

India's Gig Workers Trapped In Full-time Work With Little Mobility

India's gig economy risks becoming a dead end for young workers as long hours, low pay and weak social security keep most from progressing, a new report shows



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India's fast-growing gig economy is increasingly functioning as a full-time labour market rather than a source of flexible or transitional work, leaving millions of young workers stuck in low-paying roles with little chance of upward mobility, according to a report by Primus Partners.

Based on a survey of more than 1,100 platform-based gig workers across major Indian cities, the report finds that around 61 per cent of gig workers work eight hours or more a day, while 43 per cent work all seven days of the week. More than half are "effectively full-time", combining long hours with at least five-and-a-half working days each week.

Average monthly earnings remain modest at around Rs 22,500, with income growth driven mainly by longer workweeks rather than promotions or skill-based progression, the report said. Moving from a five-day to a six-day week adds roughly Rs 2,500 per month, underscoring what the authors describe as "grind-based growth".

"This is no longer a side hustle economy," Primus Partners said in the report, adding that gig work in India is increasingly becoming the core source of income, especially for young urban men.

India had about 7.7 million gig workers in 2021, or roughly 1.5 per cent of the workforce, a figure projected to rise to more than 23.5 million by 2029–30, according to government estimates cited in

the study. With nearly 60 per cent of India's workforce under the age of 35, gig platforms have become a key entry point into employment.

Yet the report warns that the sector is failing to deliver long-term economic security. About 31 per cent of surveyed workers had no insurance or pension-linked benefits, while 44 per cent had only partial coverage. Only one in four workers had both insurance and some form of savings-linked or social benefit.

The lack of protection leaves workers highly vulnerable to shocks. Nearly 60 per cent of respondents were classified as being at "crisis risk", meaning they lacked savings and had limited access to credit. Among workers with no social security, crisis risk rose to 84 per cent, compared with 36 per cent for those with both insurance and benefits.

The findings challenge the popular narrative that gig work acts as a stepping stone to better jobs. Only about 15 per cent of workers saw gig work as a pathway to other opportunities. Among workers in their twenties with more than four years in the same gig, that share fell to around 3 per cent, with most describing gig work as a long-term career or a financial necessity.

Financial pressure, lack of guidance and lack of time for training were cited as the main barriers to mobility. About one in four workers said "no time for training" was the single biggest obstacle to moving into better-paid roles.

The report also highlights the absence of basic labour protections. Only three of the 12 major platforms studied offered any form of sick pay or income support when workers are unable to work. There is no paid leave, and algorithm-driven incentives often penalise workers who decline tasks or log off during peak hours, making flexibility largely illusory.

Primus Partners warned that these micro-level vulnerabilities could have broader economic consequences. High income volatility and weak social security suppress household consumption, reduce productivity and risk creating a "missing middle" in the labour market — workers who power urban services but remain excluded from stability and long-term mobility.

The report calls for a "mobility-oriented redesign" of the gig sector, including clearer legal definitions under India's labour codes, basic social protections such as insurance and income support, transparent platform algorithms and structured skilling pathways aligned with workers' age and experience.

"India is at a pivotal moment," the report said. "With strategic reforms, gig work can evolve from a low-wage holding pattern into a structured ladder of opportunity. Without these, millions risk spending their most productive years in roles that offer flexibility but little future."