

Report highlights perils of the digital gig economy

January 29 2020



Critics argue that the gig economy's flexibility is an illusion

From hidden costs and poor wages to the pressures of being constantly available and lack of career development, many workers feel there is no way out of the digital "gig economy", according to a new report published on Wednesday.

Technology think-tank Doteveryone said such jobs via [mobile applications](#) offered "flexibility and freedom" for people with existing skills and financial means.

"But for those who don't, the app has become a trap. They have no option but to work gigs, and no way out once they've begun," it said in the report, "Better work in the gig economy".

The think-tank said one in 10 Britons takes a job via a [digital platform](#) at least once a week, to provide ever-more demanding consumers with services from taxi rides, hairdressing and takeaway meals to home repairs or babysitting.

It said the "gig economy", in which nearly five million people work in the UK, works for some self-employed people, giving them a degree of freedom and a comfortable income.

Sometimes nicknamed "zero-hour jobs" because they do not guarantee any minimum working hours, these jobs also contribute significantly to the UK's record-low unemployment rate.

Many employees said they were satisfied with their income, either [full-time](#) or as a supplement to another activity.

But many employees said gig work was "like quicksand—low pay becomes unlivable pay after costs are accounted for—and the promise of flexibility is an illusion when, in reality, workers must be available 24/7 and scramble for every gig available".

They live under the stress of constant customer evaluations that can call into question their ability to receive future orders, and complain of being treated like robots by their employers.

Workers' rights

British director Ken Loach's latest film "Sorry We Missed You" depicts the difficulties of an [employee](#) of a delivery company who works at such a fast pace that his health and family life suffer.



Doteveryone's report recommends the introduction of a minimum wage for workers in the "gig economy"

He then finds himself in a financial impasse after accumulating debts to buy his van and deal with damage to his equipment.

Dot everyone's report recommends the introduction of a minimum wage for workers in the "gig economy" "that accounts for the costs of doing gig work".

The think-tank also proposed that companies should set up human contact points to answer questions from their employees, instead of automated systems.

The centre's chief executive, dotcom entrepreneur Martha Lane Fox, said: "The [gig economy](#) can be fantastically empowering if you can work on the terms you wish for.

"But it can also be destabilising, dehumanising and dispiriting if you don't."

Convenience "must not be traded for the rights of people to work with financial security and dignity and to fulfil their dream for the future", she added.

Food delivery company Deliveroo and taxi-hailing service Uber did not respond to AFP requests for comment.

In 2018, a London labour tribunal ruled on appeal that Uber should consider its UK drivers as employees, giving them the right to minimum hourly wages and paid holidays.

Uber wants to take the case to the Supreme Court.

California, on the US west coast, ratified a law in September forcing the car booking giants to reclassify its drivers as employees.

Several cases of workers affiliated to a platform demanding their recognition as employees have emerged in other countries, notably in

France.

© 2020 AFP

Citation: Report highlights perils of the digital gig economy (2020, January 29) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-01-highlights-perils-digital-gig-economy.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.