



iAUTHORITY

Building a case for equitable reform within the digital gig economy

STATE OF DIGITAL GIG WORKER ECONOMY 2025

Lean towards independence strategy

A clear majority plan to pursue seeking work off platform within the next 6 months

MY MISSION

RESEARCH AIMS

How might platform thinking and artificial intelligence be leveraged to overcome the barriers preventing digital gig workers from transitioning to independent freelancing?

CONTRIBUTIONS

Encourage and inform policymakers, industry stakeholders, and advocacy groups to drive equitable reform in the industry

BACKGROUND

The growth of the digital gig economy and the creator economy over the past decade has transformed the structure of global labour markets. Millions of individuals now participate in platform-based work, offering skills and services to global clients without traditional employment intermediaries. This shift has created new opportunities for income generation, but has also introduced significant challenges. My research is situated within this context and focuses on exploring the barriers faced by digital gig workers in their attempts to transition toward independence.

This white paper kicks off a movement for equitable reform in the industry through providing an ongoing annual effort to track and analyse the evolving state of the digital gig worker economy. As part of a multi-year commitment, this research aims to provide systematic, longitudinal insights into the realities faced by gig workers, the platforms they depend on, and the broader policy and labor implications. By revisiting this study each year, the project builds a growing evidence base that highlights shifts, challenges, and opportunities within the digital gig ecosystem.



INDUSTRY SENTIMENT



Strongly desire for independence



Very likely to pursue work off platforms within the next 6 months



Financial and professional considerations are the strongest drivers of independence desires.

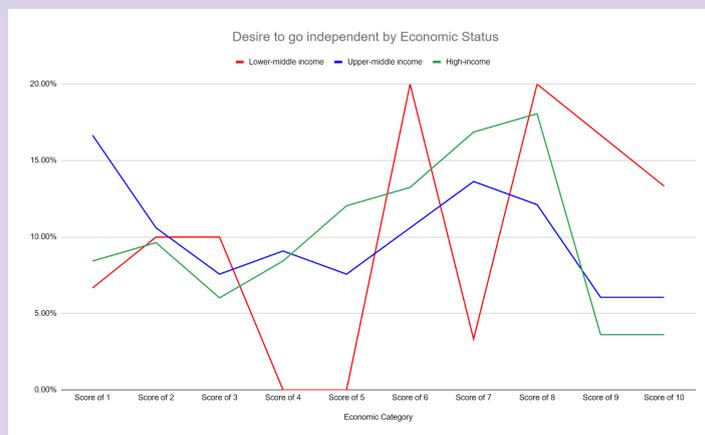


The primary barrier by far is the "fear of instability" in income.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1 There is an opportunity in the sector to develop a "freelancer independence system" if it offers a unique value proposition of providing a marketplace of clients backed by transactional security
- 2 The top concerns for adopting a new solution was high costs of the solution, data privacy/security concerns, time required to learn it, and compatibility with their existing tools.
- 3 Writing assistance is the number one AI use case across every service. Adoption ranges from 52.6% (ML/Engineering/Science) up to 80.9% (Sales & Marketing). This is the "gateway" AI capability for almost all gig roles.
- 4 Overall AI applications correspond directly to the identified barriers. This synergy highlights that AI can be a crucial enabler in the independent freelancing journey.

INTERESTING TRENDS



Lower-middle income countries leads on intent to go independent. The data reveals a pronounced concentration of pro-independence sentiment among respondents from Lower-Middle Income countries

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

273 RESPONSES 21 INTERVIEWS 40+ COUNTRIES

- ✓ Operational and conceptual definitions were used to frame this study. Operational classification focussed on tenure and monetisation status
- ✓ These categories served two purposes: (1) to focus analysis on respondents active or plausibly active in relevant work, and (2) to accommodate label overlap where 'gig worker' and 'freelancer' are often conflated.
- ✓ Anchored retention and classification to platform activity in the last 12 months (self-reported), aligning the sample with the operational definition of digital gig work. These patterns corroborate the classification logic and provide a clear foundation for the analysis

SAMPLE SIZES - COUNT BY SCREENING DEFINITION

Which of the following best describes your current situation?	
Content Creator	28
Digital Gig Worker	87
Freelancer	95
None of the above	63
Grand Total	273



RESEARCHER FOREWORD

Hi, I am Spiro Kovac, a proud father and devoted husband who has had first hand experience of feeling trapped during my time as a gig worker and realising I would want my children to have the opportunity to explore careers within this sector which offers lifestyle flexibility but with fairness and equity.

With that at the heart of my motivation to lead this study, my first-hand insight into the systemic barriers that shape gig workers' earning potential is complementary to the study, ensuring the research remains grounded in real-world experience as well as academic inquiry.

With over two decades of entrepreneurial experience and active participation in the gig economy, I bring an insider's perspective. I have observed firsthand how platforms are structured to favour employers while placing financial and procedural burdens on digital gig workers. Practices such as charging for bids, enforcing tiered fee structures, and retaining ownership of worker profiles have revealed a power imbalance within the ecosystem. This experience fuels my commitment to identifying solutions that reduce dependency and promote fairness.



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES



To bring forth the voice of the Digital Gig Worker



To unify industry on titles backed by academic research



To surface the need for equitable reform in the industry by exploring the desire to go independent

Establishing Trust in the Age of Independent Work

Trust is the currency of the modern freelance economy, yet it is too often undermined by unverifiable credentials and opaque processes. Through evidence-led insights, this foreword introduces iAuthority's role in creating systems that restore confidence and empower independent workers.

The Future of Work Depends on Autonomy

The rise of freelancing reflects a wider shift towards independence, but autonomy without support risks becoming exploitation in disguise. This foreword highlights why tools like iAuthority are vital to balance freedom with fairness, ensuring independence is sustainable for the long term.



AI & INDEPENDENT WORK: IMPLICATIONS

A new dimension shaping the future of the gig economy is artificial intelligence (AI). Artificial intelligence is already influencing the world of freelancing, and my survey indicates that digital gig workers are quite receptive to using AI tools. A majority of our respondents are already using AI in some form. The data below shows what the sector is currently using AI for and what's popular.

62.81%

Using AI for Writing Assistance

40.07%

Using AI for Data Analysis or Automation

35.18%

Using AI for Image creation or editing

AI can enhance platforms for gig workers by: automating routine operations, generating and refining content (marketing or proposals), identifying and connecting opportunities, and providing personalised analytics and education

IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKERS, PLATFORMS & POLICY MAKERS

Findings indicate that a freelancer-first, AI-enabled lead-generation ecosystem could support independent work if it prioritizes worker agency and transparent governance. A modular design should (i) verify portfolios with auditable criteria, (ii) enable secure, milestone-based or escrowed payments, and (iii) provide explainable trust signals (e.g., verified identity, reputation evidence) while keeping freelancers in control of pricing, client relationships, and data portability.

Implementation should follow data-minimization and consent-based use of work samples, offer clear explanations for AI-driven rankings or matches, and include robust dispute-resolution and fraud-detection mechanisms. Future evaluation should test whether these features reduce earnings volatility, increase client access, and improve inclusion across regions.