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THE GIG ECONOMY: Overview and prospects for the Philippines

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THE GIG ECONOMY: Overview and prospects for the Philippines

Introduction

Technology has given rise to many digital platforms that enable seamless social connections, instant transactions, and high-definition visuals and imagery, to name a few. It is amazing how far technology has brought us to where we are today. Nowadays, by using a laptop or a mobile device, we reap the benefits that come with this technological advancement. From expanding our professional networks online to learning a new recipe from an online content creator, the possibilities seem endless in a digital world. There is, however, one more aspect of our lives that is significantly impacted by this rapid change—the very nature of work.

Many have encountered the term gig economy in one form or another. The term has been frequently used in mainstream media, which have highlighted its advantages and disadvantages. At its basic definition, the gig economy refers to a labor market environment wherein jobs are mostly short-term in nature, workers are predominantly independent contractors, and no traditional employer-employee relationship exists between the transacting parties (Esguerra, 2019). It is a fresh and stark contrast to traditional employment, wherein jobs involve long-term commitments and professional relationships between employers and their employees.

Given the short-term nature of jobs in the gig economy, engagements between the employer and the worker are usually treated on a ‘piece-work basis’. Think of interview transcripts, online research, product testing, and answering survey questionnaires, to name a few—these are some of the common jobs found in the gig economy. These jobs are commonly mediated by remote working digital platforms, which we will later discuss in greater detail.

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The rapid growth of the gig economy brings with it both opportunities and challenges not only for individuals and firms, but also for entire industries. Policy makers, corporate decision makers, and participants in the labor market would be benefitted from having a better understanding of this emerging phenomenon so that its benefits could be harnessed not only to sustain economic gain but also to promote the interests and well-being of parties involved in it.

In this article, we arranged our discussion as follows. First, we further explain what the gig economy is. How does the existing literature view the gig economy? Second, we explore how the gig economy came to be in a global setting. What are the factors that led to its rise? Third, we look at the opportunities and challenges brought about by the emergence of the gig economy in the Philippines. What should we watch out for in this rapidly rising phenomenon? Finally, we establish a call to action to support the gig economy in the Philippines.

What is the gig economy?

In this article, we refer to the gig economy as a labor market that consists of jobs that are short-term in nature and mediated by remote working digital platforms, with workers being predominantly independent contractors. We came up with this definition based on various other definitions in the existing literature, as shown in Table 1 (Woodcock & Graham, 2020; The ASEAN Post, 2020; Nagamora, 2020; Esguerra, 2019; Staffing Industry Analysts, 2019; Gallup, 2018; Healy et al., 2017; Donovan et al., 2016). This definition fits the objective of this article, which is to provide an overview of the gig economy and how technology enables it to thrive. While we acknowledge that there are other forms of work in the gig economy that are not mediated by digital platforms, we nonetheless place an emphasis on technology because of the global scale it involves.

Table 1
Definitions and categorization of jobs in the gig economy

<i>Source</i>	<i>Definition/s of gig economy</i>	<i>Categorizations of gig economy</i>
Woodcock & Graham (2020)	Refers to labor markets that are characterized by independent contracting that happens through, via, and on digital platforms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery work • Taxi work • Domestic and care work • Microwork • Online freelancing
The ASEAN Post (2020)	Refers to the hiring of independent contractors and short-term workers by businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freelancers • Gig workers • Independent contractors • Free agents
Nagamora (2020)	Refers to new technology-enabled kinds of work – often temporary jobs that are commonplace in companies that rely on independent contractors and freelancers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent workers • Freelancers
Esguerra (2019)	Describes a labor market environment in which jobs are short-term in nature, workers are predominantly independent contractors, and no employer-employee relationship exists between the transacting parties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-regulars • Freelancers
Staffing Industry Analysts (2019)	Refers to ‘electronically mediated work’. Workers in the gig economy earn money by performing work that has a limited tenure from the client’s perspective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing agency assigns temporary workers • People working via the human cloud (electronically mediated work) • Other independent contractors and business owners with no employees • Companies source temporary workers • Salaried employees of consulting firms on consulting engagement with clients
Gallup (2018)	Refers to emerging alternative work arrangements that are enabled by digital technologies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent contractors • Online platform workers

<i>Source</i>	<i>Definition/s of gig economy</i>	<i>Categorizations of gig economy</i>
Healy et al. (2017)	Involves the rapid spread of startups that connect and mediate between buyers and sellers in a range of markets, but particularly markets for in-person services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract firm workers • On-call workers • Temporary workers
Donovan et al. (2016)	Refers to a collection of markets that match providers to consumers on a gig (or job) basis in support of on-demand commerce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platform workers • Online sellers <p>Suggests that characterizing the gig economy workforce is challenging along several fronts. To date, no large-scale official data have been collected; and there remains considerable uncertainty about how to best measure this segment of the labor force.</p>

The kinds of jobs that gig economy workers receive are typically contingent or ‘by chance’. It may have variable hours and little job security, involve payment on a piece-work basis, and lack any options for career development. From the client’s perspective, there is no tenure in such an arrangement (Staffing Industry Analysts, 2019). For gig workers, however, working full-time in the gig economy and developing a career out of it, is possible. According to Johnson (2019), for instance, various online jobs in marketing, blogging monetization, and online content creation allowed him to earn a significantly higher income as compared to his previous full-time employment.

In recent years, more professionals are engaging with work in the gig economy because of its short-term characteristics and its capacity to significantly increase one’s income. With the use of online platforms, these jobs can be performed seamlessly and gig workers can perform tasks at their own time, as long as they meet the set deadline (The ASEAN Post, 2020). Through technology, gig economy workers can take on ‘extra’ or freelance work from anywhere in the world.

One of the most salient features of jobs in the gig economy is the use of remote working digital platforms. Serving as the base upon which jobs in the gig economy are built, these platforms provide ‘tools to bring together the supply of, and demand for, labor’, including the application, digital infrastructure, and algorithms for managing the work (Graham and Woodcock, 2018). Some popular platforms include Fiverr.com, Upwork.com, and Freelancer.com.

There are, however, other ways that jobs in the gig economy are obtained, such as through referrals and word-of-mouth (Lares, 2019). Some workers rely heavily on referrals, owing to the successful relationships they

have built with their clients. These jobs are also commonly mediated by digital platforms. However, gig economy workers who receive work via referrals instead of digital work platforms utilize other means of communicating and engaging with their clients (e.g., office productivity suites, email applications, and social media platforms).

Origins of the gig economy

While the rise of the gig economy is commonly attributed to technological advancement and the proliferation of digital platforms, we also have to consider various interrelated factors that come into play. We categorized these factors as follows: (1) economic and technological factors, (2) socio-cultural factors, and (3) political and legal factors.

Economic and technological factors. With the use of digital platforms, individuals who have a smartphone or other devices can now apply for online jobs anywhere in the global market, provided they have the experience and credentials. Traditionally, a person has to submit a resume physically to a company and wait for a response, which would be further communicated via a phone call or by mail. Today, hiring processes have become more seamless and efficient through digital platforms (International Telecommunication Union, 2008).

Another essential theme to note is that technology has made ‘measuring work’ easier, unlike in more traditional set-ups under which workers are manually monitored (Woodcock & Graham, 2020). In digital platforms like cloud platforms, every digital activity being performed by workers is monitored within the platform. From performance evaluations, number of hours logged, down to the amount of data being uploaded, everything work-related are being monitored.

It is no surprise, then, that business process outsourcing (BPO) has also become popular around the world. With the technological convenience of monitoring a team even from another country, the BPO industry has continuously expanded its global talent pool. Many countries rely on their BPO sectors to fuel the economy, such as the Philippines, which employs over 1.2 million employees (Chandwani, 2019). Ultimately, the intensification of BPO services around the world became one of the bases for today's online outsourcing of various skills and services in the gig economy.

Socio-cultural factors. People participate in the gig economy for a number of reasons. Freedom to work from any location, flexible work hours, autonomy from the employer's direction and control, and higher expected incomes (mainly from performing various jobs) make working in the gig economy especially attractive for the 'young and tech-savvy' (Esguerra, 2019).

According to a 2017 Freelancer Insights Report by PayPal, the 'autonomy of freelancing' is its 'greatest appeal'. Specifically, being their own boss with flexibility in where they work, what they do, and when they do it is the most attractive to freelancers. The gig economy also provides "bridge employment" for when traditional full-time jobs are beyond the reach of workers (Donovan et al., 2016). Many workers rely on short-term contracts in the gig economy due to the presence of more lucrative prospects as compared to traditional forms of employment.

To add, Fox (2017) states that stagnant wages in traditional jobs push people into working in the gig economy because they simply cannot get by on a single paycheck. The gig economy allows them to earn income on the side, sometimes even higher than their regular jobs. According to another study, however, people participate in the gig economy 'by choice', not out of necessity (Ferguson, 2018).

Gender and race also have a role to play in the rise of the gig economy (Woodcock & Graham, 2020). The gendered relationships of work, for instance, can be seen in the inclusion and exclusion of women in different kinds of work. In the past, women are perceived to solely engage in domestic work, whereas men are seen as capable of engaging in different types of work. On the other hand, the 'racialization' of work has its roots in

slavery, which played a key role in financing the industrial revolution in Western countries. While today the nature of work has become more 'fair' for men, women, and people of all walks of life, the same gendered and racialized relationships of work in the past still continue to manifest and are rearticulated in new ways in the gig economy (Hunt & Samman, 2019).

Political and legal factors. Governments are beginning to see the benefits to investing in the gig economy. In South Korea, the government is investing on the 'platform economy', an economy based on infrastructure and technology essential for the growth of several industries (Yoon, 2018). The initiative is part of current efforts to 'attain innovative growth through bold regulatory reforms'. Specifically, the South Korean government is making strategic investments in eight key industries: hyperconnectivity, smart factories, smart farms, financial technology, new energy, smart cities, and future cars.

Similar initiatives are being undertaken in countries like Kenya. Its government, for instance, has begun investing in the Ajira Digital Platform, a joint program between the Kenyan government and private sector that enables the youth to access digital job opportunities. To date, over 52,000 youths have been trained in. The program's goal is to link two million youths across Kenya to 'digital and digitally-enabled' work by 2022 (Watima, 2020).

Opportunities in the Philippines

According to a 2019 report by Payoneer, the Philippines ranks sixth out of the top ten countries in the world in terms of year-over-year revenue growth in the Global Gig Economy Index. The data are summarized as follows: United States of America (78%), United Kingdom (59%), Brazil (48%), Pakistan (47%), Ukraine (36%), Philippines (35%), India (29%), Bangladesh (27%), Russia (20%), and Serbia (19%). Freelancing in Asia is also rapidly expanding as its freelancers 'more than doubled' their earnings since 2018.

In the 2017 report by PayPal, some of the many types of work Filipino freelancers are engaged in are data entry/internet research (34%), virtual assistance (13%), and customer service (8%). PayPal's survey also revealed that digital platforms provide ease and convenience for Filipino freelancers to receive payments from clients overseas.

Employment and training opportunities for freelancers. In the corporate environment, workers in the gig economy are beginning to tap into several opportunities (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020). Many companies, for instance, now rely on freelancers to perform various roles on learning and development, customer support, website development, and other business activities and functions. Some companies even prefer fewer employees in certain business functions because majority of the work is outsourced to freelancers.

The hiring of workers in the gig economy is also now more convenient through digital platforms. In platforms like Upwork.com, freelancers are able to sift through hundreds of job postings by employers across the world (Popiel, 2017). These job postings work similarly as classified ads in newspapers, but in digital platforms like Upwork.com, the employer and freelancer can communicate seamlessly. For instance, the job postings includes the terms and conditions, payment process, and rating of the employers based on past freelancers they worked with, among others. A summary of some popular digital platforms are shown on Table 2.

Table 2
Key characteristics of popular digital platforms

Platform	URL	Characteristics
Upwork	https://www.upwork.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes complex projects and long-term contracts • Has a software and marketing focus
Freelancer	https://www.freelancer.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General platform • Includes corporate hires • Provides capability to communicate online
Toptal	https://www.toptal.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on corporate hires • Involves rigorous screening of applicants • Provides lucrative awards
Guru	https://www.guru.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-effective for employers • Includes feedback scores • Provides flexible payment rates
People Per Hour	https://www.peopleperhour.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves an international community • Includes job ratings • Provides a wide range of services
Aquent	https://aquent.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to auto-match with clients • Allows auto project-tagging • Provides deep insights to employers and freelancers
99designs	https://99designs.co.uk/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on designers • Has 90 categories of work • Involves collaborative opportunities
Solidgigs	https://solidgigs.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a weekly ‘gig list’ • Provides courses and tools

Filipino freelancers are also supported by government initiatives such as the DigitalJobsPH Technical Training, which help people find work as digital entrepreneurs and freelancers. The trainings are commonly offered to people coming from rural communities who are seeking more lucrative work. The initiative is also meant to ‘provide meaningful work’ for people who are otherwise left out by the development and industrialization in the country’s major cities. Among the training programs the initiative provides include digital marketing, search engine optimization, virtual assistance, graphic design, content writing, website development, and social media marketing.

Larger pool of talent for companies. It is not only Filipino workers that benefit from the gig economy. Companies are now also able to attract talent from across the world. In what Graham and Anwar (2019) term as the “planetary labor market”, the world is witnessing the emergence of a hyperconnected global market where any task conceivable by companies can now be outsourced through digital platforms. In the Philippines, this means that companies now have access to a talent pool beyond its regular constraints in the local labor market.

According to Statista (2020), the projected gross volume of the gig economy is expected to reach USD 455.20

billion by 2023. As more people across the world, most especially the ‘young and tech-savvy’, participate in the gig economy, companies must increasingly recognize the many human resource opportunities that come with this growth. Moreover, with a globalized and diversified talent pool, Philippine companies can look forward to an equally diverse skillset in its workforce.

Regulatory mechanisms. In the regulatory realm, House Bill No. 6926, also known as the “National Digital Careers Act of 2020”, has been introduced in the House of Representatives. It aims to enhance the competitiveness of Filipino gig economy workers through access to necessary training, skills development, and scholarship programs as the country transitions to the “new normal” (Calalo, 2020). In the bill, various government agencies are tasked to develop a master plan to provide access to training, market support, labor standards, and other forms of assistance to workers pursuing digital careers.

These standards are essentially meant to simplify the process of registering and filing complaints by workers in the gig economy, to set up the minimum requirements for persons to be qualified as workers in the gig economy in the form of industry-centric certifications or trainings, and to adopt a simple mechanism to ensure that workers in the gig economy file taxes and other fees to the government. Once these regulatory mechanisms are in place, Filipino workers in the gig economy would gradually be recognized as essential players in the Philippine economy, much like those in traditional employment.

Challenges in the Philippines

The gig economy is not without challenges. Emerging evidence shows a range of negative outcomes: low pay, precarity, stressful and dangerous working conditions, one-sided contracts, and a lack of employment protection, to name a few (Wood et al., 2019).

Work consistency and worker exploitation. PayPal (2017) found that 92% of Filipino freelancers said ‘job stability’ is a key concern for their careers. It is difficult for freelancers to plan for the future because they constantly shift from one contract to another. To sustain a pipeline, freelancers must work for multiple clients, which allow them to cushion the unpredictability of work as well as to diversify their income streams.

In line with the difficulty of finding consistent work, Filipino workers in the gig economy also experience challenges over the lack of social safety nets, financial security, and health and retirement plans (The ASEAN Post, 2020). Without savings or health benefits, freelancing can become overwhelming and stressful. What freelancers generally do, therefore, is to set aside funds and independently avail of health and retirement plans, among others—the key reason being that they are self-employed and essentially treat themselves as a business that must be sustained long-term.

In Southeast Asia, the gig economy is unregulated, making freelancers easy targets for exploitation either by being overworked or underpaid. There are also clients who assume freelancers work for free. PayPal (2017) revealed that 58% of freelancers in four Southeast Asian markets (Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam) have experienced not being paid—the key reason of which is that freelancers ‘are not being taken seriously by clients’.

Digital divide. While the gig economy has provided jobs to millions of Filipinos, it is important to note that there are still millions of others that are left out by this technological development. The digital divide—a deep-rooted challenge in the use of digital technologies—has led to two major challenges (Lemana & Matala, 2020). One is the inequalities with access to information communication technology (ICT). This challenge is particularly salient among low-income communities that do not have access to ICT. The other involves usage patterns and intensity among people or organizations that already have access to ICT—this refers to digital literacy and one’s capability of operating such technologies.

Research shows that these two challenges in the digital divide are mainly shaped by socio-economic inequalities. Those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, such as individuals with lower incomes, lower education levels, those with disabilities, and those living in rural communities or come from ethnic minorities, among others, are more likely to suffer from digital inequalities (Cruz-Jesus, Vicente, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2016).

Other studies found that Filipinos who have higher educational attainment tend to use digital technologies for ‘capital-enhancing goals’ such as work, career, or studies (Labucay, 2014). This is most likely the demographic that

participates in the gig economy. Filipinos, however, who have lower educational attainment tend to use digital technologies more for entertainment, online commerce, and messaging.

Data from the World Bank (2017) reveal that while 60% of Filipinos are internet users, internet penetration, literacy, and speed remain hindered by inadequate infrastructure. A report by the International Telecommunications Union (2017) also places the country in 101st out of 176 countries in terms of ICT development and infrastructure. At its core, digital technologies in the Philippines are shaped by “limited, unequal, and constrained access” (Lemana & Matala, 2020). Ultimately, this is a major challenge across several areas—from societal down to economic factors—but there are potential greener pastures when opportunities in the gig economy are tapped to provide training and jobs even to those that are ‘left behind’.

Lack of legal frameworks. One could argue that the lack of regulatory frameworks is contributory to the challenges faced by parties involved in the gig economy. For instance, there is a lack of policy and governmental support for quality work or projects, worker’s protection, and access to benefits (Donovan et al., 2016). Since gig workers are not covered by labor laws, they are not officially entitled to the benefits a traditional employee receives. There are also no generally agreed upon definitions of the ‘gig economy’, ‘freelancers’, etc. in the legal lexicon, which make it more difficult to develop labor laws and models as fast as how the gig economy is growing.

For most freelancers, the lack of social safety nets can trigger legal conflicts in terms of intellectual property and confidentiality (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020). For instance, it is difficult to obtain the intellectual property from the outputs produced by freelancers. Conversely, the freelancer could be working for several competitors, thereby placing the company’s interests at risk due to the non-existence of a “non-compete” clause in casual work arrangements. Providing sensitive and vital information to freelancers with short-term contracts, therefore, can be a cause for concern.

Another important challenge to consider is the lack of regulation that address gender discrepancies when gaining work from digital freelancing platforms (Barzilay & Ben-David 2016). There has been little research to date on the impacts of the gig economy on the ‘gendered

experiences of gig work.’ This lack of knowledge limits the ability of policymakers to understand women’s experiences in the gig economy and, therefore, to develop policy responses focused on women’s economic empowerment. On the whole, this issue represents the continuation—and in some cases, deepening—of long-standing structural and gendered inequalities.

In an article, The World Bank (2015) stated that without changes to governments’ regulations, freelancers will continue to be left out of the traditional social protection systems and other relevant labor laws. The International Labor Organization (ILO) also suggested for countries to extend their labor protection to people who are working part-time or in temporary jobs.

A call to action

There is no shortage of work to be done to secure the future of workers in the gig economy. As we presented in this article, the Philippines’ gig economy is among the biggest in the world, having approximately 35% year-over-year revenue growth. Therefore, there are many opportunities for growth and investment in the gig economy, most especially in terms of developing the country’s digital infrastructure. With the millions of Filipinos now participating in the gig economy, it is becoming increasingly important to develop support mechanisms for such a growing sector.

Some of the general areas that the public and private sectors can begin investing into include the modernization of digital infrastructure, pursuing an innovation-driven industrial strategy, equipping the Filipino population with ‘21st century skills’, and reforming current regulatory frameworks as well as developing new ones that address the ever-changing needs of the gig economy (Esguerra, 2019). These recommendations are, in fact, extensively recorded in official documents, commissioned studies, academic papers, and conference proceedings by various organizations (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2019).

Closing the digital divide. As of 2019, up to 712 individuals now have online jobs because of the Department of Information and Communications Technology’s DigitalJobsPH Technical Training. Nearly 40 business process outsourcing companies have been established, and more than a thousand micro, small, and medium enterprises jumpstarted their e-commerce businesses between 2017 and 2018 (Ciasico, 2019).

While the program has been successful, there are still many rural communities in the country that do not have access to internet connection and are, therefore, unable to participate in the gig economy. There are many issues surrounding the lack of internet connection and the slow internet speeds in the country, but what the government can already do is revisit its innovation strategies and regulations. The ICT infrastructure of Vietnam, which is mainly funded by the Vietnamese government, has approximately 70,000 cell sites across the country. In contrast, the Philippines has over 16,400 cell sites that are mainly funded by the private sector (Crisanto, 2017). Given this, the Philippine government might want to reconsider its investment strategy towards ICT by becoming more involved in the process of setting up ICT infrastructure or by encouraging new players by offering incentives and reducing bureaucratic red tape.

The government can also speed up e-governance projects, such as the national identification system and the digitalization of its various processes and procedures. Among these processes and procedures include the tax system and other government services. Some other existing programs and projects of the government that need fast-tracking include the ICT ecosystem development, national connectivity, e-Filipino, e-government harmonization, e-civil servants, Next Wave Cities, and ICT-enabled startups, to name a few (Department of Information and Communications Technology, 2018).

Revisiting labor laws and regulations. Labor laws and regulations must also be reviewed to address the special circumstances of freelancers. Ideally, labor laws should support rather than impede innovation in the gig economy. They must address intellectual property issues, workers' protection, governmental support for quality work or projects, access to benefits, and gender sensitivity, among others.

Most freelancers, for instance, are not entitled to government-mandated benefits received by regular employees, because they 'do not fit' labor laws and regulations. Due to this, the responsibility of filing taxes and applying for government benefits fall on the freelancers. We believe that this is something that can already be facilitated even without the need for a sophisticated regulatory framework. Employers, for instance, can already facilitate the withholding tax of

freelancers so that the freelancers will no longer need to file taxes themselves. A limitation to this, however, is that it is mainly applicable to contractual freelancers who are 'tied' to their employers for a certain period of time. For contingent workers, this would be more difficult to enforce due to the 'piece-work' basis and informal nature of their work arrangements.

Setting the terms and conditions on intellectual property is also a challenge for employers and freelancers. Therefore, it might be pertinent to include "non-compete" or "non-disclosure" agreements in work arrangements to avoid potential intellectual property issues. Existing laws and regulations should also be revisited such that it considers the many forms of work arrangements occurring in the gig economy, as well as their implications on intellectual property.

Educating workers in the gig economy. As we have shown, there are many opportunities and challenges for gig economy workers. One of the main issues that need to be addressed is the lack of support mechanisms for the gig economy. To address this, educating gig economy workers in the country—from identifying training and employment opportunities, down to filing taxes and availing various government benefits, could be a viable approach. Freelancers must also be made aware of the different issues that the gig economy faces, such as the non-payment of certain freelancers simply because 'they are not being taken seriously' by their employers (The ASEAN Post, 2020). Awareness can be the first step in empowering workers in the gig economy.

There are many ways that workers in the gig economy can be educated. The country's educational system, for instance, can invest in digital learning platforms like short online courses to teach gig economy workers a variety of topics such as digital skills, financial management, and even fulfilling obligations with the government such as the taxation process. In other countries, short online courses are utilized by learners to 'change' or propel their career forward and learn new knowledge and skills (Coursera, 2020). The learners also get certified in the process through an official course certificate. This certification can then be used as a proof of education once the learners apply for jobs.

Workers in the gig economy must also be educated to constantly 'reskill' and 'upskill'. There needs to be a

mechanism which allows workers in the gig economy to stay relevant not just in the local labor market, but to the global labor market as well so as to increase their competitiveness and incomes. According to the Future of Jobs Report by the World Economic Forum (2020), “the pace of technology adoption is expected to remain unabated and may accelerate in some areas” and “skills gaps continue to be high as in-demand skills across jobs change in the next five years”. This means that given the rapid changes in technology across the world, workers, including those in the gig economy, will constantly need to reskill and upskill. The report adds that in the next five years, skills such as critical thinking and analysis, problem-solving, active learning, resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility will remain in-demand and essential to the labor market.

Directions for future research. The gig economy is still a young field. However, since it is closely attributed to technology and digital platforms, the gig economy would continue to progress at a rapid pace. Some topics related to the gig economy that can still be addressed include the following: (1) the need to define the gig economy; (2) a baseline study on the profile of freelancers in the Philippines, e.g. age, gender, skillset, etc.; (3) an overview of the industries that avail the services of workers in the gig economy; and (4) main issues and challenges faced by workers in the gig economy.

Ultimately, one of the main challenges for policymakers and researchers is on how different players and initiatives in the gig economy can come together to provide an environment where freelancers and independent workers alike can thrive. The goal, after all, is for workers in the gig economy to flourish under fair and proactive social protection systems as those that people in traditional employment receive.

To end, let us revisit the key principles of the International Labor Organization’s (1944) Declaration of Philadelphia, which became one of the foundations of the ILO’s aims and objectives today: (1) labor is not a commodity; (2) freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress; (3) poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere; (4) the war against wants requires unrelenting vigor for the promotion of the common welfare; and (5) all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity.

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