



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Growth and forecast of the gig economy in India: A secondary data analysis

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### Abstract

The gig economy has grown into one of the most rapidly developing areas of the global labor market. In India, there are millions of workers who have transitioned from being employed on a long-term basis to working through digitally enabled platforms and/or on a short-term or project/contract basis. According to NITI Aayog (2022), in 2021-22 approximately 7.7 million people were involved in the gig economy. This is expected to increase to 23.5 million by 2029-30. Reports from the Economic Times (2025) indicate the sector experienced a significant 38% growth during FY 25 which indicates both an opportunity and challenge for Indian workers and policy makers. The objective of this research is to use secondary information from Government publications, Academic journals/news agencies to investigate growth trends and forecast trends of the gig economy in India from 2020-2030. This research attempts to identify why the gig economy is growing so rapidly and what remains concerning for gig workers with respect to job security, financial stability and social support. While there are numerous benefits to the gig economy including rapid job creation and economic development, there are also serious concerns regarding the well-being of gig workers and their ability to sustainably engage in this type of employment. Finally, based upon these results, this research recommends that policymakers, platform owners/providers and gig workers need to work together to establish a gig economy that is equitable and sustainable for all parties.

**Keywords:** Gig Economy; Workforce Growth; Platform Economy; Employment Trends

### 1. Introduction

Work has long been at the center of human existence; yet, the nature of how individuals perform their duties has undergone substantial transformations over time. Prior to recent years, many employees worked within the confines of agriculture, manufacturing or office environments. The majority of these positions were characterized by formal, long-term commitments to employers. However, over the past couple of decades, advancements in technologies along with increased globalization and changes in consumer behaviors have led to a shift towards flexibility and diversity in terms of employment. As a result of this paradigmatic shift, there is now a classification referred to as the "gig economy" that describes labor markets in which individuals engage in short term assignments or project-based work. The gig economy refers to a type of labor market where workers engage in various types of projects and/or freelancing work as opposed to obtaining long-term full-time employment. Workers within the gig economy are typically employed via online applications or mobile apps, for example Uber, Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Upwork or Fiverr. Some workers may also be employed off-line in areas such as delivery services, construction and consulting. Rather than receiving an annual salary or stipend, workers receive payment based upon completion of assigned tasks or projects. Worldwide, the gig economy has developed rapidly due to increased availability of smart phones and use of the internet. This rapid development has enabled companies to instantaneously locate and hire workers. India's emergence as a hub for the gig economy is primarily attributed to a large percentage of India's population being comprised of young people, an increasing number of Indians owning and utilizing smart phone devices and the rising need for affordable flexible labor. In accordance with the NITI Aayog Report (2022), India currently employs approximately 7.7 million gig workers. By 2029-2030, this

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number is predicted to triple to 23.5 million. Therefore, approximately seven percent of India's non-farming workforce is anticipated to be working in the gig economy by the end of this decade. Additionally, numerous reports published by industry associations such as the Boston Consulting Group (2021) and the International Labour Organization (ILO)(2023) indicate that India has the potential to utilize the gig economy as an avenue to generate new employment opportunities and stimulate innovative business practices. These publications further emphasize that a primary prerequisite for leveraging this economic opportunity is ensuring adequate protections for gig workers' welfare and providing them with proper social security support. In summary, the gig economy presents both positive and negative aspects. While it provides opportunities for individuals seeking employment in traditionally underemployed areas, it also creates significant concerns regarding job security, equitable compensation and entitlements including health care coverage, retirement plans and paid vacation days. Considering India's projected position as a global leader in gig-based employment, it is essential for policymakers, businesses and workers to understand India's gig economy development trajectory and projections in addition to its socio-economic implications.

Therefore, the objective of this research paper is to provide an analysis of India's gig economy from 2020 onwards utilizing secondary resources including government reports, industry analyses and labor statistics. This study will also attempt to predict India's workforce participation levels by 2029-2030 and address some of the possible positive and negative factors influencing the future of gig work in India.

### **1.1. Importance of Studying the Gig Economy**

The gig economy plays a vital role in shaping India's labor market and overall economic development. It has emerged as a significant source of job creation, offering employment opportunities to millions, particularly young people, women, and individuals from smaller towns who often struggle to access traditional jobs. One of its biggest advantages lies in the flexibility it provides, allowing workers to decide when, where, and how much they wish to work. At the same time, gig work fuels economic growth by supporting startups, e-commerce platforms, and service industries that are critical drivers of India's expanding economy. It also mirrors the country's ongoing digital transformation, showcasing how technology is reshaping the nature of work and labor markets. Yet, alongside these benefits, the gig economy presents several challenges. Workers often face a lack of job security and income stability, and most do not receive formal benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, or pensions. Their livelihoods are also heavily dependent on algorithms and customer ratings, which can be unpredictable and sometimes unfair. Moreover, there is a rising concern about exploitation, as many gig workers remain underpaid and overworked. Given this dual nature offering both opportunities and risks studying the growth and future trajectory of the gig economy in India becomes essential to ensure its sustainable and equitable development.

### **1.2. Research Gap**

Most current research on India's gig economy has focused on micro-level assessments (i.e., an employee's experience working as an independent contractor), and while many studies have provided insight regarding workers' job satisfaction, their experiences, etc., most of those studies used primary data (e.g. survey results from the employees themselves) and were based upon field research using interviews. While this type of information is useful for providing a social perspective of how the gig economy impacts individuals, it does little to capture the larger picture of India's growing gig workforce and its sectoral distribution. There are very few studies which have analyzed secondary data (i.e. data generated outside of the researchers own efforts including but not limited to Government Reports, Industry Analysis/Reports, Labor Statistics, etc.) to assess long-term trends of the Indian Gig Economy. Therefore, our study will use available secondary data to track India's growing gig economy beginning in 2020 through 2030.

### **1.3. Research Question**

Beginning with the question that will guide the research (study) for this project:

- What was the approximate size of the gig economy in India as of 2020, and how large has it become since 2020?
- In addition to a better understanding of the overall size of the gig economy, what additional trends can be derived or inferred based upon information available from secondary data, i.e., Government Agencies and Industry Sources.
- How to anticipate that the number of workers participating in the gig economy will change through 2029-2030?
- What are some potential benefits to workers and/or the Indian Labor Market/Economy, and what are some of the negative impacts on workers/policymakers related to the growth of the Gig Economy?

#### 1.4. Research Objectives

The Study will be aimed at achieving four main objectives:

- Identify the Gig Economy's Size and Growth in India during the period 2020 to the current year.
- Analyze Secondary Data Trends as found in Government and Industry Sources.
- Predict (Forecast) Workforce Participation within the Gig Economy up to 2029-2030.
- Discuss Opportunities and Challenges associated with Gig Working in relation to India's Future

This research study is organized into five areas. These areas include; a literature review area that includes information regarding previous research and articles about the gig economy in both India and globally. A methodology area where it is described how secondary data is used as well as how it has been analyzed. Data Analysis and Results present the results from the data collected and provide projections of the number of gig workers in India from 2020 to 2030. Following the Data Analysis and Results section there will be a Discussion area where the author has interpreted the results found in the Data Analysis and Results section. In addition to interpreting these results, the major factors has been identified, opportunities, and challenges that have influenced or are influencing the growing trend of gig work. The final section has been titled as Conclusion and Recommendations. In this section the conclusion is summarized based on the results presented in each of the above-mentioned areas. Additionally, several suggestions have been outlined for policies to help create a more sustainable and equitable gig economy in India.

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## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Global Perspective on the Gig Economy

The Gig Economy is not an Indian Phenomenon. In fact, all over the globe, digital platforms have changed the way we create and purchase goods and services by creating millions of temporary gigs. A study conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) states that about thirty percent of the global workforce in developed economies participate in some type of gig-based work or use some type of digital platform. For example, as of today there are tens of thousands of ride hailing drivers, food delivery people and freelance programmers working on various digital platforms throughout the United States. European countries are starting to implement social safety nets for gig workers. On one hand gig work has been shown to offer flexibility, supplemental income and entrepreneurial opportunity (De Stefano, 2016). Individuals may select their own assignments, time worked and client base, making gig work attractive to individuals who require flexible schedules such as students, stay at home parents and semi-retirees. With digital platforms, barriers to entering into gig work have dramatically decreased, enabling workers to easily enter and find available tasks.

### 2.2. The Gig Economy in India

The Indian gig economy has experienced extraordinary growth during the past ten years. According to data collected by the National Institution for Transforming India (Niti Aayog) — (2022) indicated that there were around 7.7 million gig workers in India in 2020-21, working within various industries including ride hailing, food delivery, e commerce logistics and freelance digital services. That number is expected to increase to 23.5 million by 2030. This would make the gig economy one of the fastest growing employment sectors in India.

The primary reason for this rapid growth is technological development. With affordable smart phones becoming increasingly available, high speed Internet and mobile payment systems; many platforms that employ gig workers such as Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Uber, Urban Clap (Urban Company); and freelance job sites such as Upwork and Fiverr have been able to grow their businesses at exponential rates. Platforms provide gig workers with access to potential jobs or work assignments with clients through efficient matching processes using real time monitoring tools, digital payment systems and/or task assignment and completion tracking systems.

India also benefits from demographic factors. As noted earlier India's population has a relatively young workforce with a median age of 28. As urbanization continues to be on the rise, more young people are migrating to cities seeking out alternative forms of employment arrangements which offer flexibility and allow them to earn supplemental income or gain work experience in emerging industry areas. While women continue to enter the gig economy, it is difficult for them to do so due to social/cultural/safety reasons.

### 2.3. Challenges for Indian Gig Workers

The gig economy in India has created an environment that promotes flexible work; however, the gig workforce continues to experience numerous obstacles throughout their daily lives. Income insecurity is the largest issue faced by gig workers due to their earnings varying from task-to-task and/or depending upon the amount of work available per-day or per-season. Due to this variability, many gig workers earn less than the legal minimum wage and therefore live under a state of continuous financial stress. Gig workers have historically lacked social security protections including pension plans, health insurance, and/or accidental injury protection. With enactment of the Code on Social Security (CoSS) 2020, it was finally acknowledged that gig workers and platform workers would be entitled to the same protections. However, the CoSS has yet to become effective as there has been no widespread/mandatory application of CoSS by all entities required to apply. In addition to economic uncertainty, gig workers in delivery and transportation segments of the gig economy are also at risk of accidents while performing their jobs. These individuals typically do not have access to adequate medical services resulting in medical emergencies putting them into debt. Gig workers are also subject to algorithmic decision-making regarding how they receive assignments and when. The use of these algorithms creates additional uncertainty for gig workers as decisions made using these systems may result in reductions in pay, reduced worker ratings, or loss of employment without providing explanation. Furthermore, gender-based disparities persist within the gig economy as women in the gig economy experience barriers related to safety, caregiving responsibilities at home, and bias exhibited by consumers that limit female participation.

There are several reasons to believe that things are slowly changing for the better. As part of the 2025 Union Budget, identity cards will be issued to gig workers, E-Shram registration will be mandated for gig workers, and virtually all (nearly one crore) gig workers will have access to health insurance through the PM Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY). The intention behind these actions is to formally incorporate gig workers into the Indian government's formal system of social security and improve financial stability. While improvements are occurring at a slow pace, these initial efforts represent a step forward toward creating more stable and sustainable conditions for gig workers in India.

### 2.4. Existing Research on Indian Gig Economy

The Economic Times (2025), reports show an increase of 38%, showing expansion of gig economy, but also highlights the existing structure challenges. Digital platforms have enabled gig workers with flexibility and job access, however, there is a need for better regulation and public policy to protect against exploitation and provide adequate compensation. A key challenge identified in the research is that most workers do not benefit from social security, minimum wages or labor law protections; therefore, developing policies and regulations that protect workers, hold platforms accountable and help workers develop skills for long term sustainable growth will be critical for success. Overall, the body of literature identifies two competing trends in the gig economy: on one hand, it is growing rapidly creating new jobs; on the other hand, the majority of these workers continue to exist in a state of vulnerability. Because the literature clearly indicates that most workers do not have protections afforded them through social security, minimum wage protections or labor laws, all parties including policymakers, platform operators and other stakeholders must collaborate in developing and implementing regulatory frameworks to protect workers rights and to ensure accountability of platform operators and create pathways for workers to improve their skills to enable long term sustainable growth in the gig economy.

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## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study has utilized a secondary data analysis methodology in order to analyze the expansion and forecasting of the gig economy in India from 2020 to 2030. Primary research (which generates new data) via surveys, interviews, etc. is different than Secondary Research (secondary research utilizes existing data generated by other organizations). Utilizing secondary data allows researchers to quickly identify large scale trends, historical growth patterns as well as project future growth of an industry when it would be difficult or take too long to collect the necessary primary data.

The study utilized a descriptive/analytical research design to:

- Describe the size, shape and expansion of India's Gig Economy.
- Analyze past growth trends based on historical data collected since 2020.
- Forecast potential growth of gig workers in India up to 2030.

### 3.2. Data Sources

The study will rely upon secondary data that was collected from credible government, academic and industry sources. The key sources are:

#### 3.2.1. Government Reports

- NITI Aayog (2022), "India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy"
- MOHLE reports regarding e-Shram registration and social security for gig workers
- Union Budget 2025 documents reporting on government policy initiatives for gig workers.

#### 3.2.2. Industry and Market Reports

- The Economic Times, Times of India, The captable, etc. News articles regarding gig workforce trends.
- Reports by consulting firms such as KPMG, Deloitte, and pwc on India's gig economy.

#### 3.2.3. Academic Literature

- a. Research studies published in peer-review journals, books and literature reviews on gig economy, platform work and employment trends
- b. Studies of global trends regarding gig economies so as to gain insights into comparative trends.

#### 3.2.4. Online databases and portals

- E-Shram portal (to collect data regarding registered worker stats)
- Govt. Labor statistics portals

### 3.3. Data Collection

The process used to collect the data included the following:

- Selecting relevant source(s): selecting reports, articles and official statistics related to gig workers in India between 2020-2025
- Extracting key data points: collecting quantifiable data including:
  - Numbers of gig workers per year.
  - Sector wise distribution (i.e., delivery, ride hailing, digital freelancing).
  - Policy intervention and budget allocation for social security.
  - Projected growth rate and forecast through 2030.
- Validating data: cross checking numbers of workers reported across multiple sources to verify consistency; i.e., worker numbers provided by NITI Aayog were validated against data reported by Ministry of Labor and industry reports

### 3.4. Data Analysis Methods

This study employs both descriptive and predictive analytical methods to examine secondary data on the gig economy. Descriptive analysis is used to summarize the current size, composition, and sectoral distribution of gig workers, while also identifying key trends between 2020 and 2025, including growth rates and the impact of policy interventions. Trend analysis further builds on this by using historical data to understand patterns in workforce expansion over time and to assess the influence of government initiatives such as e-Shram registration, identity cards, and PM-JAY healthcare coverage.

In addition, forecasting techniques are applied using a linear growth projection model to estimate the number of gig workers from 2025 to 2030, with these projections compared against industry estimates to ensure reliability and consistency. Finally, interpretative analysis is conducted by critically examining qualitative information from news articles, policy reports, and expert opinions. This helps in understanding the broader challenges, opportunities, and implications of the gig economy for both workers and policymakers.

## 4. Data Analysis & Results

In this section we will analyze the size, structure by sectors, and forecasts for India's gig economy from 2020 through 2030 with secondary research material. By combining both qualitative and quantitative secondary data in an overall way, a general sense of current trends and future forecasts can be provided.

The Indian gig workforce grew at a rapid rate during the last five years. The reports by NITI AAYOG (2022), and the report by Ministry of Labour & Employment reports as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1** Growth and Size of Gig Workforce (2020-2025)

Year	Estimated Number of Gig Workers (Million)	Annual Growth Rate (%)
2020	7.7	-
2021	8.5	10.4
2022	9.3	9.4
2023	10.2	9.7
2024	11.2	9.8
2025	12.3	9.8

### 4.1.1. Observations

Gig workers have grown in numbers and have had a steady average annual growth rate of about 10%. Delivery services, Ride-hailing, Freelance Digital Services, E-commerce Logistics are the most contributing factors to gig worker's growing population. Tier-1 & Tier-2 cities represent the majority of urban gig worker participants due to greater access to platforms and internet.

Based on industry reports and platform data, the sector-wise distribution in 2025 is as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2** Sectoral Distribution of Gig Workers

Sector	Percentage of Total Gig Workers (%)	Key Platforms
Food Delivery	35	Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit
Ride-Hailing/Transport	25	Ola, Uber
E-commerce Delivery	15	Amazon, Flipkart, Dunzo
Freelance/Digital Work	15	Upwork, Fiverr, Freelancer.com
Other Services	10	Cleaning, domestic help, repairs

### 4.1.2. Insights:

Digital food delivery (and transportation) is a top service type that reflects an increasingly urbanized India with greater consumption of digitally delivered goods/services. The use of freelance digital labor as a result of remote work has increased greatly, especially for those working in IT, content creation and graphic design. Although non-platform-based services (like domestic worker) have historically been under-represented; they are now being included in initiatives such as e-Shram registration.

## 4.2. Policy Impact Analysis (2021-2025)

Government action toward the Indian gig economy began with recent government actions to formalize and offer support to gig workers in India. Among many examples, one of the largest steps was the implementation of the mandatory e-Shram registration process, which had an initial enrollment of over 30 crores unorganized workers. Of those registered, approximately 1 crore (10 million) were gig workers. The e-Shram registration allows gig workers to connect to social security programs offered by the Government of India, such as the Atal Pension Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, as well as receive direct benefit transfers, all providing gig workers with access to protections they did not

formerly possess. Another important protection provided to gig workers in India is the PM Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY). It provides each family in India with health insurance covering up to Rs. 500,000 in costs annually for secondary and tertiary care. Since many gig workers in the delivery and transportation sectors experience significant risk of accidents or illness due to their job duties, the PM-JAY can help reduce out-of-pocket medical costs. In addition to these protections, there are many skill-building opportunities available to gig workers through both government programs (e.g., National Skill Development Corporation [NSDC]) and private online platforms (e.g., Coursera and Udemy). These opportunities allow gig workers to develop skills that will keep them competitive within an increasingly dynamic marketplace. These changes have already begun to be realized. Gig workers are beginning to gain access to financial inclusion; access to quality, affordable health services; and access to social security benefits. Platforms also stand to benefit from having a database of their gig workforces, allowing for better assignment of tasks and workforce management. Despite this success, however, several issues persist, most notably in raising awareness about existing protections among gig workers; increasing participation of rural gig workers; and developing industry specific protections to address unique risk factors.

#### 4.3. Forecasting Gig Economy Growth (2026–2030)

Using linear trend analysis based on 2020–2025 growth rates (~10% annual), the forecast for gig workers by 2030 is shown in Table 3:

**Table 3** Gig Economy Growth (2026–2030)

Year	Projected Gig Workers (Million)
2026	13.5
2027	14.9
2028	16.4
2029	18
2030	19.8

The number of gig workers in India is predicted to grow significantly over the next few years. The number of gig workers is expected to go from approximately 12.3 million in 2025 up to about 19.8 million by 2030. The three largest categories of gig work will be food delivery, ride-sharing, and freelancing. These three types of gigs have a large demand for on-demand service and technical skills. Freelance digital work is expected to grow faster than both delivery and mobility services. This is primarily due to the world's move to remote work. In addition, there has been increased interest in hiring digital professionals (i.e., designers, IT professionals, content writers, etc.) and therefore the need for more people who can do this type of work. Rural participation will also increase. This is because Internet access will become more widespread. More platforms will start operating in Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities. As a result, many workers outside of major metro areas will now have job opportunities. This growth shows that while the gig economy may always be centered around cities it will also help bridge employment gaps in semi-rural and rural areas of India.

#### 4.4. Regional Insights

Data from government and industry reports indicate regional disparities has been shown in Table 4:

**Table 4** Regional Insights of Gig Workforce

Region	Gig Workforce (%)	Observations
North India	30	Urban hubs like Delhi, Noida, and Gurugram dominate
West India	25	Mumbai, Pune, and Ahmedabad are key centers
South India	30	Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kochi show high digital adoption
East & NE India	15	Smaller platforms, rural expansion slow but growing

The urban focus of India's gig economy is clearly evident by the fact that the majority of the opportunities for individuals working within gig economies are located in larger cities. These cities have a high level of availability of platforms, greater levels of consumption demand, and therefore greater digital literacy among residents. In contrast to other parts

of India, the gig economy is largely an urban phenomenon, indicating that there are significant structural advantages to be found in metropolitan regions in terms of supporting the emergence of gig work. While the structural disadvantage is evident across much of India, including small towns and rural areas, several government initiatives (such as e-Shram registration) are emerging that seek to address the imbalance in access to resources provided to organized and gig workers in non-urban locations. As these programs expand and the rate of expansion of Internet penetration increases over the coming decade, it is likely that the existing gap between rural and urban India will diminish, and ultimately lead to greater inclusion of rural communities in gig work.

#### 4.5. Challenges

While there has been a tremendous growth in the gig economy in India, many barriers exist for gig workers. Volatility of income is one of the biggest problems facing gig workers; they get paid based on each task they complete, and therefore their daily income can vary significantly. Additionally, many gig workers, specifically gig workers working in transportation (e.g., taxi drivers), experience other forms of risk associated with job uncertainty (i.e., the possibility of losing their jobs) and accidents while working, further decreasing the certainty of their income. The lack of understanding regarding available government programs (such as e-Shram and PM-JAY) also creates a problem for gig workers. Although e-Shram and PM-JAY were created to offer social security and health insurance to gig workers, many gig workers remain unregistered for some reason, or do not understand how to apply for these programs. Gender inequality is another barrier preventing women from entering into the gig workforce because many women who would be interested in participating in the gig workforce have safety concerns, follow societal norms dictating where they should work, and are expected to perform household duties.

However, although many barriers exist for gig workers in India, the study provides evidence suggesting there are positive developments occurring within India's gig economy. Firstly, India's gig economy is growing rapidly and is expected to grow at approximately a 10 percent compound annual rate over the next five years. Secondly, as government intervention through the creation of programs such as e-Shram (which registers workers) and PM-JAY (healthcare coverage program) increase, the Indian government is creating a formalized workforce and providing a sense of protection to its citizens. Thirdly, according to forecasts, the number of gig workers in India may reach almost twenty million by 2030, thereby becoming an important component of the Indian labor force. In order to create a sustainable and equitable gig economy in India, however, the Indian government must address several gaps including increasing participation among rural residents, enhancing policy awareness for both platform-based employers and platform-based employees, establishing strong gender equality provisions, and providing protections specific to individual sectors.

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#### 5. Discussion

There are numerous ways for businesses to grow and expand their customer base, and participation in trade fairs and exhibitions is one of the most effective strategies. Beyond direct promotion of products or services, these events provide a valuable platform to gain visibility and connect with potential customers. Trade fairs and exhibitions enable businesses to showcase their offerings to a large audience, interact directly with customers, demonstrate products, build relationships with suppliers and distributors, and generate sales. Their growing popularity reflects their effectiveness in reaching new markets and establishing business partnerships.

Pre-event preparation is crucial to maximize outcomes. This includes developing a detailed budget for travel and participation costs, preparing effective marketing materials, and planning an attractive booth display. Adequate promotional literature and items should be arranged, and decisions regarding booth setup—whether to rent or customize—must be made in advance. Staffing requirements should be carefully planned to ensure efficient management of the booth and customer interactions. Additionally, systems for handling orders during the event and strategies for post-event follow-up should be established. Networking approaches should also be designed to facilitate meaningful connections with attendees. Finally, evaluating the performance of each event is essential to identify strengths and areas for improvement, thereby enhancing future participation strategies. The Data Analysis presents a comprehensive view of the evolution of the Indian gig economy and the direction in which it is moving. From 2020 to 2025, India's gig workforce grew from 7.7 million to 12.3 million, representing a steady annual growth rate of almost 10%. According to De Stefano (2016), KPMG (2022), and others worldwide, flexible labor markets are increasingly being shaped by digitalization. As a result, it is evident that India's gig economy has become an important source of employment for young individuals, students, and individuals looking for additional income on the side. On top of that, the steady rise clearly signals a larger trend toward flexible, task-based employment models that policymakers will need to consider when developing long-term labor strategies.

According to various sources, most notably food delivery and ride hailing combined represent more than half of the gig economy. Freelance digital work represents a smaller piece of the pie, however its size is growing rapidly. Both of these realities reflect the two main drivers behind the gig economy: One driver is urbanization coupled with widespread use of smartphones and growing demand for delivery services. Another driver is the emergence of the digital skills revolution and increased adoption of remote work due to COVID-19. Nonetheless, domestic service work and small informal tasks are greatly under-represented; thus there exists a pressing need for inclusive public policy that recognizes rural/urban and non-platform workers as part of the broader gig economy (Saha & Kumar, 2023).

This emerging landscape is now being shaped by Government intervention. Programs such as e-Shram registration have permitted over 300 million unorganized workers to be officially recognized, approximately 100 million of whom are gig workers providing formalized connections to pension programs, insurance programs etc., thereby reducing the risk faced by workers. Likewise, the PM Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) provides health insurance coverage up to Rs 5 lakhs per family for workers in high-risk sectors such as delivery and transportation (ILO, 2021). These types of initiatives represent important first steps toward formalizing gig work and closing the gap between formal/informal employment. Despite these initiatives, awareness of these programs remains limited across rural populations and women workers alike. Studies indicate that while formalization increases worker confidence and decreases precariousness, implementation remains an issue

Projections show that India's gig workforce could total around 20 million by 2030 if current trends related to urbanization, digitalization and platform growth continue. Such growth will solidify gig work as an essential component of India's labor marketplace. But maintaining momentum will require significant investments in skill development/digital education as well as enhancing accountability from platforms.

One major finding is that regionally and gender-wise differences persist. Currently North/South India dominate gig-based platform work while Eastern/Northeastern India lags far behind. Women's involvement in platform-based work continues to be limited largely as a result of safety concerns/care responsibilities. Therefore, targeted interventions will be required to resolve both issues; e.g. extend digital infrastructure into less developed regions and ensure safe/women-friendly work environments. Policy must also target the "missing middle" – workers who fall beyond traditional welfare program parameters but who are just as vulnerable without adequate safeguards (NITI Aayog, 2022).

Although there is a generally positive outlook, several challenges exist. Gig workers experience unpredictable income levels and high occupational risks; they often lack sufficient knowledge regarding available social security options; further-more they are dependent upon platforms creating exposure to algorithmic bias/risk of job loss resulting from random deactivation by platforms. Thus, achieving sustainable growth will require a cooperative/government/platform/worker approach to protection/inclusion; studies have demonstrated that multi-stakeholder approaches are better able to enhance labor rights/equitable economic development (Sundararajan, 2016).

Ultimately, findings illustrate that India's gig economy has become deeply ingrained in India's labor force with great potential to produce employment. Realizing this potential depends upon raising policy awareness; establishing sector specific protections; expanding rural/female participation; implementing stricter regulation of platforms; and enabling workers to acquire additional skills; develop digital literacy; access financial instruments and taking advantage of financial planning and government welfare schemes.

## **Policy Recommendations**

This section outlines key policy recommendations based on the study findings:

- **Enhance Public Awareness and Access to Government Provided Social Security Programs:** Although there are government initiatives to create social security through e-Shram registration and PM Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), many gig workers are still unaware of what can be done to take advantage of these social security programs (ILO, 2021).
- **Provide More Comprehensive Social Security Programs for Specific Industries:** Various industries within the gig economy experience different challenges -- for example, delivery/transport workers who frequently suffer injuries/accidents, versus freelancers whose incomes fluctuate greatly (Saha & Kumar, 2023).
- **Improve Worker Skills/Digital Literacy:** In order for gig workers to compete in today's marketplace and to develop their skills in light of increasing competition in the gig economy, workers should be trained in various areas such as digital literacy (NITI Aayog, 2022).

- Increase Female Participation/Gender Equality/Safety: Female participation continues to be underrepresented within the gig economy because of concerns regarding worker safety and care related obligations (KPMG, 2022).
- Make Platforms Accountable/Transparent: Platform algorithms dictate how jobs are allocated to workers and which workers receive good/fair/bad ratings. Workers are susceptible to bias, deactivation without warning, etc. (De Stefano, 2016).
- Reduce Urban/Rural Gaps: The majority of the gig economy operates within large metropolitan areas, resulting in lower participation among rural residents despite increased access to the Internet in rural regions (NITI Aayog, 2022).
- Develop Cooperative Governance Approaches: For long-term sustainability and success in developing the gig economy, collaborative governance approaches among government agencies/platforms/worker representatives are required (Sundararajan, 2016).

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## 6. Conclusion

This research focused on analyzing India's gig economy between 2020 and 2030 and demonstrated an expanding workforce projected to grow almost twice as fast by 2030. An expanding workforce results from increasing demand for flexible work arrangements and improving digital platform accessibility and usage within labor markets. Recent government actions such as budgetary changes made in the Union Budget of 2025 indicate a growing trend toward recognizing/formalizing gig workers' rights and providing them with social security. The aforementioned government actions such as issuing ID Cards for workers registered on the e-Shram portal, registering workers on the PM-JAY healthcare program, and offering social security benefits via the e-Shram portal demonstrate much needed validation/recognition/social security/stability for gig workers. These government actions do not only protect the interests of the workforce but contribute positively to the overall economy by formalizing a hitherto unregulated part of employment. However, even though positive progress has been achieved in terms of addressing issues associated with gig economies i.e. income variability/vulnerability across sectors/gender disparity/rural-urban disparities problems persist. The expected future growth of the gig economy reinforces the necessity for proactive/inclusive/sustainable policies to address issues that exist. These recommendations identify specific ways to improve the status quo and highlight potential avenues for further research in supporting gig economy workers.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Acknowledgments*

This study is based on secondary data from publicly available sources. No specific funding was received.

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### *Statement of ethical approval*

The study uses only secondary data; therefore, ethical approval and consent were not required.

### *Statement of informed consent*

This study is based entirely on secondary data collected from publicly available sources. No human participants were directly involved; therefore, informed consent was not required.

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