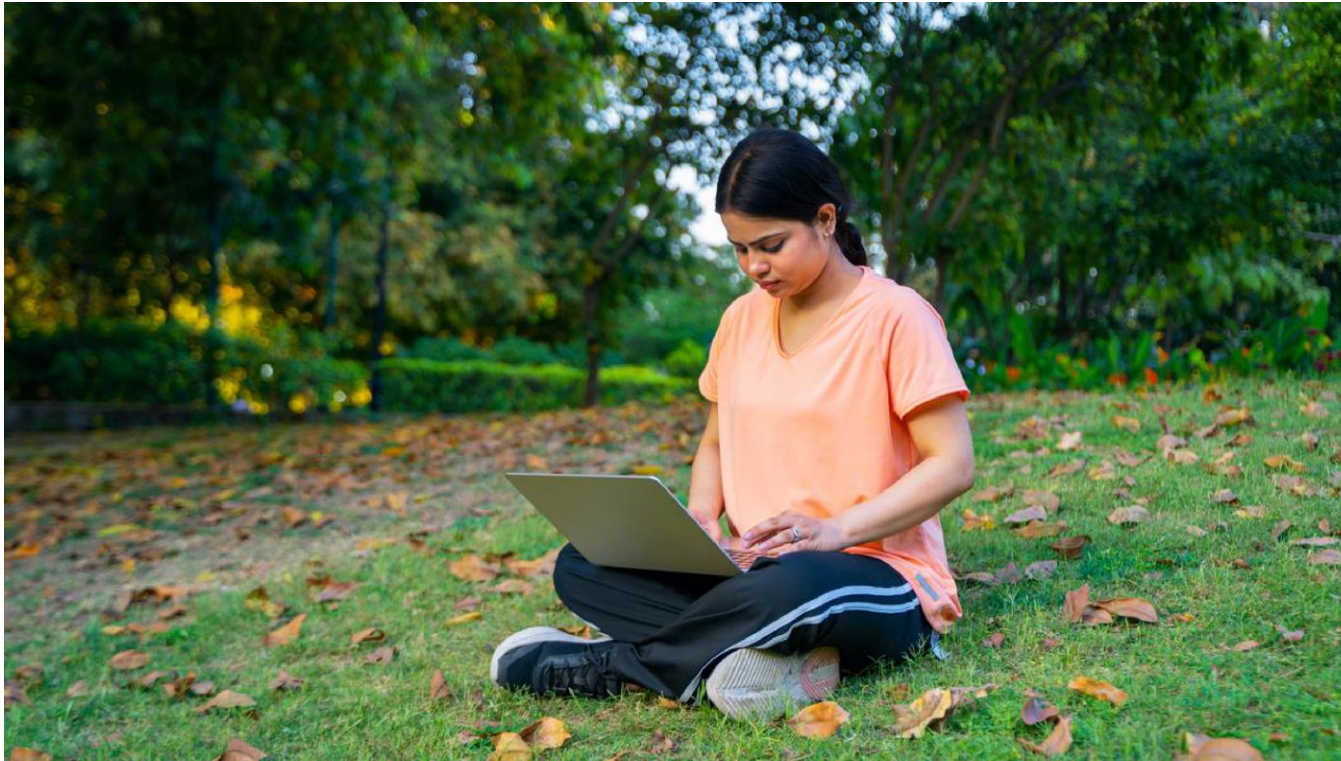


Can new collar gig jobs be a game-changer for fresh graduates

Gig economy offers diverse opportunities for freelancers, especially in tech, with potential for long-term growth and innovation.

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To train students for the gig economy, they must be encouraged to use platforms like GitHub, Dribbble and Kaggle to showcase their skills through live projects. BITS, Pilani has introduced a module on Freelancing , whereas IIT Madras has tied up with Zoho for gig internships. | iStock/Getty Images

Gig means “informal”. Gig workers are typically freelancers or independent contractors hired for specific tasks or projects, rather than as full time employees.

Whenever we hear the word “Gig Jobs ”, what readily come to our minds are the temporary blue collar workers using platforms like Uber, Ola, Urban, Flipkart etc. But in reality, the scope of gig work is far wider, ranging from platform-driven blue collar jobs, white collar knowledge workers, and going up to “skills-only” new age jobs that are called “New Collar Jobs”.

Developed countries like the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Australia have integrated gig work more deeply into their economies. According to Upwork's Freelance Forward report (2024), 38% of the U.S. workforce is freelancers, with 79% of them holding minimum Bachelors degree and 47% of them providing knowledge services in sectors like IT, consulting and marketing.

An unprecedented digital transformation of the job market fueled by AI coupled with continuation of remote working in the IT sector has produced a number of new-age jobs requiring cutting-edge skills. Just-in-time availability and substantial cost advantage are compelling companies to recruit such freelancers.

As per a recent report by TeamLease, only 10% of about 1.5 million engineering students that graduate in 2025 are expected to secure full time jobs in corporates during the year, due to automation of entry level jobs, slowdown of economy and skill-related factors. The situation is not likely to change for the better in the near future. In this environment, the emerging job market for gig sector white collar and new collar jobs presents an alternative career path .

In the prevailing context, this article examines the attractiveness of the sector for fresh engineering graduates and career pathways that can be planned in short term as well as long term, challenges faced in this process and how they can be addressed by the stakeholders.

White collar gigs

As per FlexingIt's report on Changing Global Workforce Models, despite global uncertainty and a sluggish job market, demand for independent professionals rose 38% in 2024-25 driven by the need for specialist skills, quicker turnaround and flexibility in deployment. Demand for freelancers cuts across business functions and sectors with technology services leading at 25% (AI related projects contributing about 10%), followed by strategy (15%) and finance (11%). Besides this, 25% of freelance projects are independent of location and can be outsourced. A generational shift is underway as a number of millennials and Gen Z are preferring organisations and jobs that offer autonomy, flexibility and work-life balance from the outset. No wonder, 38% of the white collar gig workers worldwide are women.

The Indian market

As traditional job markets get reshaped due to automation and become increasingly competitive, many fresh graduates are turning to gig jobs, as a viable entry point into the workforce. India currently has over 10 million gig workers in sectors such as software, professional services, digital marketing, healthcare, and media. This workforce is expected to grow to 23.5 million by 2030, as per a NITI Aayog report.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a major driver of new job creation and transformation. India's AI job market is expected to grow by 20% in 2025 and the integration of AI into the gig economy is creating new opportunities for engineering graduates, particularly in data science, machine learning, and automation.

As per a NASSCOM report, by 2027, 40% of IT work in India could be gig-based and 25% of Global Capability Centres (GCCs) will recruit gig workers. New collar jobs are not limited to IT, as other sectors like banking, insurance, healthcare, and even traditional industries such as oil and gas are increasingly seeking tech-savvy engineers for digital transformation roles.

As per Foundit Insights Tracker (April 2025), India's gig job market has been witnessing robust expansion, recording a 17% year-on-year growth in 2024-25. Most of the gig professionals are placed through company-led models across Indian corporates like TCS, Infosys, HCL Tech, Fractal and Wipro (28% share), MNCs like IBM, JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Google, Microsoft and Meta (12%), startups (8%), and others (18%). Balance 34% are placed through consultants including staffing firms and freelance platforms.

The demand for gig workers is particularly strong in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related roles, which make up 68% of total gig opportunities, underscoring the increasing reliance on skilled professionals in technology, management, and data science-driven sectors. Moreover, freshers with specialised technical expertise are in high demand, with gig-based hiring in fields like AI, data science, and cloud computing, which grew by 32% over the previous year. The steep growth in GCCs has been witnessing increased reliance on gig professionals, as a key part of their hiring strategy. As per a recent LinkedIn survey, 85% of the GCCs are focused on a skills-first approach for recruitment.

Outsourcing opportunities

Due to cost-effectiveness and a large English-speaking workforce, Indian gig workers are in demand for firms in the U.S. and Europe for outsourcing jobs like AI/ML data annotation, AI ethics, prompt engineering, data analytics, application prototyping and digital marketing campaign management. The National Capital Region (NCR) with a 26% share and Mumbai (18%) are the major gig hubs, followed by Bengaluru (12%), Hyderabad (11%) and Chennai (8%).

Income trends and platforms

The gig economy in India offers a diverse range of earning opportunities, with the largest share of 40% of jobs in the income range of ₹3-6 lakh per annum (LPA) followed by 36% in less-than-₹3 lakh per annum, 16% in ₹6-10 lakh range and balance

8% in the over ₹10 LPA bracket, reflecting the dominance of entry-level and mid-skilled roles. There has been a significant growth in skilled gig professionals, particularly in IT consulting, data analytics, and project management, commanding ₹6-10 LPA salaries, highlighting the demand for advanced technical and strategic skills. As businesses continue to integrate gig talent into their regular workforce strategies, the scope for premium skill sets and specialised expertise is expected to grow, driving greater earning potential in the future.

As the gig economy continues to grow, businesses will increasingly rely on specialized online platforms that cater to specific industries, such as healthcare, design, technology, and marketing. These AI-driven platforms match workers with highly tailored skills to project-based opportunities, enhancing the quality of work, while streamlining the hiring process.

An estimated 200 million women in India are estimated to be unemployed or under-employed due to rigid work formats and personal commitments. In order to address this gap, Swati Nelabhatula, a techie turned entrepreneur recently created a platform, SITHA, for women gig workers.

Opportunities and platforms for New Collar Gig Services		
Type of service	Roles	Platforms
Technology Services	Full stack development, Mobile App development, DevOps Automation	Upwork, Toptal, Freelancer.com, Fiverr, Turing, Google Talent Hub, Git Hub Jobs,
	AI/ML Engineering (model training, fine tuning, prompt engineering, data annotation)	
	Cyber security (Ethical hacking, Penetration testing), Fraud Analytics	
Digital Marketing & Content Creation	Social media management, SEO, blogging, video editing, influencer marketing	Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pepper Content
Creative & Design Services	Graphic design, UI/UX, animation	Behance, Dribbble, 99designs

Career growth for gig professionals

While the gig sector could be an entry level career opportunity, gig professionals, over a period of time, can look forward to multiple career growth choices, depending on their interests and career aspirations. Many successful startups are founded by professionals, who started as freelancers ,leveraging their experience and networking with the client base. Work experience thus gained also enables the graduates to build a strong skill base, making them attractive to corporate recruiters.

Some gig professionals pursue higher studies, while working. Irrespective of the career option selected, it can be a rewarding career journey of earn-while-you-learn.

Gig jobs offer flexibility in terms of the projects, clients, skills, and working hours and can also suit those pursuing further studies or career exploration. They also provide exposure to international clients in diverse industries, without the need for relocation. For those with ‘Portfolio Career Mindset’, they offer the choice of multiple income generating roles, simultaneously, depending on interest, skills and convenience. Top freelancers with the right skills can earn more than salaried peers.

Challenges

The biggest challenge in gig jobs is lack of assured income and job security, as they are temporary, project-based work, without social security benefits like PF, ESI, or health insurance. There is also the risk of credibility of the clients and possibility of delayed payments on platforms. Income growth depends on self up skilling, in alignment with the skills in demand. It depends entirely on the gig professional to manage his or her career growth.

Need to ensure sustainability of gig economy

In view of the excellent opportunity the gig sector presents in upskilling the youth to make them employable and contribute to the economic growth, all the concerned stakeholders - Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), industry and government- need to play an active role to address the challenges and make it sustainable, scalable as well as viable.

HEIs need to prepare students for gig roles by including modules on freelancing, digital marketing and financial literacy, besides imparting contemporary skills as a part of the curriculum, and conduct credit-based evaluation of the gig projects. They should collaborate with the industry to provide gig platforms and startups for short live project opportunities.

Students should be encouraged to use platforms like GitHub, Dribbble and Kaggle to showcase their skills through live projects. They should set up mentoring and counseling support and also recognize top-performers. BITS, Pilani has introduced a module on Freelancing, whereas IIT Madras has tied up with Zoho for gig internships

A number of companies, both Indian IT firms and MNCs, have already created dedicated gig platforms for engineers and have been offering micro-internships and gig projects to the students. They maintain pools of vetted freelancers for just-in-time hiring and created talent pipelines, offering regular employment to the well performing gig professionals. They also provide upskilling opportunities for the enrolled gig workers.

TCS curated the Ion Digital Marketplace as the gig platform for cloud & AI freelancers wherein over 15,000 gig workers have been onboarded so far and about 40% of the top performers were absorbed into their projects. Wells Fargo, the U.S. banking MNC set up “Gig Talent Pool” to hire Indian freelancers for fraud analytics and AI jobs.

Government policies

Recognising that the gig workforce is a vital pillar of India’s new-age economy, driving innovation and efficiency across digital platforms, the Government of India announced during the 2025-26 budget that it has decided to provide them with identity cards, e-Shram registration, and healthcare security under PM Jan Arogya Yojana, as a transformative step towards their social security and well-being. This initiative is expected to empower nearly 10 million gig workers. A pilot initiative has already been undertaken by the Ministry of Labour & Employment to register platform workers and aggregators on the e-Shram portal.

The Karnataka government has established a Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Board to provide social security and welfare benefits to gig workers in the state. More States are expected to follow suite in due course.

India, with its large education and skilling ecosystem, has the potential to emerge as a Global Gig Hub for new-collar skills, which will power the future global economy. In order to realise it, the Government of India may consider setting up a Gig India Mission and formulate strategies and action plans and implement the same in a mission mode.

Conclusion

The New Collar gig economy presents not merely an attractive alternative but also a complementary pathway for the engineering graduates to acquire and harness the new-age skills. With the right policy interventions, academic reforms, and industry collaboration, gig careers can evolve from short-term sustenance models to long-term rewarding professional careers, offering opportunities for higher income, growth, and innovation to India's young talent. It is a golden opportunity for India to leverage the demographic dividend for achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047 by way of right skilling the youth.

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