



Gig Economy

India's Gig Economy set to triple over the next 3-4 years with a potential to serve up to 90 million jobs in the non-farm economy.



- BCG
report, 2021

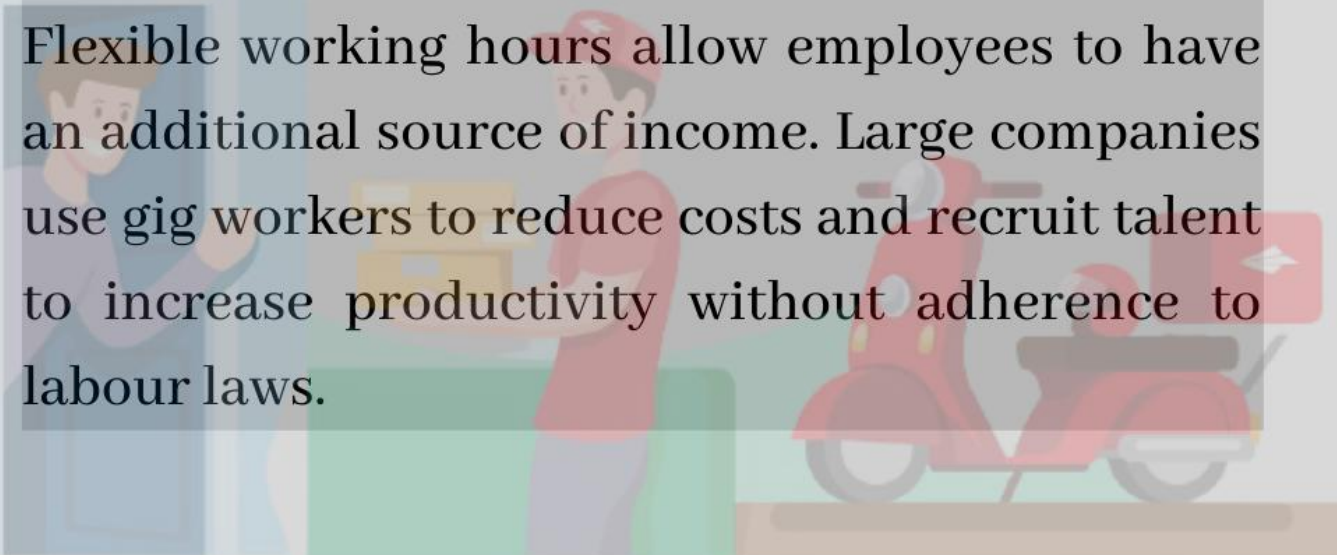


THE GIG ECONOMY

Gig work includes food delivery, couriership, transport, manual labour, and software application platforms, namely Uber and Ola.

The workers, or service providers, classed as self-employed, could work for multiple employers. They earn on the completion of every gig, i.e. job.

Flexible working hours allow employees to have an additional source of income. Large companies use gig workers to reduce costs and recruit talent to increase productivity without adherence to labour laws.





CHALLENGES

Gig workers or service providers are independent contractors working on a short-term contract.

Their employment is temporary and inconsistent. They do not receive regular payrolls and social protection benefits allotted to permanent employees. They work long and unfixed hours without job safety.

Positioned outside the scope of labour laws, they lack negotiating power and representation by trade unions. Female gig workers face gender biases and exclusion from workplace safety laws.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

Short-lived gig work and low pay create "precarious work" (British Psychological Society), adversely affecting physical and mental health.

Workers cannot reject work in the target-driven, demanding gig economy, continuing to work in sickness without adequate rest breaks. They are unsupported in health and safety matters due to company reluctance in investing in their safety training. Job inconsistencies lead workers to undercut competitors by ramping up self-exploitation to secure opportunities and maximise income.



COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

90% of India's work is informal, devoid of definite policies. The lockdown displaced 14 million internal migrant workers.

Platform owners failed to offer socio-economic support to service providers. Due to self-employed status, their problems became individual. Drivers with Uber and Ola struggled to justify the costs of sanitisers and petrol. Platforms prioritised the safety of services concerning customers and enforced measures on workers without similar expectations from customers.



WHAT CAN BE DONE

We need to push for policies that provide a governance framework to ensure the outreach of medical and unemployment benefits and minimum wages.

Provision for unionisation will grant workers necessary negotiating powers. Formalisation of the sector will structure corporate management.

Workers can receive aid from a relevant regulatory authority through a 24/7 crisis support system. There should be efforts towards investing in workers' safety training.



INDIAN LABOUR REFORMS & GAPS

The newly drafted Labour Codes (2019-2020) address gig workers through their inclusion in social security funds. It empowers the central government to formulate social security schemes for them. It calls for setting up a toll-free helpline.

India lags in facilitating women's movement into the workforce. Additionally, structural and operational barriers promote gendered division of gig work. Despite these efforts, the Indian gig economy overlooks the protection of women's labour.