

## Attempts to mitigate gig work

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## Briefing

Efforts 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 that 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 often classified as “Independent Contractors” meaning they have minimal 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 <a href="#">AB5</a> bill forced gig work companies to give workers employee rights. Some companies <a href="#">decided</a> they were exempt, then raised <a href="#">\$205m</a> to successfully fight the legislation, after having to be <a href="#">sued</a> to comply with it. They helped introduce federal <a href="#">legislation</a> protecting gig work platforms from AB5 during the Coronavirus pandemic. For gig work platforms this was a good investment, bringing <a href="#">new business</a> and <a href="#">increasing</a> their valuations.  Other states were considering a version of AB5. Their success now seems <a href="#">unlikely</a> .
2.		Limited rights for workers	California's <a href="#">Prop. 22</a> overturned AB5 (above) but introduces a net earnings floor and some other benefits. Academics calculate Prop 22 creates an effective minimum wage of <a href="#">\$5.64 an hour</a> .
3.		Hybrid classification	Groups like Tech:NYC propose a hybrid category between "W2" (employee) and "1099" (freelance contractor). This could follow <a href="#">Canada</a> with a "Dependent Contractor" status. See also: <a href="#">Good Work Code</a> .
4.		Portable benefits	<a href="#">Writers</a> like Nick Hanauer and David Rolf propose benefits accounts for sickness, unemployment insurance, etc. independent of formal employment <sup>1</sup> . New <a href="#">taxes</a> could fund this. Senator Warner <a href="#">proposed a bill</a> to <a href="#">pro-rate</a> benefits. In <a href="#">New Jersey</a> and <a href="#">Washington</a> , state

			lawmakers have introduced legislation to create portable benefits.
5.		Fair scheduling acts	<p>Some cities have <a href="#">ordinances</a> restricting employers' right to schedule at short notice. <a href="#">Georgia, Iowa, Arkansas and Tennessee</a> already have laws on the books blocking any attempt by their local governments to set rules around predictable scheduling.</p> <p>A variant, <a href="#">Show-Up pay</a> involves paying workers who turn up for a shift for which they are then sent home.</p> <p>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: <a href="#">Bluecrew</a>, <a href="#">Work Genius</a>, <a href="#">Shiftgig</a>, <a href="#">Coople</a>, <a href="#">AllWork</a>, <a href="#">Uberworks</a>, <a href="#">Wonolo</a>, <a href="#">Forge</a>, <a href="#">Jitjatio</a>, <a href="#">Stafr</a>, <a href="#">Craigslist</a>, <a href="#">ODS</a>, <a href="#">Catapult</a> or <a href="#">Snagwork</a>. (These labor markets come and go, so some on this list may now be defunct.)</p>
6.	Organizing	Unions	<p>Unions are emerging for gig workers, largely focused on ride-hailing. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Gig Workers Rising</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">International Alliance of App-Based Transport Workers</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Rideshare Drivers United</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Boston Independent Drivers Guild</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">United Private Hire Drivers</a> (UK)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Warehouse Worker Resource Center</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Unite Here: One Job Should be Enough</a></li> </ul> <p>Independent contractors have been allowed to unionize in <a href="#">some</a> US cities. Many commentators have noted the challenges of unionizing where there is no employer and such a fluid workforce.</p>
7.		Strikes	<p>Early in the Cononavirus outbreak, Instacart workers went <a href="#">on strike</a> for better terms. In Los Angeles, Uber and Lyft drivers <a href="#">organized</a> a strike to align with Uber's Initial Public Offering. Other cities followed.</p> <p>Less aggressively, Working Washington has delivered bags of <a href="#">peanuts</a> to the offices of DoorDash and Postmates to protest pay rates.</p>

8.		Training workers	Community Colleges, <a href="#">particularly in California</a> , teach courses in how to maximize opportunities as a gig worker. Samaschool <a href="#">pioneered</a> similar courses.
9.		Lobbying	Groups like the UK's <a href="#">doteveryone</a> have offered a <a href="#">manifesto</a> for better quality gig work.
10.	Legal solutions	Court challenges	A prime mover is <a href="#">Shannon Liss-Riordan</a> , a Boston attorney who has pursued multiple cases against gig economy companies.
11.	Commercial solutions	Shift swapping communities	<a href="#">Crew</a> , <a href="#">Shift Messenger</a> , <a href="#">Shyft</a> , <a href="#">Zoomshift</a> and their competitors allow workers to exchange shifts that have been dictated by a scheduling system.
12.		Worker reputation aggregators	<a href="#">WorkHands</a> , <a href="#">Traity</a> (Spain) or competitors aim to extract a worker's reputational data from multiple sites to create unified verification.
13.		Administration tools	<a href="#">Hurdlr</a> , <a href="#">Sherpashare</a> , <a href="#">Zen 99</a> (now defunct), <a href="#">Benny</a> and others bundle the kind of services employees get from an HR department for irregulars.  <a href="#">Driver's Seat</a> do something similar as a co-op. <a href="#">OpenPlatforms</a> (Sweden) aims to merge data from multiple gig work platforms.
14.		Increasing income stability	Financial services firms are exploring income <a href="#">insurance</a> for gig workers. <a href="#">Wage insurance</a> can be purchased. <a href="#">Alia</a> pools domestic worker insurance. <a href="#">Wagestream</a> amortizes precarious income.
15.	Alternative models	Platforms aiming to empower workers	<a href="#">Managed by Q</a> , <a href="#">Zirtual</a> , <a href="#">Hello Alfred</a> , <a href="#">Shyp</a> (now defunct) and others hire – or once hired - conventional staff then deploy them on short-term assignments. <a href="#">Juno</a> aimed to empower minicab drivers ( <a href="#">but didn't</a> ).  The <a href="#">UP&amp;GO</a> co-operative sells housecleaning in New York City, retaining only 5% of charges. <a href="#">Loconomics</a> is a co-op platform for the Bay Area.