

# Part 3: Digital work and the refugee “gig economy”



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# What is the gig economy?

- **Gig economy** - Labour-market activities coordinated through mobile platforms, bringing together workers and service purchasers



- **On-demand** – Work carried out locally, with clients and workers located in close physical proximity
- **Crowdwork** - Microtasks which are commissioned and carried out over the internet by freelancers located anywhere in the world

# Assessments of 'gig work'

- 'When considering the similarities between various forms of work that are accessible to refugees, whether online and offline, **it seems that both have their shortfalls and reflect larger labour market weaknesses**' (Kattaa and Byrne)
- '[Digital platform work] ... provides an important source of livelihood and economic survival in many cases, while **falling short of transforming the often insecure freelancing jobs into sustainable decent employment**' (Hackl)
- 'while [it] may offer refugees expanded options for paid work in a context of limited access to economic opportunities, **[the gig economy] does not – as it currently stands – offer decent work as defined by the ILO**' (Samman, Mansour-Ile, Hunt)

# What are the challenges?

- Income levels and security
- A skills mismatch
- Employment regulation
- Career progression
- Social protection, voice and accountability

# And for refugee women...

- Limited mobility
- Lack of 'suitable' opportunities
- Unpaid care and domestic responsibilities
- Safety concerns (at client homes)
- Isolation / difficulty linking and organizing with others
- Internet access and digital literacy, monitoring of online activity

# What can be done?

‘The question is whether the need for (any) income in situations of displacement and economic need outweighs the demand for decency of working conditions .... **The most important question may concern the missing link between them: how can these important providers of digital livelihoods be supported in ways that move refugees’ experiences closer towards decent work and sustainable dignified employment?**’

# How can the private sector be supported?

- Training to support digital livelihoods
- Invest in digital infrastructure
- Clarify legal frameworks governing refugee work
- Stress gains for refugees, companies & governments
- Multi-stakeholder cooperation and coordination

# What else is needed?

- **Governments:** promote decent work conditions including the gradual extension of social protection to gig workers
- **Civil society:** facilitate refugee association (where viable)
- **Gig companies:** adopt global good practices, e.g. adequate incomes and security, skills upgrading, social protection, recognising worker associations
- **All stakeholders:** Support legal frameworks that recognise the challenges facing women refugees and facilitate their employment



# Gig work and livelihoods

- Digitally mediated remote work [has the potential] to become a source of economic livelihood for refugees. At the same time, low payment levels and insecure work patterns mean that ***such work is best seen as one of several pillars of economic livelihoods*** (Hackl)
- ‘While the online gig economy may present some increased opportunities to link Syrian women refugees with economic opportunities, the significant challenges posed to workers in terms of overall quality and quantity of work on offer means ***it should be seen by those seeking to support this group as one element of a wider range of options***’ (Samman, Mansour-Ille, Hunt)



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