

What is a gig economy?

Originally, gig referred to jazz club music acts at the beginning of the 20th century; it referred to live performances of musicians who get paid by the show and not on a contractual basis. With the beginning of the digital era, “gig economy” took a different direction and now means making a living from working in diverse part-time jobs (or gigs). It is sometimes also referred to as sharing economy, demand economy, peer economy and platform economy. The gig economy provides many opportunities for online companies and platforms seeking competitive and innovative freelance with people working as independent contractors for short term jobs and usually per project rather than a monthly salary. Such jobs currently employ a large portion of the work force due to the evolution of technology. This development is intensified by remote working, which allows companies to hire workers anywhere in the world. The gig economy ranges from jobs in transportation like Uber and Careem to accommodation like Airbnb and Couch Surfing to food delivery and healthcare.

Gendering the earning gap in the gig economy, is it possible?

Women, people of color, low income individuals, those living in impoverished regions, and people with disabilities tend to congregate in the precarious gig jobs sector, including hospitality and catering, taxi and transportation, care giving, education, tutoring and training, software development, interpretation and translations, security, agriculture and the arts...etc. The ‘gig’ sector is also encroaching into traditional manufacturing and retail. The average pay gap in the MENA region is 40 percent according to a report by the World Economic Forum, published in 2017. This gap can increase in the marginalized gig job sector where women often get inferior positions.

Mobile apps and social media platforms gave people the ability to market themselves and sell their products and services at a much lower cost than traditional advertising. The flexibility which is offered by ‘gig’ platforms allows female workers to manage their unpaid care work and paid work simultaneously. The assumption that thus more women would become part of this workforce was not accurate. Although the research results are not yet complete for the Arab world, comparative results internationally indicate that the “gig” economy is not eliminating the gender gap. The opposite might be true. The gig sector seems to actually reinforce traditional, stereotypical relations between men and women. It reinforces the perception that female workers are primarily care givers (unpaid-care work) and should thus better work in the paid economy from home where they can remain the primary care-givers within their households.



Facts and Figures

- **The shift** from protected, primarily unionized employment to deregulated, precarious working conditions began on a massive scale in the 1980s.
- **Through** the introduction of the internet during the 1990s the process of undermining workers' rights accelerated.
- **The digital economy**, as much as it helped in providing jobs and opportunities, also greatly impacted the fundamental rights and social protection of all employees, but especially women and marginalized communities.
- **Unionization**, collective bargaining rights and agreements, social insurance and workplace health and safety regulations have been undermined gradually over the last half century only to be replaced completely by 'gig' conditions in many sectors. These work schemes often eliminate traditional forms of worker protection.
- **According** to Gig Economy Tracker, globally, 80 per cent portion of companies rely now on a mix of full-time and freelance employees.
- **A 2018** survey study conducted by Observer Research Foundation and World Economic Forum, show that 35 percent of the women surveyed were disinterested in joining the gig economy due to the lack of job security and uncertain employment status.
- **47.6 percent** of women with children worldwide are employed. Many of these women have unpaid care responsibilities and thus choose to work in the informal economy and/or are likely to be self-employed. Therefore, women with children are already less likely to be part of the social security schemes (Source ILO).
- **Following** a UN study conducted in 2019, out of 35 million migrants in the MENA region, 31% are women domestic workers excluded from national work laws protecting their rights in most countries.