also creates an unequal power dynamic between platforms and workers that needs to be regulated. It reflects a growing acknowledgment among policymakers that traditional categories of "employee" and "independent contractor" no longer fully capture the realities of modern work relationships. Moreover, Ontario's move is likely to set an important precedent for other provinces and territories across Canada, where similar concerns about worker protections in the gig economy are gaining traction.

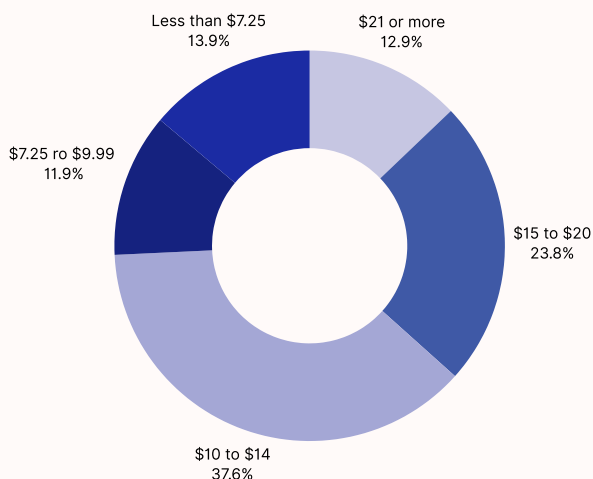
Going forward, the Act could serve as a model for balancing the flexibility that gig work offers with stronger social protections, influencing future labor reforms both within Canada and internationally. It also signals the start of a broader conversation about how to modernize labor rights in an economy increasingly shaped by technology, non-standard work arrangements, and shifting definitions of what it means to have "employment." Defining employment in and of itself is a precarious task, which has resulted in legal ambiguities and loopholes-as is evident by the many discrepancies in legislation.

Worker Demographics

Demographic Composition

- **Gender:** Males dominate app-based transportation and delivery roles (around 70%), while women are more concentrated in caregiving gigs, often facing a 20–25% earnings gap compared to male gig workers.
- **Migration:** Immigrants make up a significant share of Canada's gig workforce, with recent newcomers (arrived within 10 years) representing over 40% of rideshare and delivery workers, frequently working without access to full employment benefits or strong labor protections.
- **Education:** Approximately 34% of Canadian gig workers have a college or university degree.

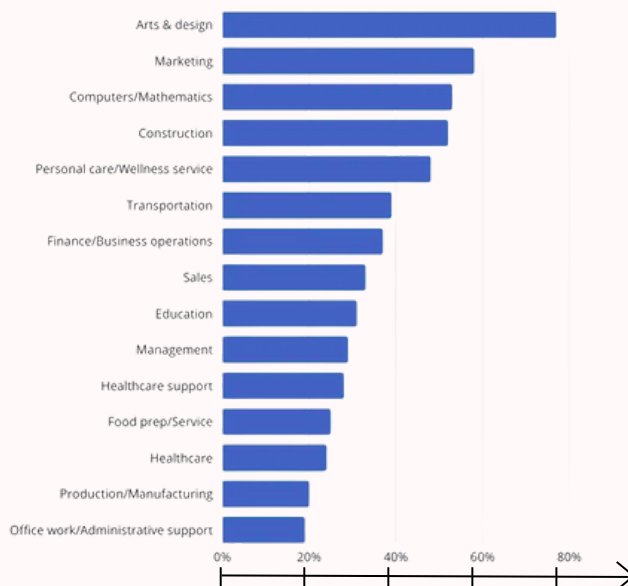
Hourly wages of Gig Workers



Motivation for Gig-Work

- **Supplementary Income:** Opportunity to earn extra money alongside full-time jobs or studies.
- **Ease of Entry:** Low barriers to entry with minimal formal qualifications or experience needed.
- **Autonomy:** Preference for independent work over traditional employer-employee relationships.
- **Limited Alternatives:** Lack of access to stable, full-time employment, especially for immigrants and young workers

% of Freelancers by Industry



Earnings, Job Security & Vulnerability

Income Instability and Payment Structures

- **Income Stability:** Gig workers tend to experience income instability based on the type of per-task or commission-based payment systems. This instability has the potential to create financial insecurity, particularly if compounded by the absence of employee benefits.
- **Wage Disparities:** There are significant wage disparities between gig workers and regular employees, with gig workers tending to earn lower pay and not enjoying benefits like pensions and health insurance.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** Unfixed income, possibility of wage theft, and slow payments increase the economic vulnerability of gig workers. Economic slowdowns and innovation in automation are also threats to the stability of gig work.

Freelance gig workers, such as those on Upwork or Fiverr, face their own payment challenges: service fees can reach 20% of each transaction, and payment is often contingent on client approval.

Income instability is a defining feature of gig work in Canada. According to Statistics Canada's 2022 Labor Force Survey supplement, nearly 55% of gig workers reported fluctuating weekly earnings, compared to only 18% of traditional employees. The median monthly income for gig workers was approximately CAD 1,150, significantly lower than the national median of CAD 4,200 for full-time employees. Additionally, about 37% of gig workers stated that their income varied by more than 25% from month to month, making financial planning and saving extremely difficult.

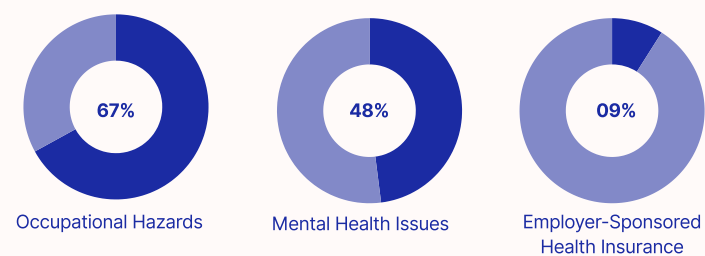
Payment structures in the gig economy are typically task-based, and compensation models vary widely across platforms. In ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft, drivers earn a base fare plus a per-kilometer and per-minute rate, but platform commissions can take up to 25–30% of the total fare. In food delivery services such as DoorDash and Uber Eats, workers are usually paid per delivery.

Worker Protections and Wellbeing

Workplace Risks

Delivery riders face acute occupational hazards, accounting for 67% of gig worker injuries. Shanghai reported 1.2 traffic accidents per rider annually, with 14% resulting in permanent disability. Mental health challenges are pervasive: 48% of platform workers exhibit anxiety symptoms, linked to real-time performance monitoring and income unpredictability.

Challenges Faced by Gig Workers



Further, Only 9% of gig workers have employer-sponsored health insurance, forcing 63% to pay out-of-pocket for injuries. Legal recourse is hindered by high costs and procedural complexity. These figures highlight the vast multitude of factors that are involved in determining the quality of life of gig workers, highlighting the fact that several parameters go into establishing worker satisfaction and happiness.

Health Impacts

The financial unpredictability and precarious working conditions in the gig economy are closely linked to negative health outcomes.

A 2023 survey by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that 61% of gig workers reported experiencing moderate to high levels of stress related to income insecurity.

Mental health impacts are particularly pronounced among full-time gig workers, with nearly 1 in 3 reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression attributed to unstable earnings and lack of benefits like paid sick leave. Physical health concerns are also widespread: 45% of delivery drivers reported suffering from musculoskeletal issues, such as back and knee pain, due to long hours spent riding or driving.

Furthermore, the absence of employer-sponsored health insurance means that nearly 70% of Canadian gig workers pay for medical expenses out-of-pocket or avoid seeking medical care altogether, exacerbating long-term health risks. COVID-19 further highlighted these vulnerabilities, as many gig workers were classified as “essential” but lacked access to protective measures, paid sick leave, or financial support during illness.

Public Perception and Cultural Attitudes

Perception of Types of Gig Work

Public and worker perceptions of gig work in Canada vary significantly depending on the sector, platform, and nature of tasks involved. Generally, highly skilled freelance work, such as consulting, graphic design, IT services, and writing, is viewed more positively, often associated with professionalism, autonomy, and entrepreneurial ambition. According to a 2023 Environics Research survey, 68% of Canadians perceive high-skill gig work as a “legitimate and respected” form of employment. Workers engaged in these fields report higher job satisfaction, with 72% citing autonomy and creative control as major advantages. In contrast, low-skill, app-mediated gig work- such as food delivery, ridesharing, and warehouse tasks-is perceived as more precarious and less prestigious. About 59% of Canadians view platform-based delivery and transportation gigs as “temporary” or “stopgap” solutions rather than sustainable long-term employment. Among workers themselves, 64% of rideshare and delivery drivers described their work as “unstable” or “unpredictable”.

Generation Wise Perception:

- Younger Canadians (aged 18–34) are more likely to view gig work - even low-wage roles - as flexible and a viable income strategy (54% positive perception).
- Older Canadians (aged 55+) overwhelmingly view gig work as insecure and inferior to traditional employment (71% negative perception).

Immigrant perceptions:

- Immigrant communities are generally more accepting of gig work due to barriers in accessing conventional labor markets.
- However, many express concerns over long-term financial stability and potential exploitation.

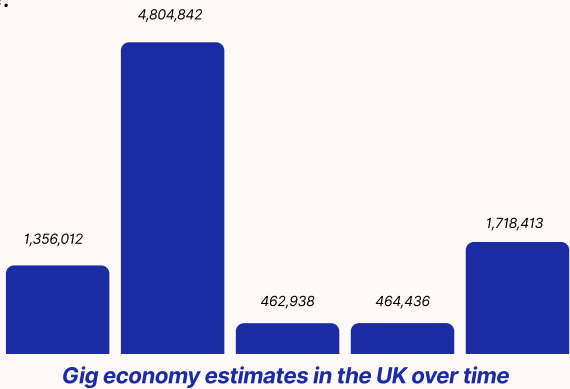
Overall public attitudes:

- The gig economy is increasingly recognized as a permanent feature of Canada’s labor market.
- These perceptions influence how gig workers are treated socially, economically, and politically.

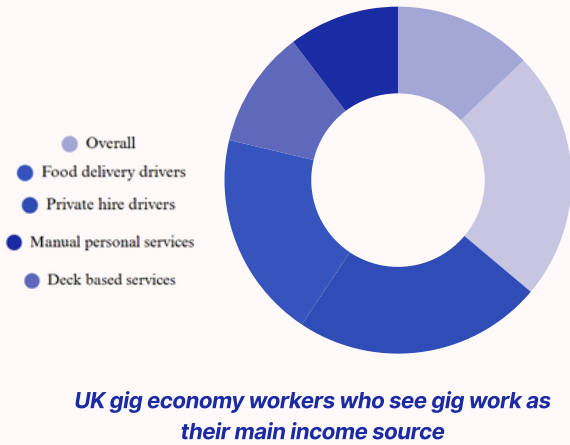
Gig Economy in United Kingdom

The UK's gig economy has experienced explosive and revolutionary expansion over the past few years, with an estimated 4.4 million people-about 13% of the country's workforce-involved in some aspect of gig employment. Facilitated by online platforms like Uber, Deliveroo, and TaskRabbit, this industry covers a broad range of services ranging from ride-hailing and takeaway delivery to freelance writing, design, and house maintenance. Its popularity is due to its flexibility, ease of entry, and the opportunity to earn additional or full-time income on one's own time.

This style of work has been particularly popular with younger populations and city dwellers, who are attracted to the independence it offers. But although gig work brings autonomy and flexibility, it carries a heavy cost—i.e., irregular pay, no job security, and limited access to the more familiar features of traditional employment, such as pensions, sick pay, or annual leave.



These issues have created unprecedented public scrutiny and legal challenge, compelling the UK to reconsider its labour laws in order to accommodate more closely the conditions of contemporary, platform-based work. The gig economy's growth has been propelled by digital platforms such as Uber, Deliveroo, and TaskRabbit, which connect consumers with workers in real-time. In 2018, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) estimated that 4.8% of the UK population had participated in gig work. Recent polling indicates this figure has risen to 7%, equating to approximately 4.4 million people. The sector contributes around £25 billion to the UK's GDP, accounting for just over 1% of the economy. Projections suggest that, with an annual growth rate of 18%, the gig economy could double in size to approximately £60 billion by 2026.



Legal Recognition of Gig-Workers

The UK's attempts to lawfully acknowledge gig workers have come a long way in the last few years, mainly thanks to high-profile court fights. Although platform firms have long declared gig workers self-employed in order to keep expenses low, the courts have continually dismissed this characterization. In *Uber BV v Aslam* (2021), the UK Supreme Court emphasized that Uber drivers are employees and not independent contractors. The ruling also brought to light the fact that Uber has considerable control over drivers' work conditions, such as prices, tasks, and performance tracking. Hence, the drivers were deemed to be economically dependent on Uber, which rendered the "self-employment" label inaccurate.

Likewise, in *Pimlico Plumbers v Smith* (2018), the court upheld that calling workers independent contractors in contracts does not exempt business firms from their obligations. The particular plumber was revealed to have been under intense management by Pimlico, with strict conditions around when and in what way he could operate, even though officially "self-employed." Such judgments have opened the door for thousands of workers to contest their worker status on numerous gig platforms, including Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Amazon Flex.

To counter the widening disparity between legal categorization and platform behavior, the UK government launched legislative proposals such as the Good Work Plan (2018) and the forthcoming Employment Rights Bill (2025). The Good Work Plan aimed to enhance transparency by mandating written contracts specifying employment rights from day one and granting employees the right to request more secure working hours. At the same time, the Employment Rights Bill seeks to further discourage exploitative tactics by prohibiting zero-hour contracts and broadening cover for unfair dismissal and sick pay. Even with these actions, critics say legal wins have not yet resulted in mass enforcement, with many gig workers remaining exposed to wage theft and misclassification.



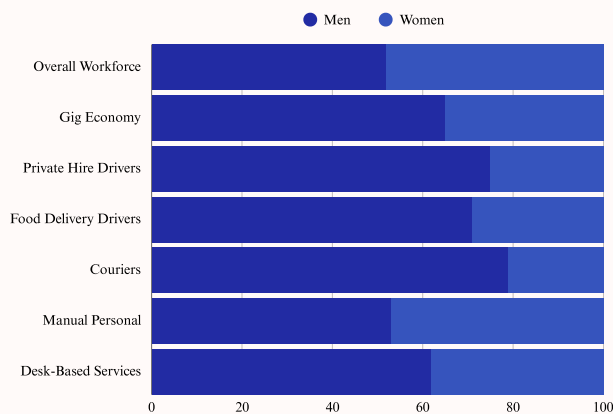
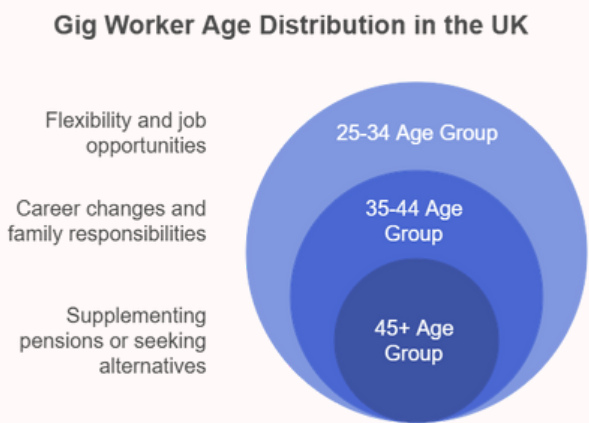
Worker Demographics

Demographic Composition of the Gig Workforce

- Following are the broad contours of the gig workforce-
- Young adults under 35, particularly university students, new graduates, and part-time workers.
 - Men dominate transport and logistics roles like food delivery and ride-hailing.
 - Women are more active in online freelance work such as writing, tutoring, and graphic design.
 - Educated professionals are engaged in skilled gig sectors like IT, marketing, and consulting

While many engage in gig work to supplement income, a growing share rely on it full-time due to limited opportunities in the traditional job market.

Recent data also shows a higher concentration of ethnic minorities and migrant workers in the UK gig workforce. According to a 2023 report by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), over a third of food delivery and ride-hailing workers are from ethnic minority backgrounds, compared to just 14% in the overall workforce. Furthermore, although younger adults are common, the age range is more diverse than expected—only 10% of gig workers are aged 16–24, while a substantial proportion are in the 35–49 age group, often engaging in gig work after leaving formal employment. These insights challenge the perception of gig work as a youth-dominated side hustle, revealing instead a multi-generational, demographically varied workforce engaged in both necessity- and opportunity-driven gig employment.



Earnings, Job Security & Vulnerability

Worker Compensation Trends

Most gig economy workers in the UK experience considerable income volatility. For example, delivery drivers have complained of earning only £2 per hour when taking into account unpaid waiting time and other delays, which is considerably below the national minimum wage. A University of Bristol study determined that more than half of gig workers are paid less than the minimum wage, which is £8.97 hourly compared to the then-minimum wage of £9.50. The difference is often accounted for by periods of unpaid waiting between tasks and expenses associated with their labor, including fuel costs and maintenance of their vehicle. Research by the Oxford Internet Institute found that only 2 out of 11 major UK gig platforms guarantee workers the national minimum wage. Most platforms don't account for expenses, leading to widespread income insecurity.

Algorithmic Management

The availability of tasks, earnings, and performance ratings of gig workers is largely controlled by secret algorithms.

They may trigger unexpected deactivations, downward movement in rating, or blocking from receiving tasks with no intelligible reasons or avenues for review. These algorithmic management processes exacerbate unpredictability and the perception of non-control over work, which amplifies stress and employment insecurity for gig workers.

Employment Stability and Security

The prevalence of zero-hours contracts in the UK gig economy provides workers with no minimum level of guaranteed income, leaving them extremely susceptible to the vicissitudes of demand. In the region of 1.1 million UK workers were on zero-hours contracts as of early 2024, with youth, women, and ethnic minorities being disproportionately represented. Such workers are often denied basic advantages such as pensions, sick pay, paid holidays, and protection from redundancy. Only 12% of zero-hours workers receive sick pay, and nearly half lack holiday pay (TUC). These gaps underscore the need for stronger gig worker protections.

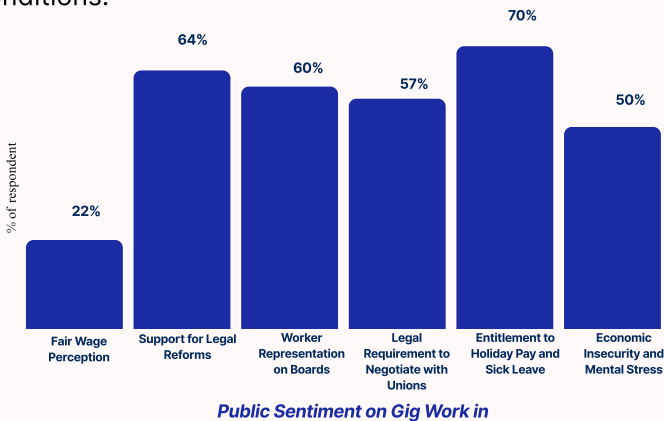
Worker Protections and Wellbeing

Physical and Psychological Risks to Health

UK gig workers undergo physical and mental pressures. Prolonged working hours, encounter with road traffic, and urgency to deliver goods on time result in tiredness, injuries, and accidents. In a 2023 report by PMAC, it was pointed out that mental health issues like burnout, anxiety, and depression are prevalent, which are further accelerated by economic insecurity and missing support services.

Lack of Legal Health Protection

Existing workplace health and safety legislation, e.g., under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, is not necessarily extended to gig workers since they are classified as self-employed. As such, platforms are not necessarily liable for occupational health hazards, including chronic stress or hazardous working conditions.



Collective Representation and Legal Isolation

In contrast to employees, gig workers tend not to have organised grievance redressal channels. While their unions, such as the IWGB (Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain), continue to fight for them, the vast majority of platform workers are unorganised and legally barred from collective bargaining rights. In 2023, the UK Supreme Court held Deliveroo riders to be ineligible for unionisation as independent contractors, a significant setback for organised labour in the gig economy.

Need for Comprehensive Reforms

The intersection of scarce legal protections, lack of mental health services, and algorithmic pressures makes gig work insecure and lonely. Specialists and labor unions have advocated for more transparent legal definitions, portable benefits, and comprehensive worker protections that encompass all types of employment. In the absence of these reforms, the welfare of millions of gig workers will remain compromised in the name of platform efficiency. As the gig economy solidifies its role in the UK labour market, the lack of statutory protections leaves workers exposed. Operating without access to sick pay, holidays, or health coverage, many face serious risks especially under algorithmic control. The pandemic highlighted these gaps, as essential gig workers often lacked safety and income support. This raises urgent concerns about long-term worker wellbeing in the digital economy.

Public Perception and Cultural Attitudes

Mixed Views on Flexibility vs. Exploitation

Public attitude in the UK towards gig work is ambivalent. While most value the flexibility and independence it provides, there's increasing worry about the absence of job security and reasonable pay. A Fair work survey found that just 22% of those questioned think gig platforms are paying workers a fair wage, and 64% favor reforms to employment law to curtail misclassification of self-employed workers.

Media coverage has increasingly highlighted the challenges faced by gig workers, from low pay to lack of benefits. This scrutiny has influenced public perception, leading to a more critical view of gig economy practices. However, some narratives still romanticize gig work as entrepreneurial, potentially downplaying the economic necessity driving many into such roles. Despite their essential contributions, gig workers often face social stigma, particularly those in roles like food delivery and ride-hailing. These positions are sometimes viewed as less prestigious, affecting workers' sense of professional identity and societal value.

This stigma can impact mental health and job satisfaction, underscoring the need for broader recognition and respect for gig workers. Public sentiment in the UK increasingly favors reforms to improve conditions for gig workers. A 2021 poll by Fair work revealed that 64% of respondents support changes to employment law aimed at reducing the misclassification of self-employed workers.

Additionally, 60% believe that gig economy platforms should be required to have worker representatives on their boards, and 57% think these platforms should negotiate with trade unions representing their workers. This growing public support underscores a shift towards recognizing the need for greater protections and representation for gig economy workers. Public perception of the UK gig economy balances appreciation for flexibility with concern over worker exploitation. Increasing awareness has sparked growing support for reforms to ensure fair treatment and protections for gig workers.



Legal Framework Governing the Gig Economy in India

Chapter 6

Traditional Employment Law Framework

India's labor laws have historically been designed for conventional employer-employee relationships, creating significant gaps in protection for gig workers. The traditional framework comprises numerous statutes regulating various aspects of employment, including:

- The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947
- The Factories Act, 1948
- The Minimum Wages Act, 1948
- The Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948
- The Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952

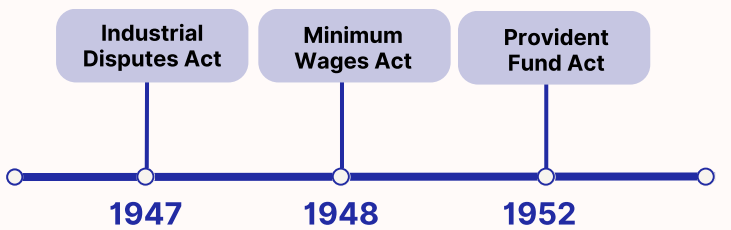
However, these laws generally apply to individuals classified as "employees" within established organizations, leaving gig workers largely outside their protective ambit. The triangular relationship between workers, customers, and digital platforms further complicates the application of traditional labor laws to the gig economy.

The Classification Dilemma: Employees or Independent Contractors?

The core legal challenge in regulating the gig economy lies in the classification of workers. Gig workers occupy an ambiguous position, sharing characteristics with both employees and independent contractors. Their work is regulated by contracts, suggesting independent contractor status, but the nature of their duties often resembles that of regular employees. This classification is crucial because it determines:

- Which labor laws apply to gig workers
- The responsibility of employers toward these workers
- Workers' entitlements to benefits such as minimum wage, social security, and safe working conditions
- The mechanisms available for dispute resolution

The business model of many platform companies relies on classifying workers as independent contractors rather than employees. This classification reduces operational costs by eliminating obligations related to social security contributions, minimum wage requirements, and other employee benefits. However, it also leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation and without access to basic labor protections.



The Code on Social Security, 2019: A Paradigm Shift

Recognizing the growing significance of the gig economy and the need to extend social security protections to non-traditional workers, the Indian legislature introduced the Code on Social Security, 2019 (the "Code")¹. This legislation represents a significant milestone in acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by gig workers.

The Code explicitly defines and recognizes "gig workers" and "platform workers" for the first time in Indian labor law. Section 2(35) defines a "gig worker" as a person who performs work or participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of traditional employer-employee relationship." Section 2(61) defines a "platform worker" as "a person engaged in an employment form where organizations or individuals use an online platform to access other organizations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services in exchange for payment. Key provisions of the Code relating to gig workers include:

- Establishment of a Social Security Fund specifically for gig workers.
- Provisions for accident insurance
- Disability coverage
- Old-age protection
- Health and maternity-related schemes.
- Creation of a national database of gig workers

The Code mandates that aggregators (digital platforms) contribute 1-2% of their annual turnover to the Social Security Fund, with the total contribution capped at 5% of the amount payable to gig workers and platform workers.

Implementation Challenges

Despite the progressive provisions in the Code on Social Security, 2019, implementation remains a significant challenge. The effectiveness of these provisions is contingent on:

- Proper registration of all gig workers
- Compliance by platform companies
- Efficient administration of the Social Security Fund
- Clear delineation of responsibilities among central and state governments
- Development of appropriate schemes under the fund

Moreover, the Code does not address all aspects of gig work, such as minimum wage guarantees, working hours, or dispute resolution mechanisms. The absence of comprehensive regulations on these aspects continues to leave gig workers vulnerable in many respects.

Access to Dispute Resolution

Gig workers face significant barriers in accessing justice when disputes arise. The contractual arrangements often include arbitration clauses that may disadvantage workers, and traditional labor courts may not have clear jurisdiction over gig work disputes.

Delayed Implementation and Notification Hurdles

Despite being enacted in 2019, the Code on Social Security has faced significant delays in implementation. The provisions specifically addressing gig workers have not been fully operationalized as of 2023 due to delays in notification and rule-making. This implementation gap has created a legal limbo where gig workers remain largely unprotected despite the existence of legislation designed to safeguard their interests.

The practical consequence of this delay is evident in multiple sectors of the gig economy:

- Food delivery workers continue to operate without adequate social security coverage
- Ride-hailing drivers lack access to formalized accident insurance mandated by the Code
- Platform-based service providers remain outside the purview of formalized benefits

Regional Disparities in Application

The actual application of legal protections for gig workers varies significantly across Indian states. While some states have taken proactive measures to implement protective regulations, others have lagged behind, creating geographical inequalities in worker protections. For example, Karnataka and Maharashtra have introduced state-level initiatives to register gig workers and extend certain social security benefits to them, while many other states have taken minimal action to operationalize the Code's provisions.

Documented Violations and Enforcement Challenges

Case Study 1: Food Delivery Workers and Exploitative Algorithmics

Food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato have faced criticism for their algorithmic management practices that effectively circumvent labor protections. A documented case from 2022 revealed how delivery workers in major metropolitan areas were subject to:

- Arbitrary reductions in per-delivery compensation without prior notice
- Imposition of increasingly challenging delivery time targets
- Unilateral changes to incentive structures that significantly reduced overall earnings
- Deactivation of accounts without due process or explanation

When affected workers organized protests in Bengaluru and Delhi, they faced immediate account deactivations, effectively terminating their livelihood without access to any formal grievance redressal mechanism. This violation occurred despite the Code's intention to provide security and financial stability to gig workers. The National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) reported that approximately 38% of surveyed food delivery workers experienced at least one instance of unexplained account deactivation in 2022, highlighting the widespread nature of this practice.

Case Study 2: Ride-Hailing Drivers and Misclassification Issues

Ride-hailing companies operating in India have consistently maintained that drivers are "partners" rather than employees, effectively exempting them from labor law protections. This misclassification has resulted in documented violations. In 2021, a collective of Uber drivers in Mumbai filed complaints with the labor department highlighting how the company:

- Required drivers to maintain specific acceptance rates and online hours
- Imposed penalties for declining rides
- Unilaterally modified commission structures
- Exercised substantial control over working conditions while denying employee status

Despite these control mechanisms suggesting an employer-employee relationship, legal recourse remained limited due to the contractual classification of drivers as independent contractors. This contractual arrangement effectively circumvented the intended protections of the Code.

Case Study 3: Platform Workers and Occupational Safety Violations

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant occupational safety violations affecting platform workers. In 2020-2021, delivery workers were classified as "essential services" workers but often operated without:

- Adequate personal protective equipment
- Sanitization facilities
- Compensation for medical expenses related to work-acquired COVID-19 infections
- Access to paid sick leave when experiencing symptoms

A survey conducted by the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) found that 86% of platform workers reported spending their own money on protective equipment despite platform companies' public announcements about providing safety gear.

Comparative Analysis with Implementation in Other Jurisdictions

UK Supreme Court Decision Impact

The UK Supreme Court ruling in *Uber BV v. Aslam* (2021) classified Uber drivers as "workers" rather than independent contractors, entitling them to minimum wage and paid holidays. This international precedent has influenced legal discourse in India but has not translated to similar judicial determinations in Indian courts. When a similar case was brought before the Bombay High Court, the court acknowledged the UK precedent but deferred to existing contractual arrangements, citing differences in the legal frameworks between jurisdictions. This demonstrates how international best practices in gig worker protection have not been effectively incorporated into Indian jurisprudence.

California's AB5 Implementation Contrast

California's ABC test, implemented through Assembly Bill 5 (AB5), places the burden of proof on companies to establish independent contractor status. This proactive approach contrasts sharply with India's implementation of the Code, which lacks similar presumptive protections for workers. Platform companies operating in both jurisdictions have adopted markedly different approaches to worker classification, with stronger compliance in California due to more robust enforcement mechanisms and substantial penalties for misclassification.

Case Studies of Non-Compliance and Worker Responses

Bengaluru Food Delivery Workers' Strike (2023)

In March 2023, approximately 3,000 food delivery workers in Bengaluru initiated a strike against a major delivery platform after:

- Base pay per delivery dropped from ₹25 to ₹15 without consultation
- Fuel allowances were cut despite rising costs
- Incentive structures were modified to require significantly more deliveries to earn the same amount
- Workers raising concerns faced suspensions.

The workers organized through informal WhatsApp groups and social media channels, highlighting the absence of formal collective bargaining mechanisms. Despite the Code's provisions for worker protection, affected workers had no formal recourse to challenge these unilateral changes to earning structures.

The company responded by engaging temporary workers during the strike period and implementing a phased restoration of modified payment terms only after significant media attention. The entire episode highlighted how enforcement mechanisms remain inadequate despite legislative provisions.

Urban Company Service Providers' Grievances

Urban Company (formerly UrbanClap), a platform connecting service providers like beauticians, plumbers, and electricians with customers, faced protests in 2022 when service providers highlighted:

- Excessive platform commissions (up to 30%)
- Mandatory purchase of supplies through the platform at marked-up prices
- Penalties for declining service requests
- Rating systems that effectively compelled acceptance of all bookings

Despite these workers clearly falling within the definition of "platform workers" under the Code, they had no effective mechanism to challenge these practices. The absence of sector-specific regulations and implementation guidelines meant that platforms could continue practices that significantly impacted worker earnings.

Positive Developments in Implementation

Maharashtra's Registration Initiative

In a positive development, Maharashtra became the first state to create a comprehensive database of gig workers in 2022. The initiative included:

- Digital and physical registration centers
- Simplified registration processes
- Issuance of identity cards to registered workers
- Integration with state welfare schemes

While this represents progress, the benefits extended remained limited compared to the comprehensive social security framework envisioned in the Code. The initiative covered approximately 38% of estimated gig workers in the state, with ongoing efforts to expand coverage.

Industry Self-Regulation Attempts

Some platforms have introduced voluntary benefits for workers in response to regulatory pressures and public scrutiny:

- Zomato introduced an accident insurance program covering all active delivery partners
- Ola established a fund for driver-partners affected by medical emergencies



Policy Recommendations

Chapter 7

Policy Recommendations

To build a more inclusive and sustainable gig economy in India, a comprehensive suite of policy interventions is necessary, centered around social protection, fair compensation, accountability, financial empowerment, and collective bargaining.

These recommendations draw upon global best practices while addressing India's unique challenges related to informality, digital fragmentation, and state capacity.

Extending Social Security and Labor Rights

First, there is an urgent need to extend social security and labor rights to gig and platform workers, who are largely excluded from the traditional framework of employment protections. While the Code on Social Security (2020) makes a welcome reference to gig and platform workers, implementation remains weak. The creation of dedicated gig worker welfare boards at both the central and state levels would institutionalize targeted protections.

These portable accounts should be designed to aggregate contributions from multiple platforms and include provisions for government top-ups through public-private partnerships. They must ensure comprehensive coverage, offering benefits such as health insurance, life insurance, maternity benefits, disability coverage, and pensions, thereby providing a safety net for gig and platform workers across diverse sectors.

Ensuring Fair Compensation and Contracts

Second, income volatility and lack of formalized contracts contribute significantly to economic insecurity among gig workers. To remedy this, India should mandate platform-specific minimum earning guarantees based on prevailing wage rates and regional costs of living. Workers must also be provided with clearly articulated digital contracts at the outset of engagement. These contracts should include terms related to pay calculation, rating systems, deactivation protocols, and grievance redressal mechanisms.

Importantly, platforms must be required to disclose the key features of their algorithmic logic in simplified and understandable forms to increase transparency and reduce the asymmetry of power between workers and digital systems. Additionally, the legal recognition of sector-specific digital labor collectives is essential, alongside dedicated funding for providing legal assistance, technological infrastructure, and capacity-building support to help workers organize and advocate effectively for their rights.

Strengthening Platform Accountability

Third, the government must strengthen platform accountability through legal recognition of their dual role-as technology intermediaries and de facto employers. In high-control sectors such as ride-hailing, delivery, and domestic services, platforms should be classified as digital employers and held liable for compliance with minimum labor standards.

Regular submission of "worker impact assessments," along with the appointment of compliance officers, would create mechanisms for ongoing regulatory oversight. Additionally, the establishment of a Platform Transparency Index could enable ranking of platforms based on worker-centric metrics, thereby incentivizing ethical practices through reputational competition.

Financial Empowerment of Gig Workers

Fourth, integrating gig workers into mainstream financial systems is essential for economic resilience and upward mobility. Many gig workers lack formal credit histories, limiting their access to loans, insurance, and savings instruments. To address this, fintech platforms should be encouraged to offer tailored financial tools like daily wage advances, micro-credit lines, or income-smoothing wallets linked directly to earnings data.

Furthermore, the government should collaborate with digital skills initiatives such as Skill India or NSDC to design and deliver customized, micro-certification programs in soft skills, digital tools, and service-specific competencies. These programs should be affordable, flexible, and made easily available via mobile-based platforms to ensure wide accessibility, especially for low-literacy or low-connectivity gig workers.

Strengthening Collective Bargaining and Worker Voice

Fifth, and perhaps most critically, the collective voice of workers must be bolstered. The nature of gig work-isolated, algorithm-driven, and often informal-discourages traditional forms of unionization.

Platforms should be required to include elected worker representatives in tripartite boards to ensure participatory governance. Community hubs can also serve as physical spaces for support.

Conclusion

The gig economy in India has become a key part of today's job market. It has opened up new income opportunities for millions, especially young adults, women, and those living in rural areas. Businesses benefit too because gig work provides a flexible and cost-saving workforce.

The gig economy in India represents one of the most significant shifts in the nature of work in recent decades. Characterized by short-term contracts, freelance engagements, and platform-based work, it has opened up new avenues for employment and entrepreneurship, particularly among the youth, women, and semi-skilled workers. As technological adoption accelerates and societal expectations around work-life balance evolve, gig work has gained increasing legitimacy and appeal, especially in urban centers. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the sector's importance, with many individuals turning to gig platforms for supplementary or primary sources of income amidst economic disruptions.

Yet, while the gig economy has democratized access to work opportunities, it has simultaneously exposed deep structural vulnerabilities. The lack of formal labor protections, absence of social security nets, erratic incomes, and challenges around skill development remain critical concerns. Many gig workers operate without health insurance, accident coverage, retirement benefits, or mechanisms for collective bargaining, placing them at substantial economic and social risk.

Additionally, issues related to algorithmic management, lack of transparency in payment systems, and biases in platform governance have begun to surface, calling for greater scrutiny.

From an economic standpoint, the gig economy contributes meaningfully to GDP growth, employment generation, and innovation, especially in sectors like transportation, delivery services, education technology, healthcare, and digital media. However, the absence of comprehensive data and standardized metrics on gig work continues to hamper effective policymaking and long-term planning.

Going forward, it is essential for multiple stakeholder—including government bodies, private sector companies, platform operators, and civil society organizations—to collaborate in creating an enabling environment that supports both the growth of the gig economy and the protection of its workers.

Policy interventions must prioritize extending labor rights and social security benefits to gig workers without stifling the flexibility that makes gig work attractive. Initiatives such as portable benefits, mandatory accident insurance, minimum wage guarantees, skill upgradation programs, and formal grievance redressal mechanisms could serve as critical first steps.

Policy Reform and Social Security Expansion

Developing strong policy frameworks, such as fully implementing the Social Security Code, 2020, is essential. This will provide gig workers with access to benefits like health coverage, insurance, and pensions, making them more secure.

Platform Accountability and Algorithmic Transparency

It's vital to manage how platforms use data and algorithms to handle workers. Ensuring fair pay, having systems for complaints, and making performance measurements clear are crucial steps.

Formalization and Worker Voice

Promoting formal work contracts and standard working conditions can significantly help gig workers. Encouraging collective bargaining and creating platform-specific worker forums can improve fairness and empower workers.

Technology as a Driver of Inclusion

The widespread availability of mobile internet can help close the employment gap between urban and rural areas. By expanding gig opportunities to smaller cities and rural regions, we can promote more balanced economic growth.

Skill Development and Digital Literacy

As gig work often requires specialized skills, investment in training programs and digital literacy is essential. This will enhance job prospects and career advancement for gig workers.

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GLOSSARY

1. Algorithmic Management-

Control and monitoring of gig worker tasks and performance via platform algorithms and data.

2. Algorithmic Pressure-

Stress from real-time platform tracking, ratings, and algorithmic income fluctuations.

3. Autonomy-

A key characteristic of gig work highly desired by workers, referring to their desire for increased control and decision-making power over their professional lives, including choosing projects and managing their schedules.

4. Bargaining Power-

The ability of workers to negotiate for better pay, working conditions, or benefits; often significantly reduced for gig workers due to their classification as independent contractors and lack of collective organization.

5. Classification (of workers)-

The legal determination of whether a worker is considered an employee (entitled to full labor protections and benefits) or an independent contractor (with fewer rights and responsibilities for the engaging entity); a core issue in the gig economy.

6. Contract Labour-

A form of temporary or flexible employment where workers are engaged on short-term arrangements or through intermediaries, often moving from one project to another without the security, benefits, or stability of a permanent job.

7. Digital Platforms-

Online applications or marketplaces (like Uber, Swiggy, Upwork, Fiverr) that connect workers directly with clients or tasks, enabling gig work and revolutionizing how people find and perform work.

8. Flexibility-

A key characteristic and perceived benefit of gig work, allowing workers freedom to select projects, dictate their own hours, and manage personal obligations, offering control over when, where, and how they work

9. Formal Employment-

Traditional employment arrangements typically involving long-term contracts, fixed wages, formal work schedules, and access to standard benefits and labor protections.

10. Gig Economy-

An open marketplace system characterized by temporary, flexible, and task-oriented work arrangements where entities hire independent individuals for short-term engagements, enabled by digital platforms.

GLOSSARY

11. Statutory Obligations-

Mandatory employer costs for employees (benefits, taxes); often avoided with gig workers.

12. Traditional Employment-

Conventional, stable full-time work with one employer, fixed pay, and benefits.

13. Underemployment-

Working below full skill level or fewer hours than desired.

14. Unionization-

Workers organizing into a union for collective bargaining.

15. Work-Life Balance-

The perceived ability to successfully manage personal and professional responsibilities; often cited by workers as a reason for choosing the flexibility offered by gig work.

16. Worker Cooperatives-

Worker-owned and managed businesses; mentioned as a potential form of worker representation in the gig economy context.

17. Digital Divide-

The gap between those with access to digital technology/internet and those without, creating unequal opportunities in the gig economy.

18. Transparency-

Clarity in how platforms operate, particularly regarding pay calculations, algorithms, and work allocation.

19. Standard Contracts-

Formal agreements outlining terms of engagement, seen as a way to provide clarity and protection for gig workers.

20. Scalability-

The ability of businesses to easily increase their operational capacity (e.g., workforce size) in response to demand.

21. Public Perception-

Societal views and opinions regarding a topic, such as the status and dignity of gig work.

22. Regional Balance-

Achieving a more equitable distribution of economic opportunities and development across different regions.

23. Portable Benefits-

Benefits (e.g., health insurance, pensions) that are tied to the worker, not a specific employer or platform, allowing them to move between engagements.
