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Gig Economy in Georgia: New Labor Market Dynamics and Social Challenges

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Abstract

The global labor market is rapidly changing under the influence of digital transformation and the spread of platform-based employment. In this context, the gig economy represents the formation of a new model of labor that combines flexible, temporary, and digitally managed forms of work. The presented research aims to assess the development trends of the gig economy in Georgia, as well as its social outcomes and challenges.

The research methodology is based on bibliographical and quantitative analysis. The bibliographical part includes the evaluation of studies conducted by international organizations and academic publications, while the quantitative study was carried out through Google Form, involving 153 respondents engaged in the gig economy. Data processing and visualization were conducted using Excel and Canva. The obtained results reveal that the gig economy in Georgia is growing rapidly and already plays an important role in the labor market; however, it is simultaneously associated with income instability, a deficit in social protection, and limited opportunities for career development. The conclusion emphasizes that it is a priority for the country to formulate policies that combine flexible employment with minimum guarantees of labor rights, ensuring the sustainable and socially fair development of the gig economy.

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Introduction

In recent years, the global labor market has been undergoing fundamental changes driven by the growth of the digital economy, technological innovations, and new forms of global labor mobility. Traditional employment structures, such as stable contracts, fixed working hours, and clear labor guarantees, are gradually disintegrating. They are being replaced by more flexible, on-demand forms of labor known as the gig economy. In this process, digital platforms play a decisive role by connecting users and providers, reducing transaction costs (Kharaishvili *et al*., 2025) [9], and creating new types of labor relations. According to the World Economic Forum (2020) [14] and McKinsey Global Institute (2021) [11], platform-based employment already provides income sources for millions of people worldwide, yet simultaneously exacerbates problems related to job instability, lack of social protection, and insufficient regulation.

In the post-Soviet region, including Georgia, the formation of the gig economy is taking place under different social and economic conditions, where the share of informal employment remains high and labor protection mechanisms are weak. In this context, digital labor can be seen both as an economic opportunity (especially for young and urban populations) and as a social challenge linked to unstable jobs, low pay, and social inequality. The case of Georgia is particularly interesting, as the development of the gig economy coincides with the country's digital transformation policies and efforts toward economic modernization, while also raising questions about labor rights, social protection, and economic justice.

Understanding these issues is the main objective of this study, which aims to critically analyze the essence, structure, and social consequences of the gig economy in Georgia, based on existing scientific and practical data.

Literature Review

The rapid growth of the gig economy in Georgia reflects one of the most significant transformations in the labor market over the past decade, where traditional employment forms are gradually being replaced by flexible, short-term, and digitally mediated work. The development of the gig economy in Georgia began with the entry of international platforms such as Bolt, Glovo, Upwork, and Wolt, which have become particularly popular in major urban centers. As noted by the International Labour Office (2021) [8], platform-based employment creates new opportunities for people excluded from formal labor relations, especially for young people. However, World Bank studies show that the growth of the gig economy does not occur under stable labor market conditions but rather relies on informal employment, where labor guarantees, social protection, and health insurance are limited or practically nonexistent (Zeid *et al*., 2022) [15].

Research conducted by Georgian scholars indicates that the gig economy creates additional income sources and increases self-employment opportunities; however, it simultaneously intensifies economic vulnerability (Diakonidze, 2023) [3]. Gig workers in Georgia are often perceived as independent contractors, but in reality, they are dependent on the algorithmic management of platforms, which limits their autonomy and bargaining power (Grigolaia, 2025) [7]. This phenomenon aligns with De Stefano's (2015) [2] global assessment, according to which the gig economy creates an "illusion of flexibility," where workers appear to work freely but, in fact, operate under conditions of insecurity. From the perspective of gender and social equality, the gig economy in Georgia further exacerbates inequality. Women and low-income citizens are mainly concentrated in low-paid and unstable jobs, which increases economic marginalization. Furthermore, regional differentiation is evident: in Tbilisi, the gig economy is perceived as a temporary income source, while in rural areas, it is often the only employment opportunity.

According to official labor market data (GeoStat, 2025) [5], the rate of self-employment in Georgia remains high, while the share of formal labor relations is low, which facilitates the development of the gig economy. At the same time, the country practically lacks regulation governing digital platforms' operations or workers' rights. Consequently, Georgia needs to implement a "hybrid model" that combines the flexibility of self-employment with elements of social guarantees characteristic of formal employment. A similar recommendation is found in the OECD (2021) [12] report, which calls on post-Soviet countries to establish labor protection mechanisms ensuring minimum standards, data transparency, and fair remuneration.

The economic impact of the gig economy in Georgia is twofold: on one hand, it increases population participation in the digital economy and creates new income types; on the other hand, it contributes to labor market fragmentation and the weakening of the state's fiscal base. Unregistered work and tax avoidance reduce the resources of social funds, which, in the long term, threaten the maintenance of social stability (Grigolaia, 2024) [6]. As a result, the gig economy in Georgia has become a symbol of a socio-economic paradox - it strengthens economic dynamism while simultaneously reinforcing labor insecurity, low social standards, and inequality. Therefore, it is critically important for the country to develop regulations based on the study of gig workers' labor market conditions, which would protect their rights, establish minimum social protection, and promote long-term, inclusive economic development.

Research Methodology

This paper uses a combination of bibliographical and quantitative research methods.

Within the framework of the bibliographical study, relevant research conducted by international organizations (ILO, OECD, World Bank, WEF, etc.) and academic publications was analyzed, allowing the phenomenon of the gig economy to be discussed in both global and national contexts. The quantitative study was conducted in the format of an online survey using Google Form. A total of 153 respondents participated in the research, all of whom are involved in various digital and platform-based activities. The obtained data were processed and visualized using Excel and Canva software tools.

The analytical part of the research is based on the methods of analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction, which ensure both the logical processing of factual material and the accuracy of its theoretical interpretation.

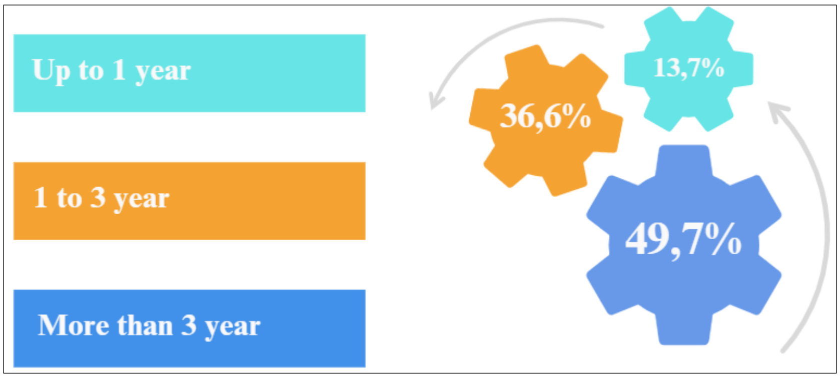
This methodological approach provides an understanding of the substantive aspects of the gig economy based on its quantitative profile and creates a foundation for formulating practical and theoretical conclusions.

Research Findings

The gig economy is one of the fastest-growing directions in the modern labor market, based on flexible, temporary, or project-based forms of employment. Its study is particularly important in Georgia, where the labor market structure is characterized by a high share of informal employment. Under these conditions, gig activity can become both an additional source of income and an important opportunity for young people and the self-employed.

The results of the survey conducted within the framework of the study clearly show the picture of existing trends – 27.7% of respondents are already engaged in the gig economy. These data confirm that in Georgia, the gig economy is a real, though still limited-scale, practice. Its study has both scientific and practical value, as the information obtained will help us better understand workers' behaviors, their needs, and possible directions of development.

A total of 153 respondents participated in the study of the gig economy segment. Data on their fields of employment clearly show that the gig economy in Georgia covers diverse sectors, although certain dominant directions also emerge. The largest group of those employed in the gig economy is represented by the delivery service and courier sector (42 respondents). Also notable are taxi drivers (26 respondents). These data indicate that the most accessible and large-scale form of gig economy in Georgia is associated with transportation and logistics services. This may be due to the rapid growth of platforms (Bolt, Glovo, Wolt), the low entry barrier, and the fact that such work does not require special qualifications but provides an opportunity for stable income. On the other hand, the data also revealed a segment of intellectual and creative labor, including programmers (18), tutors (14), auditors (10), graphic/web designers (6), content creators (6), translators (4), copywriters (2), and coaches (2). This group accounts for a significant share, showing that the gig economy in Georgia is not limited to low-skilled areas only. It is gradually acquiring a professional dimension where the main requirement is digital skills and knowledge. Within the framework of the study, the duration of employment in the gig economy was determined. 36.6% of respondents have 1–3 years of experience in the gig sector, while only 13.7% have worked for less than one year. This indicates that the inflow of new participants into gig employment is relatively small, while the main body already consists of a consolidated group of workers. Almost half (49.7%) of respondents have been working in the gig economy for more than 3 years (Fig. 1).



Source: Compiled by the authors based on quantitative research results

Fig 1: Work experience of employees in the gig economy

The above result is interesting for two reasons: (1) it confirms that the gig economy in Georgia is no longer a new or temporary phenomenon - it is becoming a stable employment practice where people remain for several years; (2) it indicates that for many, gig work represents not only additional activity but also a long-term livelihood. For employers and other labor market actors, this is a signal that gig work should no longer be perceived as a “temporary economic trend,” but as a sustainable segment of the labor market, already comprising a broad group of experienced and stable workers.

Data from 153 respondents show that the majority of those employed in the gig economy work within the framework of traditional full-time employment. Specifically, the largest group works 31–40 hours per week (39.2%), followed by those working 21–30 hours (34%). Only 20.9% work less than 20 hours per week, while 5.9% exceed 40 hours (Fig. 2).

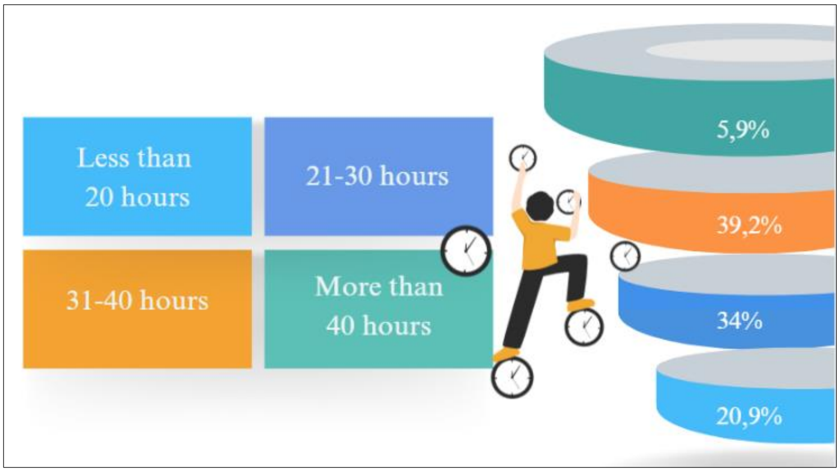


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Fig 2: Weekly working hours of employees in the gig economy

The results of this study are interesting from several perspectives. On the one hand, they indicate that a large part of those employed in the gig economy actually work part-time or full-time, contradicting the stereotype that gig employment is only an additional, small-scale activity. On the other hand, the existence of a small group working more than 40 hours suggests that some participants experience intensive workloads, possibly due to financial needs. Naturally, such a workload can create an imbalance between work and personal life for those employed in the gig economy. The study results also show that for the majority, gig work is associated with significant challenges in quality of life. Only 14.4% stated that they fully balance work and personal life. For 73.9%, the balance is “sometimes disrupted,” and for 11.8% it is “constantly disrupted” (Fig. 3).

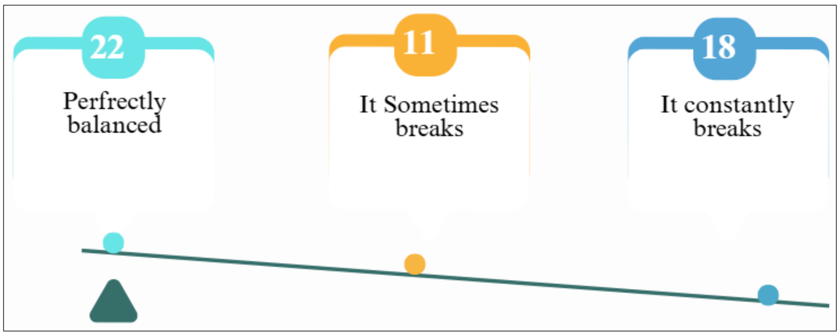

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Fig 3: Work-life balance among employees in the gig economy

These data show that despite the widespread perception of gig work as flexible, in practice, flexibility does not always translate into a harmonious life. On the contrary, work-life imbalance is quite common. This can be explained by several factors: (1) the irregular nature of work (calls, orders, customer demand) hinders a stable schedule; (2) some gig workers have to work simultaneously on multiple platforms, complicating time management; (3) there are no regulated labor guarantees protecting personal time, as in traditional employment.

Against this background, data from the study show that for two-thirds of respondents (65.4%), the gig economy is the main source of income, while for one-third (34.6%) - an additional source (Fig. 4).

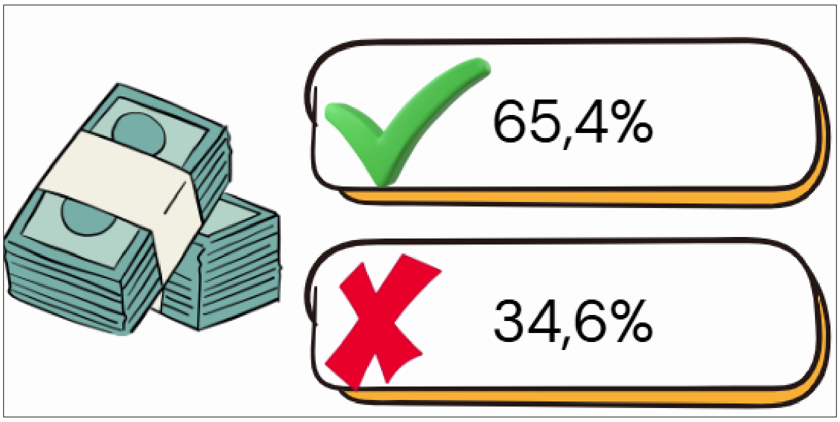

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Fig 4: Significance of income from gig economy employment (main source)

This result is particularly important. It confirms that the gig economy in Georgia is already perceived not only as an opportunity for additional income but also as a primary economic support mechanism. Considering that more than half of these individuals have been in this field for over 3 years, it becomes clear that the gig economy actually functions as an alternative sector of the labor market.

Under such conditions, it is important to assess workers' perceptions of fairness regarding remuneration in the gig economy. The study shows that 55.6% of respondents consider their pay fair, while 44.4% do not. This almost equal distribution suggests that the perception of pay fairness in the gig economy is quite unstable (Fig. 5).

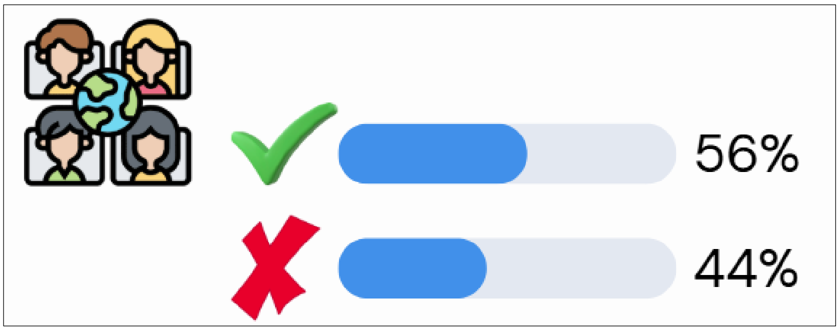

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Fig 5: Perception of fairness regarding remuneration in the gig economy

Theoretically, the sense of fairness is related not only to the objective amount of pay but also to social expectations and the subjective value of work. The fact that nearly every second worker is dissatisfied indicates structural problems, namely: (1) algorithmic management by platform companies often creates opaque pay conditions; (2) work volume and income depend on external factors beyond workers' control; (3) the absence of social guarantees reinforces the sense of unfairness.

In this context, it is logical to examine attitudes toward income stability. According to the results, 62.7% of respondents assessed their income as "unstable," 23.5% as "rather unstable," and only 13.7% as "stable" (Fig. 6).

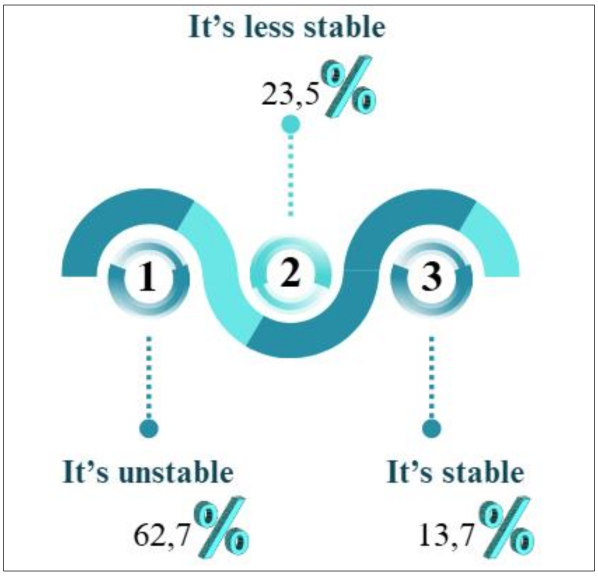

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Fig 6: Income stability of employees in the gig economy

These results indicate that for the majority of gig workers, the economic situation is constantly changing and insecure. The lack of stability is one of the main challenges in gig work, as the inability to predict income complicates both long-term financial planning and the sense of daily security. According to employees' assessments, the variability of income is mainly determined by (Fig. 7):

- Number of orders (76.6%) – the main factor reflecting demand-based dynamics of gig work;
- Competition (34%) – indicating that job distribution on platforms is often closely related to the number of other workers;
- Seasonality (24.7%) – particularly evident in transportation, delivery, and tourism-related sectors;
- Platform algorithm (18%) – less frequently mentioned, but a critically important factor, as algorithms determine how orders are distributed, directly affecting income.

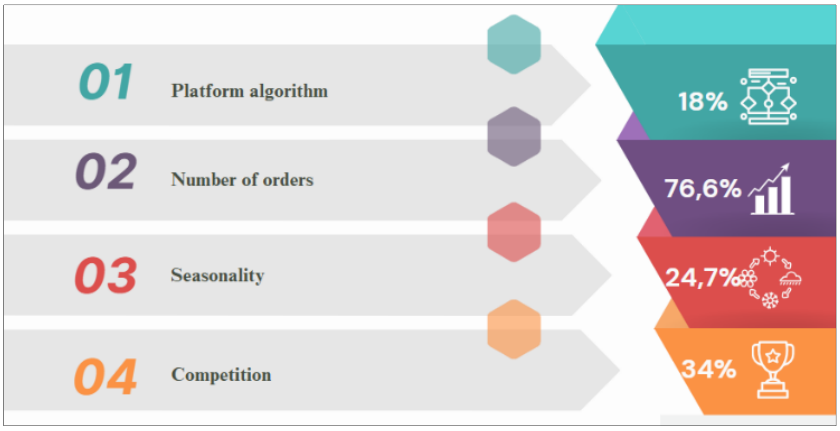

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Fig 7: Factors determining income variability in the gig economy

These results once again confirm that the gig economy is a systemic source of instability. Income depends not only on individual skills and work quality but also on factors beyond workers' control, such as algorithmic decisions or seasonal demand.

Theoretically, the data obtained correspond to trends described in international studies. Gig work increasingly replaces traditional employment but simultaneously aggravates social protection issues, as such employment is mostly unregulated.

This opinion is reinforced by data from the Georgian study. The absolute majority of those employed in the gig economy, 71.9%, do not have a health insurance package. Only 7.8% are insured by an employer, while 20.3% finance health insurance independently (Fig. 8).

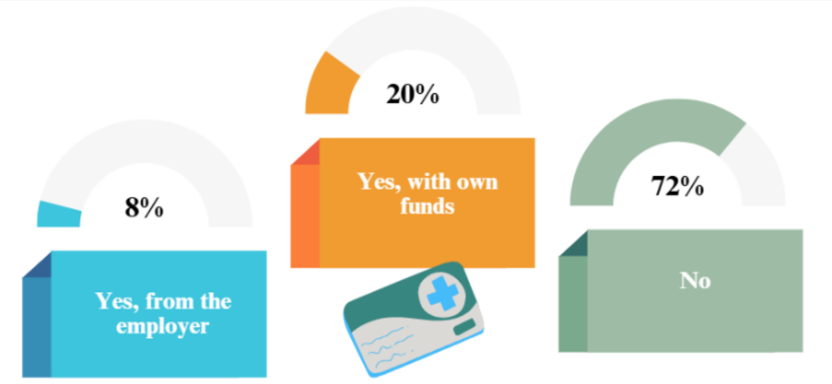

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Fig 8: Health insurance coverage among employees in the gig economy

This indicator points to one of the main structural problems. In the gig economy segment, there is practically no social protection mechanism, which is typical for platform-based employment. The lack of insurance coverage increases the individual burden of health and social risks, which may later translate into both financial and social vulnerability. In this regard, the existence of savings (e.g., pension savings) becomes crucial. According to the study, the majority of gig workers (85.6%; 131 respondents) do not have savings, while only a small part (14.4%; 22 respondents) reported having the opportunity to save (Fig. 9).

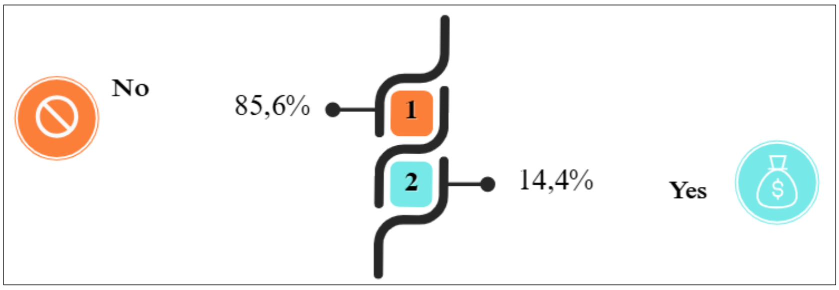

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Fig 9: Use of savings among employees in the gig economy

Such a result underlines the social insecurity and economic vulnerability of gig workers. The lack of savings is particularly problematic for a country like Georgia, where social protection mechanisms and the pension system are still under development. As a result, a large part of gig workers may face high risks in cases of economic crises, income fluctuations, health problems, or job loss.

In this context, educational and professional training programs gain particular importance, as they provide gig workers with opportunities to develop skills, acquire new competencies, and increase competitiveness in the labor market. Therefore, it is important to examine research results in this direction as well. In Georgia, a low rate of gig workers' participation in training and courses was recorded (26.1%; Fig. 10).

Source: Compiled by the authors based on quantitative research results

Fig 10: Participation of employees in the gig economy in training and courses

The low activity of gig workers in training and educational courses highlights an important gap - most have no access to or do not participate in professional development initiatives. This creates two major problems: (1) limited professional development hinders long-term career prospects; (2) given the specific nature of the platform economy, constant skill renewal is of critical importance, yet self-employed workers often face financial or time constraints.

Such a low level of participation in professional development tools indicates a systemic problem of skill renewal, which in the future may become an obstacle both for individual and market development.

The recorded activity in training and courses suggests that gig workers lack systemic support for professional development, which threatens their career stability. Against this background, it becomes important to analyze how workers themselves perceive the gig economy: whether they see it as a long-term career choice or merely a temporary solution to meet economic needs. The results obtained in this regard allow us to better understand how sustainable the gig sector is as an employment model and how realistic its integration into the country's labor structure might be.

The results show that the majority of gig workers (61.4%) do not consider gig employment as a long-term career perspective, while only 38.6% view it as a stable professional choice (Fig. 11).

Source: Compiled by the authors based on quantitative research results

Fig 11: Workers' perception of gig employment as a long-term career perspective

The data clearly reflect one of the main paradoxes of platform employment: although the gig economy provides a significant source of income (for 65% of workers, it is the main income source), it is still perceived as temporary or transitional rather than a stable career strategy.

The determining factors of such public perception can be considered as follows:

- The problem of income stability – according to the study, 86.2% of respondents consider their income unstable or rather unstable. Such economic uncertainty prevents gig work from becoming a "serious career project";
- Lack of social guarantees – the absence of insurance and pension systems, along with low participation in training, creates a perception that gig work cannot provide long-term social and professional security;
- Social perception and identity factor – gig work is often associated with temporality and "supplementary income" rather than a full-fledged professional path;
- Limited career development perspective – algorithmic control and standardized tasks of platforms provide insufficient opportunities for professional growth and skill diversification. As a result, gig work remains more operational.

The obtained data show that in Georgia, the gig economy is still perceived more as a "temporary and flexible employment mechanism" rather than a long-term career alternative. Despite the fact that one-third of respondents see it as a promising path, for the majority it is associated with insecurity, income variability, and lack of social guarantees. Thus, gig employment in Georgia requires career institutionalization, which is essential for it to become a stable professional choice rather than merely a temporary solution in the economic reality.

Discussion

The study revealed that the gig economy in Georgia no longer represents a temporary or marginal phenomenon. It is gradually becoming one of the significant segments of the labor market. However, as the results show, this transformation is accompanied by a complex set of social, economic, and institutional challenges.

First of all, workers' experiences indicate that the actual flexibility of the gig economy is limited. Although platform-based employment is formally considered a type of free and self-employment, in practice, it often relies on algorithmic management and an order-dependent system that restricts individual autonomy. This result corresponds to De Stefano's (2015) [2] concept of the "illusion of flexibility," according to which gig work only superficially provides a sense of freedom, while in reality, it creates conditions of insecurity and structural control.

At the same time, the social effects of the gig economy are noteworthy. As the study showed, two-thirds of workers consider gig activity their main source of income; however, the majority (86%) believe that their income is unstable. This fact once again indicates the economic volatility of platform labor and aligns with global research trends (Li, 2023) [10], according to which gig employment fails to provide financial security and long-term social stability (Wheatley, 2024) [13].

In addition, according to the study's data, the absolute majority of gig workers do not have health or pension insurance, while 85% have no savings at all. These results reflect the weak integration of the social protection system with the new economic model (Gaidampas, 2025) [4]. This problem is especially acute in countries like Georgia, where the share of informal labor is high and social policy is still in the process of formation. Similar to OECD (2021) [12] recommendations, a clear need emerges here for a "hybrid model" that combines flexible employment with minimum social guarantees.

The study results also indicate gender and regional inequalities. Specifically, women and individuals living in the regions are more concentrated in low-paid and unstable jobs. In Georgia's case, this trend is associated both with structural asymmetries in the labor market and with cultural norms that limit women's economic activity and access to digital resources.

An important issue is also the attitude of the self-employed toward gig work. Only 38.6% consider it a long-term career choice. This result shows that the growth of the gig economy

does not yet imply its institutionalization. It lacks mechanisms for professional development, training, and skill enhancement. The low level of professional development (only 26% participated in courses) poses a risk that the gig sector will remain an area of low-skilled and low-paid labor.
Thus, the results highlight the need for a new policy vision. Regulation of the gig economy in Georgia should be based on three main principles:

1. Definition of minimum labor protection standards – including issues of fair remuneration, working hours, and health insurance;
2. Creation of flexible social protection mechanisms – integration of the self-employed and platform workers into the state insurance and pension systems;
3. Promotion of digital skills and education – support for professional training, which will strengthen gig workers' competitiveness and facilitate the transformation of their activity from short-term labor into a stable career.

Based on the above, one of the priorities of the country's economic policy should be the formation of a regulatory model for this sector that combines flexibility with social responsibility. Only in this way can the gig economy become not merely a temporary economic alternative for Georgia but a part of sustainable development.

Research Limitations
Although the presented study represents one of the first quantitative analyses of the gig economy in Georgia, it has several methodological and substantive limitations:

- The research is based on a selective sample (153 respondents) – although this number allows for the identification of general trends, it cannot fully reflect the diversity of all segments involved in the gig economy nationwide. In particular, regional and rural workers are underrepresented, where platform labor occurs in a different socio-economic context.
- The self-assessment (subjective) nature of the data – the research results are based on respondents' personal perceptions and evaluations, which may affect data accuracy (for example, in the perception of working hours, income, or social status). Subjective factors sometimes create a gap between perceived and actual economic conditions.
- Limited analysis of the managerial and economic aspects of platforms – in particular, the business models of companies, algorithmic mechanisms of remuneration, and regulatory strategies. Further analysis of these aspects would provide an important understanding of the systemic functioning of the gig sector.
- The time factor – the study reflects the situation in 2025 and does not include long-term dynamics. The gig economy is characterized by high variability, so over time, both employment forms and social impacts may change.
- The study does not deeply explore gender and social inequalities – although some trends were identified, additional qualitative research is needed to analyze the specific experiences of women, youth, and regional workers.

Taking these limitations into account will allow future research to assess the structure of the gig economy, its social outcomes, and its regulatory potential in Georgia more comprehensively.

Conclusion
The trends in the development of the gig economy in Georgia clearly reflect the impact of digital transformation on the labor market, which equally brings new opportunities and social risks. The conducted study shows that platform-based employment is gradually gaining structural importance; however, its institutional support and social protection remain insufficient. This reflects the systemic transformation of the labor market, where flexibility and freedom often coexist with insecurity and economic volatility.
Realizing the potential of the gig economy requires a new framework for the redistribution of responsibilities between the state and platforms – a model that simultaneously promotes innovative employment and protects labor dignity. Integration of social guarantees, support for skill development, and transparent regulation of the platform economy will be crucial in this process.
Thus, the gig economy in Georgia should become not a temporary economic reaction but an integral part of the modern labor system, based on fairness, responsibility, and the sustainable development of human capital.

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