Attempts to mitigate gig work

Briefing

Attempts to soften the impacts of irregular employment have involved legislation, organizing, litigation, pro-worker markets and commercial solutions.

Despite these measures, uncertain employment continues to grow. Across the US for example, pre-Covid over 30% of workers were reliant on at least some gig work. Even before the pandemic, that was forecast to be 43% by end of 2020.

For-profit labor markets dominating this kind of work resist many attempts to mitigate its impacts, seeing them as a threat to business models.

The "Gig work" issue:

"Gig work" can be a confusing term. It is typically associated with ad-hoc earning through online platforms. But this is a small part of irregular employment.

- Many low-skilled jobs now involve employees being called in and sent home, by a workforce scheduling system, in line with their employer's hour-by-hour needs.

- Some 40% of Americans have earned off-the-books in the shadow economy.

The forces driving precarious employment include:

- New technologies.

- Cost-cutting by buyers of labor.

- Voracious Venture Capital.

These forces shape a commoditized, cheapened, labor pool legally classified as "Independent Contractors" meaning they have no employee rights. The typically voiceless - the young, women, minorities and the lowest-income households - are over-represented in this pool.

Our proposed solution to this shift is markets for irregular employment built around needs of workers, launched at scale by leveraging the heft of public agencies. They could neutrally enable multiple tools and interventions for workers. Comparable markets already exist for those in traditional employment.

- Most governments provide a platform linking job seekers to any kind of job. They are an alternative to for-profit job boards like Monster or Indeed. In the US, each state workforce agency funds a jobs platform. Examples include: Alabama JobLink, IowaJobs and CalJobs. Other countries do it nationally, for example Canada, Australia and Britain.

- These services have no agenda beyond maximized opportunities, growth, generating data and interfacing into public assistance. Extending these services to hourly labor would create a comparable alternative to for-profit gig work exchanges.

In the meantime, there are diverse efforts to tame exchanges for precarious work.

	Solutions to irregular work problems		
	Category	Solution	Notes
1.	Legislation/ proposed legislation	Employee classification	California's AB5 bill forced gig work companies to give workers employee rights. Some companies decided they were exempt, then raised $110 million to fight the legislation, then had to be sued to comply with it. They then helped introduce federal legislation protecting gig work platforms from AB5 during the Coronavirus pandemic. Other states are considering a version of AB5.
2.		Limited rights for workers	California Prop. 22 would overturn AB5 but introduce a net earnings floor and some other benefits. Gig work companies put $110m behind Prop. 22.
3.		Hybrid classification	Groups like Tech:NYC propose a hybrid category between "W2" (employee) and "1099" (freelance contractor). This could follow Canada with a "Dependent Contractor" status. See also: Good Work Code.
4.		Portable benefits	Writers like Nick Hanauer and David Rolf propose benefits accounts for sickness, unemployment insurance, etc. independent of formal employment[i]. New taxes could fund this. Senator Warner proposed a bill to pro-rate benefits. In New Jersey and Washington, state lawmakers have introduced legislation to create portable benefits.
5.		Fair scheduling acts	Some cities have ordinances restricting employers' right to schedule at short notice. Georgia, Iowa, Arkansas and

			Tennessee already have laws on the books blocking any attempt by their local governments to set rules around predictable scheduling.
			A variant, Show-Up pay involves paying workers who turn up for a shift for which they are then sent home.
			These rules typically apply only to larger employers in a specified sector. As an unintended consequence, restrictions on scheduling of employees can drive take up of "Tap-the-App" staffing services which send temps on demand. Examples include: Bluecrew, Work Genius, Shiftgig, Coople, AllWork, Uberworks, Wonolo, Forge, Jitjatjo, Stafr, Craigslist, ODS, Catapult or Snagwork. (These labor markets come and go, so some on this list may now be defunct.)
6.	Organizing	Unions	Unions are emerging for gig workers, largely focused on ride-hailing. They include: • Gig Workers Rising • International Alliance of App-Based Transport Workers • Rideshare Drivers United • Boston Independent Drivers Guild • United Private Hire Drivers (UK) Independent contractors have been allowed to unionize in some US cities. Many commentators have noted the challenges of unionizing where there is no employer and such a fluid workforce.
7.		Strikes	Early in the Conoavirus outbreak, Instacart workers went on strike for better terms. In Los Angeles, Uber and Lyft drivers organized a strike to align with Uber's Initial Public Offering. Other cities followed. Less aggressively, Working Washington has delivered bags of peanuts to the offices of DoorDash and Postmates to protest pay rates.
8.		Training workers	Community Colleges, particularly in California, teach courses in how to maximize opportunities as a gig worker. Samaschool pioneered similar courses.
9.		Lobbying	Groups like the UK's doteveryone have offered a manifesto for better quality gig work.

10.	Legal solutions	Court challenges	A prime mover is Shannon Liss-Riordan, a Boston attorney pursuing multiple cases against gig economy companies.
11.	Commercial solutions	Shift swopping communities	Crew, Shift Messenger, Shyft, Zoomshift and their competitors allow workers to exchange shifts that have been dictated by a scheduling system.
12.		Worker reputation aggregators	WorkHands, Traity (Spain) or competitors aim to extract a worker's reputational data from multiple sites to create unified verification.
13.		Administration tools	Hurdlr, Sherpashare, Zen 99 (defunct), Benny and others bundle the kind of services employees get from an HR department for irregulars.
14.		Increasing income stability	Financial services firms are exploring income insurance for gig workers. Wage insurance can be purchased. Alia pools domestic worker insurance. Wagestream amortizes precarious income.
15.	Alternative models	Platforms aiming to empower workers	Managed by Q, Zirtual, Hello Alfred, Shyp and others hire(d) conventional staff and deploy them on short-term assignments. Juno aimed to empower minicab drivers (but didn't). The UP&GO co-operative sells housecleaning in New York City, retaining only 5% of charges. Loconomics is a co-op platform for the Bay Area. OpenPlatforms (Sweden) aims to merge data from multiple gig work platforms.