



GIGGIN' POLICY


ENGAGING YOUTH IN POLICY MAKING

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
02	LABOUR MARKET CHANGES How Covid-19 and the Ukraine crisis has changed the Labour market
03	TRENDS
04	TRENDS Continued...
05	DKIT (IRE) ANALYSIS




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
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LABOUR MARKET CHANGES

How Covid-19 and the Ukraine crisis has changed the Labour market

Spain and Italy were two of the countries in the European Union where unemployment hit young people the hardest during the Great Recession of 2009 - 2014. The unemployment rate for Spanish workers under the age of 25 exceeded 50% in 2012, 2013 and 2014. While youth unemployment has declined since these peaks, in Spain it still remained very high at 26.9% in July 2022 while in Italy it was 21.2%.

Youth unemployment in Ireland in July 2022 was 11.6%, in Lithuania it was 11.5%, in the Netherlands 7.8%, in Germany 5.7%, in France 16.5% and in the UK 9%. The Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crises triggered by the Ukraine War seems to have had the effect of re-calibrating the pattern of demand and supply in labour markets across the European Union.

Yet in some sectors there is now a serious labour shortage in all EU countries, from Spain to Ireland. This seems to be the result of a phenomenon experienced in all economies in the advanced industrialised world since 2021 - the "Great Resignation" - where people in jobs which demanded long hours, unsociable shifts, commuting and/or which were poorly remunerated or insecure, decided to seek alternatives and for many this has taken the form of becoming self-employed.

A shortage of taxi drivers everywhere in the EU is one high profile manifestation of this shift. And still baseline youth unemployment remains high particularly in countries like Spain and Italy despite labour shortages. Why might this be? Economists suggest that the explanation lies in the mismatch between where the labour shortages are within those countries, geographically and sectorally and where the clusters of very high youth unemployment are. Rates of youth unemployment are much higher in rural areas and in smaller towns and cities, and among young people with few or no formal qualifications and job skills (most of whom live in families and communities where economic adversity has become embedded over many years).

Controversially some economists further suggest that countries with tightly regulated labour markets have much higher rates of unemployment than those in which employers can set up businesses and recruit staff more easily. Government support for vocational training which incentivises companies to offer opportunities to young people can make a big difference, as can the extent of rural underdevelopment, the level of urbanisation, the design of the education system and an area's attractiveness to foreign investors - these are significant structural factors which require long term government attention.

Continuing disparities in the macro-economic performance of EU member states and regions within those countries will have profound political consequences for the long-term stability of European Union. Unless weaker economies and labour markets can be strengthened and there is greater convergence in economic performance and of life chance expectations there will be greater political divergence and fracturing as dissatisfaction and dissent spreads.

The sharing of best practice through EU knowledge exchange projects like Giggin' Policy has a role to play in tackling that challenge which is why the EU Commission funds these initiatives. Those participating in this project from Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and Lithuania are respected stakeholders in the policy-making community in their respective countries. By encouraging changes in economic development practice at local and regional level and demonstrating the efficacy of those changes the project partners hope that they can contribute to more substantive wider scale change in practice with virtuous economic results.



UK YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

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EU YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT STATS EXPLAINED

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DIVERGENT YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATES ACROSS THE EU

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MORE ON HOW TRADITIONAL EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS ARE CHANGING

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TRENDS

CHALLENGE POSED FOR GOVERNMENT BY THE GROWTH IN GIG WORKING



In 2022 across the EU there has been an increase in the number of people working for themselves and a concomitant fall in the number of people employed full time in some sectors, notably hospitality and catering, food processing, social care, transport and logistics. Many of those who have become newly self-employed have formally registered as such and this is reflected in the data. But there is evidence that a significant number have not, which when coupled with the decline in the tax-take from sectors whose workforces have shrunk, presents a problem for EU governments needing to source increased revenues to address the cost-of-living crisis.

The gig economy is diverse, complex, fluid, difficult to measure. Governments are struggling to keep pace with the changing labour market and to understand how the gig economy works in their countries. That's why it is so important that policy makers listen to those at the sharp-end, the young people who populate the growing so-called "precariat" i.e., the large group in society who earn for themselves but who have little security and who are unable to make investments in their future financial security notably in private pensions or savings.

How will future governments pay for the health and care needs of these citizens in the future? The Giggin' Policy Project's vision is to bring these two groups, policy makers and young gig workers, together and to initiate a dialogue between them.

POTENTIAL EU COMMISSION
REGULATORY OVERSIGHT

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TAXATION

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WHY THE "GREAT RESIGNATION"?

DESIRE FOR
FLEXIBILITY

NEGATIVE
CULTURE



LACK OF
ADVANCEMENT

WEAK OR RUTHLESS
MANAGEMENT

POOR HEALTH & SAFETY
PROTECTIONS

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TRENDS

THE INTERGENERATIONAL TECHNICAL COMPETENCE GAP

There is an emerging but highly significant Inter-generational technical competence gap - between older managers trained in methodologies and on systems that are increasingly obsolete and young tech-savvy gig workers. This is creating a significant opportunity which the VET sector can harness.

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ECONOMIC INSTABILITY

Economic instability is generating major challenges for employers (who are facing supply chain problems, a fall in consumer spending, soaring energy costs and wage-price inflation) and for freelancers for whom the availability of work is less certain and the rates which they should charge are difficult to calculate (they risk significantly under-pricing if they do not accurately price in inflation).

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DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Tools to enable efficient, effective and economic gig working are increasingly readily available across the EU - cheap video-conferencing apps e.g. Zoom and Microsoft Teams, payment platforms, better and more accessible broadband, bookkeeping and business management apps and aids to improve social media marketing.



intuit
QuickBooks



Dropbox



PayPal



TikTok

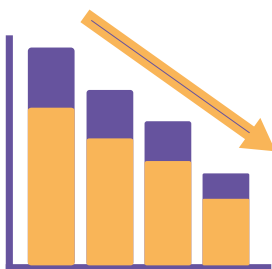


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Teams

FALLING BIRTH RATES ACROSS EUROPE



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HYBRID WORKING

EMPLOYERS ARE INCREASINGLY HAVING TO ADAPT TRADITIONAL JOB ROLES TO FACILITATE FLEXIBLE WORKING OR REPLACE JOBS WITH OUTSOURCED CONTRACTS.

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SOCIAL MEDIA ENCOURAGING GIG WORKING



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ANALYSIS OF OUR PROJECT PARTNER, DKIT (IRE)

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE INDIFFERENT

Different reports and commentary have suggested that the emergence and continuing rise of the gig economy has been, to quote, “phenomenal”. In some quarters they say it is a relatively new with the term being attributed to Tina Brown the editor in chief of the New Yorker who at the height of the global economic crisis of 2009 coined it to describe how workers in the knowledge economy were increasingly pursuing “a bunch of free-floating projects, consultancies, and part-time bits and pieces while they transacted in a digital marketplace.” Despite the popular use of the term, it seems that it is very difficult to find a definition for exactly what is meant by the “gig economy” with multiple definitions and interchangeable terms cited. However, it generally describes employment within the labour market that is non-permanent and contingent in nature. While the commentary in the media gives the impression that this “sector” is relatively new, the reality is it has been around for a long, long time. The term “Gig” in relation to work itself is accredited to Jazz musicians around the early 1900’s to describe their individual performances, a legacy name that has endured for the music industry. But the concept of the Gig economy, that is temporary, flexible jobs, is likely to have preceded that time also, one could imagine it has been around for a millennia with people working multiple jobs to piece together a living, albeit missing the digital platform asset that we have seen rising in the last decade or so.

The implications of the global economic crisis 2008 - 2012 did put an emphasis on the Gig economy as a “sector” through the re-imagining of the nature of work while unemployment rates were escalating. That resulted in many people being left with little choice but to work when and wherever they could, partaking in short-term and sometimes precarious roles as a means of making ends meet. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this with part-time and freelance work spiking dramatically. This has brought about mixed feelings and debate with both praise for the innovative use of technology as an enabler to facilitate on-demand needs coupled with others questioning the sustainability and fairness of working conditions. Media and policy debate generally focuses on the activities of larger organisations that rely heavily on non-permanent workers, such as taxi-hailing apps and fast food delivery apps, that are really only a newer dimension of the sector enabled by new technology platforms and algorithms. Gig workers though should be seen as encompassing a broader range of fields beyond those which get the most airtime in the media such as the taxi drivers or delivery riders. They include project managers, and technical writers, tech support, consultants, digital marketeers and performing artists, to name but a few. To be classified as a gig worker one must work on a short term, project by project basis, rather than as a long term employee of one organisation.

There has been lots of bad publicity in the media about the Gig economy, mainly in relation to high profile cases targeted at for instance Uber drivers, Deliveroo delivery riders and Amazon fulfilling warehouses. Our direct experience of the Gig economy in our role supporting start-up enterprises at Dundalk Institute of Technology, has however been a positive one, albeit that we interact mostly with what might be perceived as higher-value Gig workers. We see many start-ups supplementing their income by providing Gig services to others while they try to get their businesses off the ground. Many resource-strapped start-ups will tap into the Gig economy for services as a way of avoiding the longer term commitment direct employment brings, and we have seen many in our network developing sound careers as high value and highly sought-after Gig economy workers, by choice and typically with gusto.

When looked at historically the concept of the Gig economy isn’t something new, but the interest in the term and its interchangeable monikers is. Certainly, the advent of digital platforms and algorithms has helped the gig economy to grow and expand its reach and create new ways of working.

Some promote Gigging as some sort of utopia of opportunity. However in our experience the extent to which it is a positive experience for someone depends on where that person fits in the

hierarchy of worker categorisation, whether gigging is a choice, whether the engagement is humane and indeed whether the individual has an understanding of the implications of being a “Gig economy worker”.

Article by Aidan Browne, Head of Innovation & Business Development at Dundalk Institute of Technology

DID YOU KNOW? - GIG HAPPENS.

I first saw the video Did You Know? - Shift Happens back in 2008. It was created based on research conducted by Karl Fisch, Scott McLeod and Jeff Brenman and highlighted the pace and areas of change unfolding in the world at that time. There were also a few predictions made for the future world we would live in. Areas such as technology, language, data, information and the world of work. As someone who works in an educational institute, I was struck by the following observation made in the video:

“We are currently preparing students for jobs that don’t yet exist, using technologies that haven’t been invented, in order to solve problems, we don’t even know are problems yet”.

It really stopped me in my tracks and has stayed with me over the years.


Another prediction made in the video was that people will work on average 10 - 14 jobs by the age of 38. I not sure whether they envisioned the emergence of the gig worker in that prediction or whether employed or self-employed were the only two types of employment path they considered.

Nonetheless, the world we now live in has three employment options available to individuals: those of being an employee, a self-employed individual or a gig/platform worker. And while some people are drawn to the flexibility the gig economy provides, a cursory look through the world’s media shows the implications, often negative, on employment law, social security and pension provision that individuals, society and governments are scrambling to deal with at the moment.

Perhaps it was this that attracted me to get involved in the Giggin Policy Project when the opportunity presented. Especially as the programme aims to get youth involved in taking the lead in mapping out future policy direction for the Gig Economy.

Perhaps when this project is completed and in another 10 years’ time, we will be able to look back and see the influence it has had on the future of work and an individual’s employment path, rights and obligations.

One thing is certain though – Gig Happens! Didn’t you know?

To watch the “Did you know?” video, please [CLICK HERE](#) 

Article by Garrett Duffy, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Ireland



Pictured: Garrett Duffy and Aidan Browne, Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT) Ireland. DKIT is a partner on the Giggin Policy Project with responsibility for measuring and assessing the project’s impact.