

THE FORMATION, RISKS, AND REGULATORY NEEDS OF THE GIG ECONOMY IN MONGOLIA'S LABOR MARKET

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Abstract: *The gig economy is becoming an increasingly visible component of Mongolia's labor market as platform-mediated work expands across ride-hailing, delivery services, freelance and digital work, and short-term task-based employment. This study examines the formation, key risks, and regulatory needs of the gig economy in Mongolia's labor market. To achieve the research objective, the study conducts a literature review based on theoretical and practical studies published by scholars in the Google Scholar database and comparatively uses open information from ride-hailing, delivery, and freelance service platforms operating in Mongolia. The findings indicate that gig work creates opportunities for flexible income, youth employment, service accessibility, and digital economic participation. However, its expansion is accompanied by significant risks, including unclear employment status, limited social protection, opaque algorithmic management, occupational safety concerns, income instability, and platform dependence. The study argues that the sustainable development of the gig economy in Mongolia requires a coherent regulatory framework, including legal clarification of platform workers' status, flexible social protection mechanisms, algorithmic transparency, occupational safety standards, and stronger platform accountability.*

Keywords: gig economy, platform-mediated work, labor-market transformation, algorithmic management, social protection, labor rights, income instability, Mongolia

INTRODUCTION

The organization of work is being reshaped by the growing role of digital platforms in connecting labor supply with service demand. Unlike conventional employment, which is generally based on a stable workplace, formal labor contracts, direct managerial supervision, and predictable income, platform-mediated work is commonly organized through short-term tasks, flexible schedules, customer ratings,

and algorithmic coordination. This shift has contributed to the formation of the gig economy as a distinct form of labor-market participation.

International studies show that gig work can expand access to paid employment by offering flexible working hours, supplementary income opportunities, and task-based work arrangements beyond traditional full-time employment [1], [2]. At the same time, this flexibility is accompanied by significant risks, including income volatility, unclear employment status, algorithmic control, limited access to social protection, and weak labor-rights guarantees [3], [4]. Therefore, the gig economy should be understood not only as a flexible employment opportunity, but also as an emerging labor-market structure that requires appropriate regulatory and institutional responses.

In Mongolia, gig work is becoming more visible in ride-hailing, delivery services, freelance and digital work, content creation, and short-term task-based employment. These activities provide new income opportunities, particularly for young people, students, and workers seeking flexible employment. However, the expansion of gig work also reveals regulatory and social protection gaps, including unclear labor relations, insufficient employment protection, limited platform accountability, and inadequate mechanisms for occupational safety and dispute resolution [5], [16].

Therefore, this study aims to examine the formation of the gig economy in Mongolia's labor market, identify the major risks associated with platform-mediated work, and analyze the regulatory needs required for its sustainable development. By linking international theoretical perspectives with Mongolia's labor-market context, the study contributes to understanding how gig work is emerging, what forms of vulnerability it creates, and what policy directions are needed to support a more sustainable and socially protected platform labor environment.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to examine the formation of the gig economy in Mongolia's labor market, the risks arising from it, and the corresponding regulatory needs. Within this objective, the study analyzes the main forms of platform-mediated work, their implications for the labor market, the legal status of gig workers, access to social protection, algorithmic management, income instability, and occupational safety issues in relation to both theoretical perspectives and practical developments.

This study employs a literature review approach. To achieve the research objective, the analysis draws on theoretical and practical studies published by scholars in the Google Scholar database, particularly those related to the gig economy, platform labor, algorithmic management, labor rights, social protection,

and income instability. In addition, for the Mongolian context, the study comparatively uses open information from ride-hailing, delivery, freelance work, and digital service platforms.

This study does not involve primary data collection, surveys, interviews, or statistical quantitative analysis. Rather, it aims to synthesize and systematize previous theoretical perspectives, key findings, practical manifestations of platform labor, and Mongolia's labor-market conditions in order to clarify the formation, risks, and regulatory needs of the gig economy.

The literature review is structured around the following main themes: labor flexibility, platform intermediation, algorithmic management, legal ambiguity in employment relations, limited access to social protection, income volatility, occupational safety, and platform accountability. This approach provides a methodological basis for examining how the gig economy is forming in Mongolia, what risks it generates, and what regulatory measures are required for its sustainable development.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE GIG ECONOMY

The gig economy refers to an emerging form of labor organization characterized by short-term tasks, flexible work arrangements, digital platform mediation, and algorithmic coordination. De Stefano describes gig workers as a “just-in-time workforce,” emphasizing the task-based, fragmented, and demand-driven nature of platform labor [2]. Friedman similarly conceptualizes gig workers as “workers without employers,” highlighting the role of digital intermediaries in organizing labor outside conventional employment structures [6].

The formation of the gig economy can be explained through several theoretical perspectives. First, flexible labor theory emphasizes workers' ability to choose working hours, location, and workload, thereby expanding access to paid work for individuals who may face barriers to regular employment [1]. Second, algorithmic management theory explains how platforms automate task allocation, performance evaluation, pricing, incentives, and work monitoring through data-driven systems [3]. Third, labor-market segmentation theory views gig work as part of the secondary labor-market segment, where income is unstable, employment security is weak, and access to social protection is limited [6]. Fourth, labor-rights and social-protection perspectives argue that platform work often falls outside traditional employment categories, creating ambiguity in legal status, occupational safety, insurance coverage, and social protection [16].

Accordingly, the gig economy should not be understood only as a flexible employment arrangement. It is also a complex labor-market phenomenon shaped by platform governance, algorithmic control, income volatility, legal uncertainty, and

changing forms of social risk. These theoretical perspectives provide the basis for analyzing the gig economy in Mongolia not only as a new source of labor-market participation, but also as an emerging structure that generates risks and requires regulatory adaptation.

Table 1. Theoretical Foundations of the Gig Economy

Theoretical perspective	Key concepts / explanation	Source
Flexible Labor Theory	Platform work provides flexible choices of working hours, location, and workload. It can increase labor-market participation among groups with limited access to regular employment.	[1]
Algorithmic Management Theory	Platforms use automated systems to allocate tasks, evaluate performance, distribute assignments, and monitor productivity. These systems directly affect workers' income, work opportunities, and autonomy.	[3]
Labor Rights and Social Protection Theory	Platform work does not fully conform to traditional employment categories. This creates gaps in labor protection, occupational safety, insurance coverage, and social protection.	[16]
Labor Market Segmentation Theory	Gig work is often located in the secondary segment of the labor market, where income is unstable, social protection is weak, and employment security is limited.	[6]
Income Volatility Theory	Gig workers' earnings are unstable and highly dependent on demand fluctuations, platform pricing models, customer ratings, and algorithmic variability.	[8]

The theoretical perspectives summarized in Table 1 indicate that the gig economy combines both opportunity and risk. While it enables flexible participation and diversified income opportunities, it also creates challenges related to unstable earnings, limited social protection, unclear employment status, and reduced bargaining power. Therefore, analyzing Mongolia's gig economy requires attention not only to its contribution to labor-market flexibility, but also to the risks and regulatory needs that accompany platform-mediated work.

Formation of the Gig Economy in Mongolia's Labor Market

The gig economy in Mongolia has formed at the intersection of urbanization, digital service demand, platform-based intermediation, and changing patterns of labor participation. As of 2021, 64% of the population had internet access, while the concentration of mobile phone users in urban areas created favorable conditions for the expansion of platform-based services. These conditions have enabled digital platforms to connect consumers with short-term service providers and workers with relatively low entry barriers.

In the Mongolian labor market, the gig economy is developing mainly through four segments: ride-hailing, delivery services, freelance and digital services, and short-term task-based work [5]. These segments differ in their degree of digital mediation, income structure, and labor protection, yet they share common characteristics such as flexible participation, task-based work, unstable earnings, and limited social protection.

In the ride-hailing sector, the limited accessibility of formal taxi services in Ulaanbaatar created conditions for app-based transport platforms. UBCab, launched in 2013, became one of the first major ride-hailing platforms in Mongolia. The

number of registered UBCab drivers increased from 12,000 in 2022 to 40,000 in 2023 and is projected to reach 74,000 by 2025. The platform's user base reached 1.5 million, indicating rapid growth in platform-mediated urban mobility [20], [21]. This segment provides flexible income opportunities for drivers, but fuel costs, vehicle depreciation, maintenance, insurance, platform commissions, customer ratings, and algorithmic allocation directly affect workers' net income.

In the delivery sector, platform-based services expanded rapidly during and after the COVID-19 period as consumer behavior shifted toward online ordering. Since 2020, TokTok has integrated with more than 500 restaurants and has provided 1–3-hour delivery services, while platforms such as QMenu and PickPack have developed flexible logistics models based on individual couriers [23], [24]. Some PickPack couriers reportedly earn up to 4 million MNT per month, while sellers may generate 1–1.5 million MNT in revenue for every three completed deliveries. UBCab Express and UBEats processed more than 120,000 food orders within two years and delivered approximately 550,000 items. The food-delivery market grew by 6.2% in 2021, reflecting the growth of platform-based consumption and logistics services [20], [25].

In the freelance and digital services sector, programming, design, translation, content creation, digital marketing, and online consulting have become important forms of gig work for young professionals. Participation through international platforms such as Upwork, Freelancer, and Fiverr, as well as domestic platforms such as eBazaar and Business Network, has been increasing [9], [10]. The average income of content creators reaches 1–3 million MNT, while top influencers earn 5–10 million MNT [10]. This segment expands access to domestic and international labor markets, but workers remain exposed to irregular project availability, platform fees, weak contract enforcement, and income uncertainty.

In the short-term and task-based work sector, gig-type labor is observed in construction, agriculture, mining, repair services, and household services. These forms of work are not always digitally mediated, but they share the core features of gig labor: temporary engagement, weak contractual protection, irregular income, and limited social insurance coverage. The share of informal workers in Mongolia's labor market reached 16% in 2023, indicating the continued significance of unstable and non-standard employment [14], [25].

Based on the sectoral discussion above, Fig. 1 summarizes the four major segments through which the gig economy is currently forming in Mongolia's labor market.

Fig. 1. Major Segments of the Gig Economy in Mongolia



Figure 1 illustrates the four major segments of Mongolia’s gig economy: ride-hailing, delivery services, freelance and digital work, and short-term task-based employment. The figure shows that gig work in Mongolia is developing through both digitally mediated platform services and temporary task-based labor, reflecting the coexistence of platform innovation and non-standard employment in the labor market.

In Mongolia, gig labor is observed across both platform-mediated and non-platform-mediated sectors. Ride-hailing, delivery services, and freelance digital work are more closely associated with digital platforms, whereas short-term and task-based work remains closely linked to informal and temporary labor arrangements. This demonstrates that the gig economy in Mongolia reflects not only digital labor-market innovation, but also broader patterns of income instability, limited labor protection, and secondary labor-market participation. To further clarify these sectoral patterns, Table 2 links the major theoretical perspectives on the gig economy with their practical manifestations in Mongolia’s labor market.

Table 2. Manifestations of the Gig Economy in Mongolia

Theoretical concept	Core content	Practical manifestation in the Mongolian context
Labor Flexibility Theory	Flexible working hours, diversified task-based arrangements, and increased labor-market participation	QPer, UBCab, and food-delivery platforms provide flexible work options, workers combine platform work with primary jobs for supplementary income
Algorithmic Management Theory	Algorithm-based task allocation, evaluation, and income determination	UBCab allocates tasks based on proximity and ratings, income fluctuates due to demand-based algorithmic adjustments
Labor Rights and Social Protection Reform Theory	Platform labor exists in a legally ambiguous status and requires updated regulation	Gig workers lack clear employment protection, social insurance participation remains limited
Labor Market Segmentation Theory	Gig work belongs to the secondary labor market, with weak job stability and income insecurity	Delivery workers and ride-hailing drivers face unstable monthly income and limited employment security
Income Volatility Theory	Income is unstable, unpredictable, and dependent on demand fluctuations	Gig workers report month-to-month income variations of 30–50%, workers often rely on multiple jobs to reduce income risk

The theoretical–practical alignment summarized in Table 2 indicates that Mongolia’s gig economy is forming within a dual labor-market structure. On the one hand, platform-mediated work expands flexible labor participation and creates new income opportunities. On the other hand, unstable earnings, weak social protection, unclear employment status, and dependence on platform rules continue to expose

workers to structural risks. Although there is no comprehensive official national statistic on the full scale of gig work in Mongolia, platform growth and participation dynamics suggest that several tens of thousands of people are engaged in this sector either regularly or partially. Most gig workers remain concentrated in Ulaanbaatar, while limited digital infrastructure and weaker market capacity in rural areas restrict the broader expansion of platform labor.

Overall, Mongolia’s gig economy is shaped by urbanization, digitalization, rising service demand, and institutional gaps. Its continued development will depend not only on platform expansion, but also on regulatory innovation, clearer labor-rights protection, and more adaptable social protection mechanisms.

Risks and Regulatory Needs of the Gig Economy in Mongolia’s Labor Market

The formation of the gig economy in Mongolia is increasingly shaped by platform integration, algorithmic management, income instability, weak social protection coverage, and regulatory uncertainty. These factors indicate that gig work should not be viewed only as a new source of flexible income, but also as a labor-market arrangement that generates specific institutional risks. In the Mongolian context, the main regulatory concerns are linked to undefined employment status, platform dependence, opaque algorithmic decision-making, unstable earnings, occupational safety risks, and limited access to social protection [2], [3], [5], [16]. To illustrate the main risk dimensions and regulatory needs discussed above, Fig. 2 presents the key analytical framework of the gig economy in Mongolia’s labor market.

Fig. 2. Key Risks and Regulatory Needs of the Gig Economy in Mongolia’s Labor Market



Figure 2 illustrates the main risks and regulatory needs associated with the formation of the gig economy in Mongolia’s labor market. It shows that legal uncertainty, weak social protection, algorithmic opacity, income instability, occupational safety concerns, and platform dependence are interconnected issues that require coordinated regulatory responses.

The key risks shaping Mongolia’s gig economy are interrelated. Platform integration expands service access and income opportunities, but it may also increase workers’ dependence on a small number of dominant platforms. Algorithmic management improves task allocation and service efficiency, yet it creates concerns regarding transparency, fairness, and workers’ autonomy. Legal uncertainty limits access to labor rights, while income volatility and weak social protection increase workers’ financial vulnerability. To systematize these issues, Table 3 summarizes the main risks observed in Mongolia’s gig economy and identifies the corresponding regulatory needs.

Table 3. Risks and Regulatory Needs of Mongolia’s Gig Economy

Key issue	Risk in the Mongolian context	Regulatory need
Platform integration	Workers may become increasingly dependent on multi-service platforms such as UBCab, TokTok, and PickPack	Define platform responsibilities and strengthen fair platform governance
Algorithmic management	Task allocation, ratings, incentives, and work access may be determined by opaque automated systems	Establish standards for algorithmic transparency and appeal mechanisms
Legal uncertainty	Gig workers are not clearly classified as employees, contractors, or self-employed workers	Clarify the legal status of platform workers
Limited social protection	Irregular income restricts stable participation in social insurance schemes	Develop flexible contribution and protection mechanisms
Income volatility	Workers’ earnings fluctuate due to demand, seasonality, platform pricing, ratings, and task availability	Introduce income-risk mitigation tools and improve worker protection
Occupational safety risks	Delivery, ride-hailing, repair, and construction-related gig work involve traffic, weather, and workplace risks	Set minimum occupational safety standards and accident protection measures
Urban-rural digital gaps	Gig opportunities remain concentrated mainly in Ulaanbaatar	Improve digital infrastructure and platform access in rural areas

Table 3 indicates that the risks of Mongolia’s gig economy are not isolated issues, but interconnected regulatory challenges. Platform integration, algorithmic management, legal uncertainty, limited social protection, income volatility, occupational safety risks, and urban–rural digital gaps collectively shape the vulnerability of platform-mediated workers. The following discussion examines these issues in greater detail.

Platform integration is becoming a central feature of Mongolia’s gig economy. Companies are increasingly moving toward multi-service ecosystems that combine transportation, delivery, payment, and logistics services. For example, UBCab has expanded from ride-hailing into food delivery, express services, and payment-related functions, while TokTok and PickPack have broadened delivery and marketplace-based services [17], [26]. This diversification increases consumer convenience and creates additional income opportunities for gig workers. However, it also strengthens platform dependence, data concentration, and unequal bargaining power between platforms and workers.

A second major issue is the increasing role of algorithmic management. In platform-mediated work, task allocation, customer ratings, worker visibility, incentives, and income opportunities are often determined through automated systems [3]. This form of management can improve efficiency, but it also limits workers' understanding of how decisions are made. In the absence of clear rules, workers may face unfair ratings, sudden reduction in work access, or account restrictions without sufficient explanation. Therefore, algorithmic transparency and human-based complaint resolution mechanisms are essential for fair platform governance.

Legal uncertainty is another important risk. Under the current labor regulatory framework, gig workers do not fit clearly into traditional categories such as employee or independent contractor. This creates gaps in paid leave, sick leave, occupational safety protection, social insurance, and dispute resolution [16]. Since many platform workers are economically dependent on platforms despite having flexible schedules, Mongolia may need to examine an intermediate legal category, such as a dependent contractor or economically dependent worker.

Income instability remains a core characteristic of gig work. Workers' earnings depend on daily and seasonal demand, customer ratings, platform pricing models, algorithmic visibility, and operating costs. In ride-hailing and delivery services, fuel, vehicle maintenance, insurance, communication costs, and platform commissions reduce net income. Previous findings indicate that gig workers may experience income fluctuations of 30–50%, particularly during off-peak periods [25]. This increases household financial vulnerability and shows the need for income-risk mitigation mechanisms.

Social protection is closely connected to income instability. Since gig workers' income is irregular, regular monthly social insurance contributions may be difficult to maintain. As a result, many workers remain insufficiently covered by pension, health, unemployment, and occupational accident protection schemes [5]. Flexible contribution schedules, digital insurance tools, accident coverage, and platform–worker–state co-contribution models should therefore be considered.

Occupational safety is also a growing concern. Delivery workers and ride-hailing drivers face traffic accidents, weather-related risks, long working hours, and insufficient safety protection. Similar risks are observed in short-term construction, repair, and manual service work, where contracts and insurance coverage are often weak [12], [26]. This indicates the need to define minimum safety standards for high-risk gig work.

Finally, the gig economy remains geographically uneven. Most platform-based services are concentrated in Ulaanbaatar, while limited internet access, weaker market demand, and lower digital skills restrict opportunities in rural areas. Reducing

the urban–rural digital gap requires investment in ICT infrastructure, digital payment systems, platform access, and digital skills training [19].

Overall, the risks associated with Mongolia’s gig economy demonstrate that platform-mediated work requires a more coherent regulatory approach. The future of gig work should be shaped not only by platform expansion, but also by legal clarification, social protection reform, algorithmic transparency, occupational safety standards, and inclusive digital access. These measures are necessary to transform gig work from a weakly protected and unstable labor arrangement into a more sustainable and socially protected component of Mongolia’s labor market.

CONCLUSION

1. The formation of the gig economy in Mongolia’s labor market reflects broader structural changes associated with digital platform expansion, urbanization, and the growing demand for flexible forms of work. As platform-mediated labor becomes more visible in ride-hailing, delivery services, freelance and digital work, and short-term task-based employment, it is gradually emerging as a distinct component of the country’s labor-market structure. The findings of this study indicate that the gig economy creates meaningful opportunities for labor-market participation by expanding access to flexible income, supplementary employment, and digitally mediated service work.

2. At the same time, the study demonstrates that the expansion of the gig economy is accompanied by significant risks. These include unclear employment status, limited access to social protection, opaque algorithmic management, income instability, occupational safety concerns, and increasing dependence on platform rules and digital systems. In the Mongolian context, such risks are further intensified by regulatory ambiguity, uneven digital access, and the concentration of platform-based work in urban areas. Accordingly, the gig economy should not be regarded solely as a flexible employment alternative, but as an emerging labor-market arrangement that requires careful institutional and regulatory attention.

3. The study also shows that the sustainable development of the gig economy in Mongolia depends on the capacity of the regulatory framework to respond to these new labor-market realities. Legal clarification of platform workers’ status, the development of flexible social protection mechanisms, the introduction of algorithmic transparency standards, the strengthening of occupational safety measures, and the enhancement of platform accountability are all essential components of an effective response. Without such measures, the expansion of gig work may deepen labor-market insecurity rather than contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic participation.

4. In conclusion, the gig economy in Mongolia presents both opportunity and vulnerability. Its future trajectory will depend not only on continued digital and platform development, but also on whether policy and regulatory institutions are able to balance labor flexibility, innovation, and worker protection. Further research—particularly empirical studies on workers’ income conditions, legal status, working environments, and access to social protection—will be important for supporting evidence-based policymaking in this field.

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