

CUTS–GIZ International Virtual Roundtable Discussion
Gig Workers' Welfare in India: Concerns and Solutions
Friday, 15 March 2024 | 1530-1730 (IST) / 1100-1300 (CET)

BACKGROUND NOTE

Globally, the landscape of employment has been continuously evolving, propelled by technological advancements, and shifting consumer demands which have permeated every aspect of our lives, be it political, social, economic, or cultural. In the labour market ecosystem, digital labour platforms have created unprecedented opportunities for workers, businesses, and society by unleashing innovation on a massive global scale.

In India, a leading force among nations, significant shifts in the labour landscape are evident in the rising number of gig workers, vital contributors to the informal sector. The emergence of the gig economy is not merely a trend but a catalyst for growth, innovation, and holistic progress. Leveraging digital platforms, the gig economy enhances market dynamism, amplifies competitiveness, and heralds a new era of transformation.

Approximately 40 million people in low- and middle-income countries now earn their income from the gig economy activities facilitated by digital platforms. According to NITI Aayog, in 2021, the gig economy in India supported approximately 7.7 million gig workers, and projections suggest a remarkable threefold surge, reaching 23.5 million by the 2029-2030 period.

Despite the gig economy enhancing productivity and tapping into diverse skill sets, yet at the same time growth of digital labour platforms poses concerns related to decent work especially among the blue-collar gig workers and fair competition. Because these platforms are agile and organise work in a fundamentally different way than traditional businesses, concerns are being raised on working conditions, bargaining power, social security benefits (such as health insurance and retirement plans), income volatility, unfair termination of workers' accounts, skill gaps etc. Some of such concerns may also be arising due to anti-competitive practices observed globally in digital economy.

To address the outlined challenges, GIZ and CUTS are actively engaged in fostering fair competition and promoting quality jobs, aiming to establish a sustainable framework within the gig economy. On one hand, GIZ, under its Gig Economy Initiative, has been offering an online policymakers' course addressing fair and decent work for gig workers and platform regulatory concerns such modern competition policies, the role of data and algorithms by drawing on research and case studies from low- and middle-income countries. On the other hand, CUTS, under Good and Better Jobs have been actively addressing the issues faced by the Indian blue-collar gig workers and advocating for the nature of competition required in the age of digital platforms.

In alignment with this background, CUTS International in partnership with GIZ intend to co-host a webinar with an aim to:

- Review the status of regulation around gig economy and gig workers
- Review the capacity-building efforts of stakeholders in the gig ecosystem including GIZ’s online course modules on the gig economy,
- Understand the architecture of existing labour and social security laws that seek to protect gig-workers in India against the above-mentioned challenges they face,
- Explore the potential and limits of competition laws in enhancing the gig workers’ rights for better working conditions in India, and
- Deliberate policy solutions aimed at improving gig workers' rights to achieve better working conditions in India and beyond.

TENTATIVE AGENDA

1535 - 1550	Presentation I: GIZ’s Initiative on Gig Economy Sarah Wagner, <i>Project Manager, GIZ Gig Economy Project/Vellah Kedogo, Doctoral Fellow, Technical University of Munich, Germany</i>
1550 - 1600	Presentation II: CUTS work on gig economy Sanchita Chatterjee, <i>Fellow, CUTS International</i>
1600 - 1730	Roundtable Discussion: Gig Workers’ Welfare: Concerns and Solutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Concerns of Gig Workers engaged with digital labour platforms ● Implementation of Laws (Code of Social Security and the Existing Gig Workers’ Welfare Laws) ● Scope for Competition Enforcement towards Gig Workers Welfare ● (Re) Skilling as a solution for adapting technological change ● Any other solutions

WAY FORWARD

- To have a better understanding of the competitive and regulatory concerns along with other challenges to decent work with respect to platform-based blue-collar gig workers.
- To provide better solutions and recommendations based on the Roundtable discussion
- To foster better stakeholder collaborations
- To forge further collaborative research
- To develop India-centric capacity-building course modules, including fair competition and decent work.