



Gig Economy Governance and Sustainable Development Goals in India

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Abstract: India's gig economy is expanding at a fast rate as it is providing certain flexibilities to workers and now emerged as a point of discussion among policymakers. However, the compatibility of the gig economy with sustainable development goals is a largely untouched area of research in terms of policy compliance. The existing research is primarily focused on the implications of the gig economy in terms of jobs and working conditions, without addressing the research gap on the compatibility of gig economy governance with the SDGs, leaving the area ripe for further inquiry. This paper addresses this gap by examining the policy dealing with the gig economy in India against the selected SDG targets, namely SDG 8.5, SDG 8.8, SDG 10.4, and SDG 16.6. The study uses a qualitative analysis of secondary data sources, which includes labour legislation, government policy documents, SDG indicator frameworks, and international labour standards. Major policy guidelines for gig economy or platform workers were identified against the Sustainable Development targets through an alignment scorecard. The result shows that the Indian policy for the gig economy was able to identify gig economy work, but there is only partial and uneven alignment as per the SDGs. Social protection measures are divided and lack unity; labour laws are not enforceable, and institutional coordination is poor. The paper suggests that without specific integration of SDG into gig economy governance, serious risks regarding regulation will continue instead of contributing to sustainable development. It concludes with the targeted policy recommendations to improve the SDG compatibility of gig economy regulation in India.

Index Terms - Gig economy; Sustainable Development Goals; Labour regulation; Social protection.

Introduction

Nature of work have undergone various changes during the last few decades, which happened because of changes in technology, the use of digital technology, and the expansion of online services. The gig economy can be seen as an example of this shift. The gig economy is the economy that deals with short-term, task-based, flexible employment on digital platforms. Working on a digital platform has become very common in India in sectors like food delivery, home services, logistics and ride-hailing. As per NITI Aayog (2022), the gig workers in India are assumed to grow in sizeable numbers in the next decade, which means there will be an increase in demand for gig workers, which will cause a major structural shift in the employment market of India.

It is assumed that the gig economy will expand in future, thus setting a positive expectation for the economy that it will help in reducing unemployment and will support employment for youth, women and migrants. On the other hand, there have been complaints about the gig economy for unstable employment, instability of income, lack of social security and weak labour protection, unlike traditional employment. These changes have gained the attention of policymakers and researchers regarding the economic, social, and regulatory aspects of the policy makers.

Though various research has been done on the gig economy, it has only talked about the outcomes of the gig economy that are related to workers, i.e., earnings, working hours, job satisfaction and job insecurity. Although existing studies only provide information regarding the experience of gig workers, it does not provide information on whether the gig economy supports sustainable development. And few studies are there that talked about the compatibility of gig economy policies with the SDG, which were adopted in 2015 by the United Nations for achieving sustainable and inclusive development by 2030

India is a member of 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development and is trying continuously to realise Sustainable Development Goals with specific policies. There are 17 SDGs and 169 targets, of which 3 SDGs are there which affects labour market, i.e. SDG 8, which provides for improving living standards and social protection, SDG 10, which talks about eliminating discrimination, and SDG 16, which supports strong institutions. Out of these 3 SDGs, there are four targets which are directly related to the labour market, such as decent and productive work, labour rights, social security, and effective and accountable institutions. There are both opportunities and challenges to India in achieving these targets, which are there because of the growth in the gig economy. There has been much attention given to the gig economy by policymakers and academicians, but the compatibility of governance of the Indian gig economy from the SDGs point of view has not been studied

This paper fills this gap by conducting a policy-centric analysis of the gig economy of India using SDG targets. The focus of this research is on the policy framework, the legal system, regulatory institution and governance of the Indian gig economy instead of focusing on the platform worker. This research will be done by conducting a systematic mapping of important gig economy policies to a set of SDG targets, including SDG 8.5 (productive employment and decent work), SDG 8.8 (rights at work and safe working environments), SDG 10.4 (social protection policies), and SDG 16.6 (effective, accountable, and transparent institutions), and develop an SDG compatibility scorecard to evaluate the level of alignment.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Indian Gig Economy

According to the studies, the gig workers are estimated to be between about 7.7 and 17 million in India and are expected to grow further by 2030, making it a significant part of the labour market (Ramya. et al., 2025; Saini, 2025; Singh & Awasthi, 2025; Patil & Hattarakihal, 2025). Studies have pointed out the various positives of the gig economy, like flexible entry, employment to youth and informal workers, and the probability of inclusive development (Saini, 2025; Singh & Awasthi, 2025; Das, 2024; Yaduvanshi, 2025). Along with advantages, there are a few negatives too, like income stability, absence of social protection and lack of unions to represent gig workers. (Kulshrestha, 2025; Ray, 2024; Nasreen, 2025; Patil & Hattarakihal, 2025).

2.2 Social Protection and Labour Rights

The first law in India to recognise gig workers, Code On Social Security, 2020, lacks in properly implementing schemes related to social security for gig workers. (Kulshrestha, 2025; Loganathan, 2021; Nasreen, 2025). Thus making it difficult to achieve SDG targets that are about social security and labour rights. (Kulshrestha, 2025; Loganathan, 2021; Nasreen, 2025). NITI Aayog's Report of 2022 tells about the growth potential of the gig economy while mentioning the shortcomings in the gig economy, such as a lack of regulation and improper implementation of schemes related to social security for platform workers. (R. et al., 2025; Singh & Awasthi 2025; Patil & Hattarakihal, 2025). A study of SDG 8 indicators in India revealed the necessity for better inclusion of the platform workers in social protection (Loganathan, 2021).

2.3 Gig Work and SDGs (Global Perspective)

Globally, researchers associate platform work with SDG 8 and SDG 10, but emphasise that the current business models block sustainability by providing risky working conditions and a lack of benefits (Novitz, 2021; Lari-Williams & Verheyen, 2023; Hudek & Sirec, 2023). Studies analysing SDG 8.5 and 8.8 show that platform work can reduce barriers to entry but fails to provide equal pay and safe working conditions (Novitz, 2021; Lari-Williams & Verheyen, 2023). Some researchers believe regulation for minimum wages and hours must be there for the gig economy to achieve SDGs, and there must be regulations for social protection and a union to represent them. (Novitz, 2021; Lari-Williams & Verheyen, 2023; Karumathil, 2025; Hudek & Sirec, 2023).

2.4 Regulatory Landscape in India

As per the studies, the gig economy governance in India is uneven. The Social Security Code identifies gig workers but does not provide a clear picture regarding the legal rights of gig workers (Kulshrestha, 2025; Loganathan, 2021; Nasreen, 2025). Courts in India consider gig workers independent contractors (Kulshrestha, 2025). States like Rajasthan and Karnataka created welfare funds and dispute resolution mechanisms, but remain limited in scope and coordination (Kulshrestha, 2025; Karumathil, 2025).

These studies recognise the connections to SDG 8 and 10 but do not build a formal SDG-policy compatibility evaluation, especially incorporating governance-oriented SDG 16.6. This is the gap that the current study addresses.

III RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the alignment of gig economy governance with SDGs
- To check if SDG targets 8.5, 8.8, 10.4 and 16.6 are supported by Indian polices governing the gig economy
- To identify policy gaps in labour rights, social protection, and institutional governance for gig workers in India
- To suggest polices to improve the alignment of gig economy governance with SDGs in India

IV METHODOLOGY

The research uses a qualitative policy analysis using secondary data. It assesses how the gig economy regulations in India align with four chosen targets of the SDGs through a systematic mapping and scoring process of the SDG targets and policies.

4.1 Data Sources

The secondary data sources mentioned below are used in the analysis :

1. Laws and policies by the Indian Government:
 - Code on Social Security (CSS), 2020
 - Laws and schemes of the Ministry of Labour and Employment
 - NITI Aayog's report India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy, 2022.
2. Documents related to SDGs:
 - United Nations SDG Global Indicator Framework
 - India SDG Index and Dashboard
 - NITI Aayog.
3. Conventions and guidelines by the ILO and Guidelines given by the OECD on platform work.
4. Literature about the gig economy in the Indian and global context.

4.2 Selection of SDG Targets

Four SDG targets that are related to gig work have been selected to check the compatibility of gig economy governance

- SDG Target 8.5: This target is about productive and decent work for all. It includes both men and women, and also includes the youth and people with disabilities. It also mentions equal pay for the same work regardless of one's demographics.
- SDG Target 8.8: This target talks about labour rights and a working environment that is safe for all workers.
- SDG Target 10.4: This target focuses on reducing inequalities by providing social protection to laborers.
- SDG Target 16.6: This target talks about creating effective, accountable and transparent institution at all levels.

4.3 Operational Criterion

The operation criteria are given in the table 1, which are used as a yardstick to measure the alignment of key provisions in Indian policies related to the gig economy with SDGs. These criteria will help in identifying whether Indian policies related to the gig economy support SDGs.

Table 1: Operational Criterion

8.5	The presence of regulations ensuring fair and respectable working conditions for gig workers
8.8	Legal recognition of labour rights, occupational safety, and grievance redressal for platform workers
10.4	Coverage and enforceability of social protection schemes and welfare mechanisms for platform workers
16.6	Institutional clarity, accountability mechanisms, and enforcement capacity in platform regulation

Source: Author

4.4 SDG-Policy Mapping and Scorecard

The analysis procedure in three steps:

1. Identification of relevant provision: Identifying the key provision in the Indian law and policy document that relates to the regulation of platform work
2. Alignment Assessment: Each provision was evaluated against the operational criteria for the four SDGs targets and categorised as:
 - 2 = Fully aligned: Policy provisions completely address the SDG target
 - 1 = Partially aligned: Policy provisions acknowledge the SDG target but lack coverage, clarity, or enforceability.
 - 0 = Not aligned: Policy provisions do not adequately address the SDG target.

The aggregate scores will be used for identifying the overall level of SDG alignment of the Indian gig economy governance framework.

V ANALYSIS

The analysis will concentrate on four policy areas: employment recognition and working conditions (SDG 8.5), labour rights and occupational safety (SDG 8.8), social protection and welfare (SDG 10.4), and institutional governance and accountability (SDG 16.6).

SDG 8.5: SDG target 8.5 talks about full and productive work for all. It also focuses on decent work for all and equal pay for similar work. This target becomes crucial for the gig economy because it mentions the legal position of workers, the minimum level of wages and the quality of work. The gig workers were mentioned and defined by the Code on Social Security 2020 for the first time in India. It considers gig work as a form of employment, but doesn't consider the gig workers as employees. Therefore, the benefits that are there for traditional employment, like the principle of minimum wage, minimum working hours, and equal payment, were still not available to platform workers. Also, the present laws about wages and working conditions are not there for gig workers, as they aren't considered employees in the Code on Social Security 2020. In conclusion, gig work has received its legal status in India, but there are no provisions for minimum wages and employment stability for gig workers. From the above analysis, it can be said that in India, gig work cannot be called as "productive employment and decent work" under SDG Target 8.8. The governance of gig economy has partial alignment with SDG Target 8.5 in India.

SDG 8.8: SDG Target 8.8 talks about the promotion of labour rights and a safe working environment. This target becomes crucial for gig economy because it supports occupational safety and health(OSH) standards, grievance resolving systems, and unions for gig workers. Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, is the law that governs the labour rights and OSH in India, which is mainly for formal organisations. It is not for gig workers. Thus, employers of the gig economy are not required to provide for safety at work. They are not obliged to provide insurance for injuries during work or a grievance resolving system. Alongside, gig workers do not have strong unions to represent them, which reduces their power to fight for their rights. There are lack of provisions that support labour rights for gig workers, which

further reduces the chances of achieving the objective of SDG target 8.8. The Governance of the Indian gig economy has low alignment with SDG Target 8.8. There is no specific provision for gig workers regarding labour rights and occupational safety.

SDG Target 10.4: SDG Target 10.4 talks about fiscal, wage and schemes related to social security. This target becomes crucial for the gig economy because it talks about providing social security, insurance, and welfare schemes, which are necessary for gig work. The CSS, 2020 mentions the social protection schemes for gig workers, which include life insurance, disability insurance, social protection of health, maternity and old age pensions. This can be seen as a major positive sign for platform workers of India, as the law talks about social protection schemes for gig economy. But these laws don't provide proper guidelines for implementing these social security schemes. Also, the schemes related to social security are not compulsory, and there are improper guidelines for employers in the gig economy to contribute to these programs. Though the CSS, 2020, identifies the importance of these social security programs for Indian gig workers, it isn't compulsory for the employer or employees to participate in such social protection programs, which makes it ineffective in promoting the objective of SDG target 10.4. The governance of the Indian gig economy has a partial alignment with SDG Target 10.4.

SDG Target 16.6: SDG talks about setting up effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels in the economy. This becomes important for the gig economy because it supports setting up a regulatory body and promoting coordination among various institutions, which are required for a system in the economy to work smoothly.

The management of the Indian gig economy involves various ministries such as labour, information and technology, transport and commerce. All these ministries have their separate rules and regulations for everything, and the governance of the Indian gig economy is not in coordination. Social Security of employees and the labour market are controlled by the MoL&E, but digital platforms are managed by the Commerce and I.T. ministries. There is an absence of a dedicated regulatory body to govern the rules and regulations of the gig economy at a central level. The lack of a single regulatory authority at the central level and the lack of governance for enforcing rules and regulations make the Indian gig economy ineffective in promoting SDG Target 16. The governance of the Indian gig economy is aligned poorly with SDG Target 16.6.

5.1 SDG Compatibility Scorecard

Based on the analysis of four selected SDG targets, an SDG compatibility scorecard is prepared by mapping the SDG targets to a score to know the level of alignment between the policies governing the gig economy of India and selected SDG targets. The scorecard is provided below:

Table 2: Scorecard

SDG Targets	Score(0-2)	Justification
SDG 8.5	1	Gig workers are recognised in law, and there are fewer social protection schemes also available to gig workers, but the rules and regulations regarding the minimum wage, working hours, or employment security are not there.
SDG 8.8	0	Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (OSH), 2020, is not applicable to the platform worker. Thus, the rules and regulations for occupational safety are absent, and there exists a weak dispute management system in the Indian gig economy
SDG 10.4	1	Various social protection schemes exist for platform workers, but their coverage is voluntary, and contribution by the employer of gig economy in the schemes is not clearly mentioned.
SDG 16.6	0	No dedicated national regulatory body for platform work; institutional responsibilities are scattered, with low monitoring of platforms and weak accountability
Total Score	2	

Source: Author

Total SDG Compatibility Score: 2 out of 8

The aggregate score reflects that there exists very limited and uneven alignment between policies governing the Indian gig economy and the selected SDG targets. Though some policies recognise and support the objectives of selected SDG targets, but its enforcement remains weak.

VI DISCUSSION

The outcome of the study of SDG targets, policy mapping, and scorecard analysis reflects that the policy framework governing the Indian gig economy is partially aligned with the SDGs instead of full alignment. It is considered positive as some policy framework has started to give importance to platform workers and feel the necessity to extend some rights to platform workers. But the policies are not fully aligned with the principles of decent work, social inclusion, and effective governance as required for Sustainable Development Goals

6.1 From Recognition to Regulation: Limits of Legal Acknowledgement

The legal recognition of platform workers in the CSS, 2020, is a vital shift considering the previous policy frameworks, which altogether ignored the presence of any form of work except the standard form of employment. Though it can be seen as a positive shift in the labour market, considering its changing nature, it will be of no use if not implemented properly. The lack of a minimum standard for wages and working hours makes it difficult to achieve the objective of SDG target 8.8. It is seen in developing countries that they only recognise the platform worker and do not implement laws related to it properly. Without proper implementation, the objective of SDG 8.8, i.e. job with decent work, can not be achieved.

6.2 Regulatory Gap in Labour Rights

The governance of the gig economy is poorly aligned with SDG 8.8, which means there exists a regulatory gap in providing labour rights and occupational safety at work to gig workers. Gig work mainly include high level of physical and psychological risk. The rules regarding occupational safety and health are only available for traditional forms of employment, thus making them ineffective for gig workers.

Looking globally, we can conclude that to provide labour rights to gig workers, classification of gig workers as employees are not needed; instead, some mixed set of rules and regulations can be made that involve gig workers. These hybrid rules and regulations will help the gig economy in promoting sustainable development. Without such law, it will be difficult to achieve SDG target 8.8

6.3 Fragmented Policies for Social Security and Inequalities

The governance of the Indian gig economy has partial alignment with SDG target 10.4, which means that the policies for social protection are not implemented properly. Social protection polices for workers of gig economy are mentioned in the CSS, 2020, marking a major positive shift for the gig economy, as no law has talked about it earlier. But these polices are not made mandatory for the platforms, thus they became ineffective in achieving social protection.

Social protection policies, when looked through the SDGs perspective, are important as they help in reducing inequalities, support inclusive growth of workers and increase economic support.

The social protection schemes that are there in India for gig workers are voluntary, thus does not help in reducing the gap between formal and informal workers.

Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive and mandatory social protection schemes for gig worker which can support SDGs. Income and health-related problems will not be solved if such schemes are not introduced, and the voluntary part of policies even reduces the chances of achieving the objective of SDG Target 10.4.

6.4 Regulatory Authorities and Governance Gap

The Indian gig economy governance has poor alignment with SDG target 16.6, which means there is no regulatory body to govern the Indian gig economy. In India, the gig economy is governed by many ministries and comprises many components such as labour markets, information technology and commercial platforms. Therefore, requirement for a single institution that helps in the smooth governance of the gig economy. In India, regulations that govern the gig economy are fragmented and lack coordination among various ministries and components. Thus, for achieving the objectives of SDG target 16.6, there must be a regulatory body or regulations that are well coordinated among various ministries and components.

6.5 Effect of Sustainable Development

The result shows that policy intervention in the gig economy of India is needed, without which structural issues will be there. The gig economy can generate employment opportunities for all, which mainly includes youth, migrant workers and marginalized group, and to utilise these opportunities, gig economy governance must align with the SDGs, mainly principle of decent work, social protection and accountability

This study highlights the necessity to concentrate on governance-based evaluation of policy design instead of focusing on outcome-based evaluation of employment generation. Thus, decent work, labour protection and social security must be given due importance as merely employment generation can not be considered as a comprehensive indicator of development.

The SDGs framework allows us to check whether changes in the labour market are moving towards sustainable development or only changing the way the informal labour market was before.

VII POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the analysis of policy mapping with SDG targets, the following are the policy recommendations to improve the alignment of gig economy governance in India with selected SDG targets

7.1 Integrate SDG Targets Directly into Gig Economy Policy Design

First, there must be direct integration of relevant SDG targets into the gig economy policies, which must include the SDG targets of decent work, labour rights, social protection, and effective institutions. This will increase the alignment of the Indian gig economy with sustainable development. Integration of SDGs in the Indian gig economy governance must be done properly, instead of only focusing on it theoretically.

7.2 Expansion of Existing Labour Standards to Gig Workers.

Second, there should be the expansion of existing labour rights and occupational safety rights for gig works also after making the necessary changes. It does not suggest categorising gig workers as employee instead suggests making a new or hybrid category of employment for gig workers. This is necessary to increase the alignment of the Indian gig economy with SDG target 8.8

7.3 Clear and Mandatory Social Protection Schemes

Third, the social protection scheme must be made compulsory, and there must be proper guidelines regarding the contribution of platforms and platform workers. This will help in increasing the alignment of the Indian gig economy governance with the SDG target 10.4, which will help in reducing inequalities and ensuring economic security for gig workers.

7.4 Dedicated institution for gig economy governance

Fourth, a regulatory body must govern the Indian gig economy to resolve the issues arising in the absence of a regulatory body. The regulatory body should be there for making coordinated policies, monitoring platform work, enforcing labour and social protection and establishing a grievance redressal system for the Indian gig economy. This will help in increasing the alignment of the gig economy governance with SDG Target 16.6

VIII CONCLUSION

This research paper analysed whether the governance of the gig economy supports sustainable development by performing a systematic policy mapping, considering four SDG targets, which are SDG 8.5, SDG 8.8, SDG 10.4, and SDG 16.6. This paper focused on policy assessment of the Indian gig economy by involving SDG targets instead of only concentrating on the outcome of the Indian gig economy. This fills the gap in existing literature on sustainable development and the gig economy. This paper shows that there exists partial and uneven alignment of selected SDG targets with the governance of the Indian gig economy through a scorecard using secondary data.

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