

THE GIG ECONOMY AND THE FUTURE OF DECENT WORK IN BANGLADESH



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GROUP NAME: INNOVATIVE LEADERS

Introduction

The gig economy refers to a labour market based on short-term contracts, freelance work, and on demand services rather than traditional employment.¹ Globally, it has grown rapidly due to advances in digital technology and the rise of online platforms.

In Bangladesh, the gig economy has gained significant attention because of rising youth unemployment and increased access to smartphones and the internet.² Platforms such as Pathao, Shohoz, Foodpanda, Foodie, Sheba xyz, Obhai, Behance, Freelancer, Upwork, and Fiverr offer flexible work opportunities for young people, university students, and part time workers.



However, this flexibility often comes at the cost of income instability, lack of job security, and minimal legal protection, No social Protection, Work Pressure. They are usually excluded from benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, or pension plans. Furthermore, the absence of clear employment relationships often leads to work pressure, long hours, and uncertainty about future earnings. While the gig economy provides opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and labor market participation, it also highlights the urgent need for regulatory frameworks to ensure fair treatment and social protection for all workers

¹ International Labour Organization (ILO), World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms (ILO 2021)

² M Rahman, 'Platform Work in Bangladesh: Opportunities and Challenges' (2023) 14(2) Bangladesh Development Studies Journal 45–60.

This research aims to examine the current state of Bangladesh's gig economy and evaluate whether gig work can evolve into a form of decent employment in the future.

The Gig Economy in Bangladesh



The gig economy in Bangladesh has grown significantly in recent years. Many university students, freelancers, and part-time workers join online platforms for services such as graphic design, software development, delivery, ride-sharing, and content creation.

Objectives of the Study

To explore the current structure and growth of the gig economy in Bangladesh.³

To identify major challenges faced by gig workers across online and location-based platforms.

To assess whether gig work can meet the International Labour Organization (ILO) standards of decent work.

To recommend legal and policy measures to protect and empower gig workers.⁴

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research using secondary data. Information was collected from published reports, journal articles, and credible online databases. Primary data was not collected due to time

³ Rahman, Md Tanvir, *The Gig Economy in Bangladesh: Opportunities and Challenges* (University of Dhaka Press 2022).

⁴ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Digital Jobs and the Future of Work in Bangladesh* (UNDP Bangladesh 2021).

constraints, but case studies and factual examples were drawn from reputable sources such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNDP, and national newspapers. A descriptive and analytical approach was used to interpret the findings and draw conclusions.

Results

The findings show that the gig economy in Bangladesh has grown remarkably in recent years, covering both online and offline forms of work. Thousands of young people are now engaged in online freelancing, particularly in areas such as web design, content writing, and software development.⁵ According to the Oxford Internet Institute, Bangladesh ranks among the top five countries in the world for digital freelance employment.⁶

In addition to online platforms, location-based gig activities like ride-sharing and food delivery have created new and immediate income opportunities for low-income and less educated individuals.⁷ However, these workers often operate without health insurance, accident compensation, or safeguards against unfair account suspensions. The July 2024 internet shutdown illustrated this vulnerability, as ride-sharing and delivery services dropped sharply, leaving thousands of workers without income.⁸

Although women's participation in the gig economy is gradually increasing, it remains limited due to safety concerns, social restrictions, and gender-based discrimination.⁹

⁵ Rahman, Md Tanvir, *The Gig Economy in Bangladesh: Opportunities and Challenges* (University of Dhaka Press 2022).

⁶ Oxford Internet Institute, *Online Labour Index 2024: Country Rankings and Trends* (University of Oxford 2024).

⁷ 'App-based economy expands, leaving workers unprotected' *The Business Standard* (Dhaka, 17 October 2022)

⁸ Mahmudul Hasan, 'Bangladesh: Internet disruption affects online food delivery sector, threatens livelihoods of delivery workers & small businesses' (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 28 July 2024)

⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Gig Employment and Implications for Economic Resilience* (UNDP 2025)

Discussion

The gig economy offers flexibility and autonomy, but workers face economic insecurity and exclusion from formal labour rights. Platforms determine wages and work allocation through opaque algorithms, limiting workers' control and transparency.

In Bangladesh, gig workers are not recognized under Section 1(4) the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, which means they lack access to social protection, maternity benefits, and collective bargaining.

Global evidence also shows similar patterns in Indonesia and India, platform workers face unstable income and limited legal safeguards.¹⁰

Therefore, without proper regulation, the gig economy risks deepening inequality instead of promoting inclusive growth.

Analysis

The analysis indicates that the gig economy contributes significantly to Bangladesh's youth employment and foreign remittance. However, most workers remain in the informal sector, without standard employment contracts or social safety nets. The International Labour Organization's concept of decent work includes fair income, workplace safety, social protection, and respect for rights.

Currently, most gig jobs fail to meet these standards, but with government intervention and platform accountability, they could become more sustainable. Legal recognition, transparent payment systems, and collective worker representation are essential for improving working conditions. Furthermore, encouraging women's participation through

¹⁰ Legal Protections for Gig Workers: A Comparative Socio-legal Study of Indonesia and India (Vidisha Shekhawat & Pranjal Khare) (2025)

digital training and safety measures can make the gig economy more inclusive.

Advantages

-  Flexible working hours.
-  Opportunities to earn extra income
-  Access to global markets for digital freelancers

Gig workers have the freedom to set their own schedules, which allows them to balance work with personal commitments like family, education, or other jobs. This flexibility is a key motivator for many, providing control over their work-life balance.

Gig work serves as a valuable way to supplement income or, for many, become a primary source of earnings. The ability to take on multiple projects or work for different platforms simultaneously can significantly increase overall income.

For online freelancers, the gig economy removes geographical barriers, allowing them to connect with clients and projects from all over the world. This provides access to a wider range of opportunities and potentially higher-paying jobs that would not be available in the local market alone.

Major Issues Faced by Gig Workers

No Job Security & Benefits: Gig workers are classified as “partners,” so they lack paid leave, medical insurance, or retirement benefits. Accidents lead to lost income and self-funded treatment..



Unstable Income: Earnings depend on completed trips or tasks. Platform commissions, fuel price increases, bad weather, or internet disruptions can reduce income.

Control by the App: Algorithms decide how much a worker earns, which tasks they receive, and sometimes deactivate accounts without explanation. Workers have little opportunity to appeal these decisions.



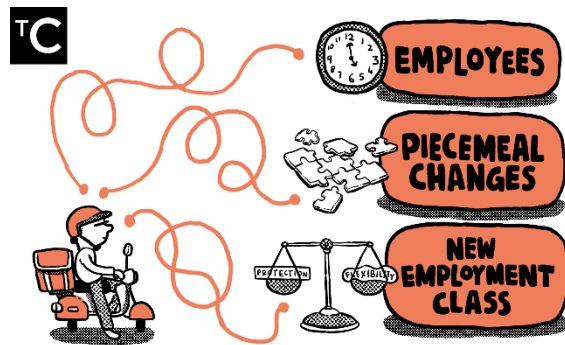
No Collective Voice: Workers cannot easily unionize or negotiate, forced to accept platform terms.

Decent Work and Future Possibilities for Gig Workers



The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as employment that is productive, provides fair income, ensures social protection, respects workers' rights, and promotes equality. In Bangladesh, decent work is still mostly limited to formal employment, leaving gig workers unprotected.

Currently, most gig workers in Bangladesh do not meet the full criteria for decent work due to the informal nature of their employment. However, there is potential for improvement in the future if the government and digital platforms take appropriate action.



Social Security Coverage: Platforms should provide basic health and accident insurance through a low-cost, portable social security fund for each worker.

Transparency: Platforms must clearly explain wage calculations and account deactivations, giving workers the right to appeal.

Worker Representation: Workers should be allowed to form associations for collective bargaining to demand fair pay and safer working conditions.

Impact: Implementing these measures would make gig work more stable, decent, and suitable for youth and women seeking flexible employment.

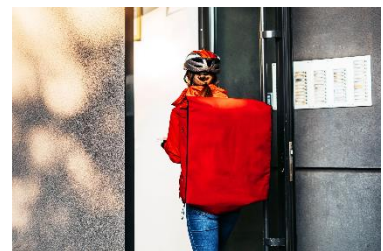
Gender Disparities in Gig Work

The gig economy presents both opportunities and inequalities for women in Bangladesh.

Flexibility and Empowerment: The remote nature of online freelancing, particularly, appeals to women who may face mobility restrictions or have caregiving responsibilities. It provides them with a pathway to financial autonomy and can increase their participation in the paid workforce.

Systemic Inequalities: However, women tend to be concentrated in lower-paying tasks and earn less than their male counterparts, echoing broader gender pay gaps in the labor market. Social biases and gendered hiring practices on online platforms further exacerbate these disparities.

Safety and Harassment: In both online and location-based gigs, women can face harassment. For location-based workers, safety on the roads is a key concern, while online freelancers can encounter harassment from clients.



Conclusion

The gig economy in Bangladesh offers both opportunities and challenges. While most gig work is informal and lacks social protection, it provides thousands of young people a way to survive in a competitive job market.

However, jobs that leave workers vulnerable to sickness, accidents, and income instability cannot form a strong foundation for the future. By implementing clear policies on social security and fair pay, gig work can become decent, stable, and beneficial for both workers and the economy..