

Unpacking the potentials of the platform economy in Albania

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I. Introduction

A. Background on the online platform economy in the country

The online platform economy in Albania, although still emerging, has experienced substantial growth in recent years. Its development can be attributed to various factors, such as technological advancements, globalization, governmental policies, and a growing demand for flexible work arrangements. In fact, the online platform economy in Albania started to take shape in the early 2010s with the proliferation of internet access and mobile technology. During this time, international platforms such as Upwork, Freelancer and others became accessible to the Albanian population, enabling them to connect with global clients. The impact of technological change on the Albanian economy was made evident especially during and after the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak when digitalisation trends accelerated at a noticeable rate. New non-standard forms of employment enriched the labour market especially in the platform work which provided new online-based employment opportunities (Kasimati, 2022). The steadily increase over the last decade of E-commerce and virtual business diversified this market as well (Buhaljoti et al., 2022). Working for online platforms, geographically tethered or cloud work, emerged as new forms of employment in the dynamic labour market of Albania.

Meanwhile the Albanian government has recognized the potential of the online platform economy and has taken steps to

promote and regulate it. Various initiatives have been launched to support digital literacy, encourage entrepreneurship, and ensure a favourable legal framework for online businesses, such as the Coding Programme, which provides financial support (50% to 100%) for the youngsters to learn coding and programming¹. This was supported by improved telecommunication infrastructure, increased internet coverage, and widespread smartphone usage have contributed to the growth of online platforms in Albania (Leka, 2021c). These technological advancements have allowed more people to access online work and services, broadening the base of both providers and consumers. Albania's focus on education and skills development, particularly in IT and digital fields, has played a critical role in preparing the workforce for the online platform economy². Universities and vocational schools are increasingly offering courses that align with the demands of the digital market. Therefore, the online platform economy has become an essential part of Albania's economic landscape, creating new job opportunities, especially for the youth. It has helped small businesses and individual entrepreneurs to reach a wider audience and compete in the global market.

During the implementation of the project "Open Western Balkan Collaboratory on Online Platform Work: Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina PN5- 052" we realized that despite the growth, there are many challenges that the online platform economy in Albania faces. Some of the main challenges platform workers face are payment processing issues due to limited international banking integration, digital security concerns, and the need for more

1. <https://riniafemijet.gov.al/muzhaqi-mbeshtesim-te-rinjte-se-shpejti-nis-zbatimi-i-garancise-rinore-trajni-me-kurse-profesionale-me-mbeshtetjen-e-shtetit-ose-punesim-per-te-rinjte-ne-situatae-vulnerabel>
2. <http://www.vet.al/>

comprehensive regulatory frameworks to protect both workers and consumers. These conclusions were drawn by using a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The data gathered through the GigMetar statistical instrument were combined with the results of the in-depth interviews with platform workers. The analysis from Gigmetar and the interviews provide insights in the dynamics of Albania's gig economy, offering potential guidance for growth and development within the labour market. While Gigmetar analysis focused on tangible aspects, the in-depth interviews offered a personalized insight into the lived experiences of the gig workers, giving a possibility to comprehend the nuances of their working conditions, challenges faced, opportunities and benefits. Comparatively, Albania seems to be a strong player in the Western Balkans' gig economy, with a broad base in different sectors and a more equitable gender distribution. The future of Albania's online platform economy looks promising, with potential for further expansion and diversification. Investments in technology, continuous government support, and collaboration with international entities may drive the sector to new heights in the coming years. This report provides valuable input for policymakers, platform operators, and workers themselves to understand the dynamics and potential growth areas within the gig economy in Albania.

B. Objectives of the report

The main goals of this report are to offer an exhaustive insight into the platform economy in Albania, evaluate the prevailing status freelance labour, and suggest legislative guidelines to meet demands and alleviate the challenges faced by platform workers.

The project seeks to enhance cooperation and scientific exchange among educational and research institutions, civil society and public sector in Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the domain of online platform economy which is increasingly attracting young workforce from Western Balkans, and may potentially contribute to:

- The prevention of brain drain
- The promotion of gender equality and equal opportunities within the realm of online platform economy by addressing core vulnerabilities of female workforce stemming from inequalities and discrimination in the “offline” economy, and
- To enhance good neighbourly relations and European integration in the field of science, education and employment policies among the three countries. Namely, in view of the forthcoming European Directive on Platform Economy the project seeks to strengthen scientific and policy resources in the three countries and inspire educated debate about interpolation of the selected solutions from the Directive into public policies in the above mentioned Western Balkan countries.

C. Research methodology and data sources

The study on the gig economy in Albania has been conducted employing both quantitative and qualitative research methods to offer an in-depth view of the current state and trends of the platform ecosystem. The quantitative analysis was primarily performed using Gigmeter, a specialized tool developed to gather and analyse data related to gig workers. Data were extracted from major freelance platforms such as Upwork, Freelancer and Guru, which encompassed information from nine countries, including Albania. Key variables such as the number of workers, earnings, type of work, and more were extracted to understand the dynamics of platform work in the region. As the quantitative data is focused on tangible aspects and numbers, it may not capture the subjective experiences and sentiments of the workers. That is why a set of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with gig workers in Albania. We also relied on the focus group approach which was used during the kick-off meeting event. Organised as a round table in the beginning of the project, it involved various stakeholders, providing this way a platform for open discussion and exploration of multifaceted issues concerning platform workers. In addition to the identified sample of interviewees directly from the online platform, potential interviewees were identified during this first meeting as well. When selecting the interviewees geographical location was considered bearing in mind the main cities platform workers live, Tirana, Durres and Shkodra. The interviews were conducted online and onsite, audio registered and then transcribed

(Annex I – Table of the interviewees). The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, where key themes such as working conditions, challenges, opportunities, and benefits were identified. All interviews and discussions were conducted with informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and adherence to ethical guide. Literature reviews, previous studies, and agencies reports were also consulted to contextualize the findings within the broader socio-economic scenario.

II. Overview of the Platform Economy

A. Definition and scope of the online platform economy

The online platform economy refers to the economic activities that are facilitated by digital platforms connecting various users, such as businesses, consumers, and individual providers. The 'social model' of industrialized countries, a structure built very gradually on three dimensions – place, time and action since the end of the 19th century, is weakened as a result of the virtualization of the work relationship which de facto allows the global integration of work (regardless of cultural and linguistic barriers). Online work platforms have led the way. If this work can now be done on a screen, it can also be done on the other side of the world. This is the new 'law' that workers throughout the world are now having to live with (Degryse, 2023).

In all the six Western Balkan countries, platform work is emerging as a notable and

growing aspect of the employment landscape, mirroring this way the global trend (Kasimati, 2022). This new employment structure takes two main forms:

- ① Remote service platforms – the digital labour platforms where services are provided remotely and transmitted electronically as various freelance marketplaces where tasks are completed online and
- ② On-location service platforms – the actual service delivery occurring in person, but the connection between consumers and service providers, as well as administrative tasks, facilitated through digital means.

Part of this report is the workers engaged in the remote service platforms in Albania. These platforms act as intermediaries, allowing parties to interact, transact, and collaborate on a virtual basis. The scope of the online platform economy is vast and continually evolving, encompassing various sectors and functionalities. The online platform economy operates across international boundaries, removing geographic constraints and enabling a global marketplace. Online platforms often disrupt traditional business models, leading to new innovations and changes in how industries operate. It creates diverse working opportunities from part-time gig work to full-time remote positions, catering to different skills and preferences. But the unique nature of online platform economy often requires new or adapted regulations to ensure fair competition, protect consumers, and govern labour practices. It heavily relies on and drives technological advancements, including AI, machine learning, data analytics, and more, to enhance user

experience and efficiency. It continues to grow and evolve, influenced by technological innovations, societal needs, and regulatory landscapes. But along with opportunities, the online platform economy presents certain challenges and risks, including security, privacy, inequality.

B. Key characteristics and trends in the country

Albania's online platform economy is still in its nascent stages (early stage of digital transformation) but has shown promising growth, particularly in areas like e-commerce, freelancing, and ride-sharing services. Reports from (DataReportal, 2022) show that internet coverage rate at the start of 2023 for Albania stood at 80.1% of the total population with a decrease of 0.4% in relation to 2022 (the same decrease rate also is reported for the total population). Increased internet coverage and mobile device usage have enabled more individuals and businesses to participate in the online platform economy the younger generation seems to be at the forefront of this economy, both as consumers and providers, embracing the flexibility and opportunities offered by online platforms. Much of the online platform activity is concentrated in urban areas, like Tirana, where infrastructure and digital literacy are more advanced (it is reported that 64.1% of the population lives in urban areas and 50.2% of the Albania's population is female). For the region, especially Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the issue of brain drain is prominent. This phenomenon intensifies the

shortages of skilled labour, as qualified professionals emigrate in search of better opportunities elsewhere (Kasimati, 2022), a problem the government has to tackle. A large contingent, often even the majority of platform workers are migrants (Altenried, 2023). While this might be the case for the gig economy labour market in the western countries, in Albania platform workers are mainly Albanian. This landscape is changing recently with the emerging of digital nomads and the marketing of Albania as the DN Paradise³.

On the other hand, the Albanian government has begun implementing regulations and policies to support oversee online platforms, although this is still a work in progress. In collaboration with World Bank the government has launched Digital Jobs Albania in order to enhance digital literacy, especially among women through digital skills training programs (Ungerer et al., 2022). Regarding its trends, platforms like Upwork and other freelancing sites are providing new employment opportunities, especially appealing during economic uncertainties or for those looking for flexible working arrangements (Leka, 2021a). With the rise of online platforms there is a corresponding growth in digital payment methods, although challenges remain in integrating international payment systems (Leka, 2021b). Challenges such as banking integration, cybersecurity, and uneven geographic development need to be addressed to fully realize the potential of the online platform economy in the country. Government support, technological investments, and focused education in digital literacy will be essential in shaping the future trajectory of this dynamic economic sector in Albania.

C. Comparison with global and regional trends

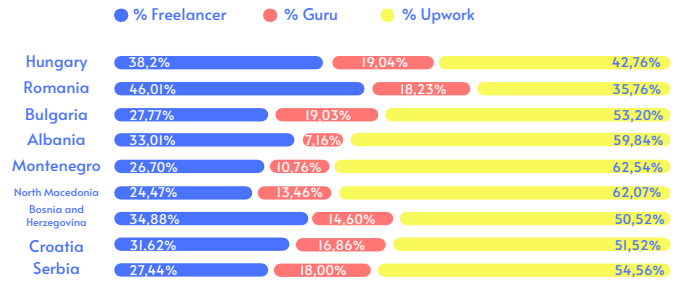
Albania's online platform economy trends largely align with regional and global patterns, reflecting common directions in e-commerce, gig work, digital payments, and more. However, there are noticeable differences in the maturity and implementation of these trends. Albania and some of its regional peers are still in the development phase in many of these areas, while more globally advanced markets are further along. The average in the region for households with internet for 2020 was 81% versus 91% in EU, while on average 20% of individuals possessed average digital skills (25% is the average for EU) for 2019 (Kasimati, 2022). Continued investments in technological infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, education, and international collaboration may help Albania accelerate its growth in the online platform economy, allowing to catch up with both regional and global leaders in various sectors. In relation to gig work there is a noticeable increase in freelancing, with platforms like Upwork gaining popularity. While in the region there is a similar trend, particularly in countries like Serbia and Romania, which have a more significant number of gig workers, and globally being already a prominent trend for several years, especially in the western economies.

3. <https://www.adventureswithluda.com/albania-for-digital-nomads-guide/>
<https://nomadlist.com/tirana>

III. Quantitative Analysis (Gigmetar)

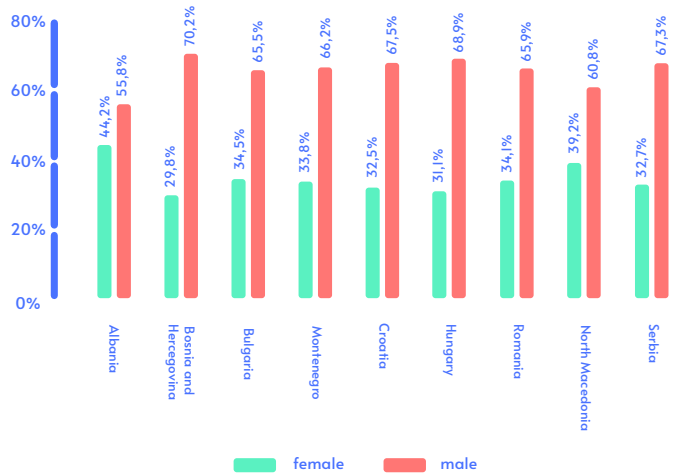
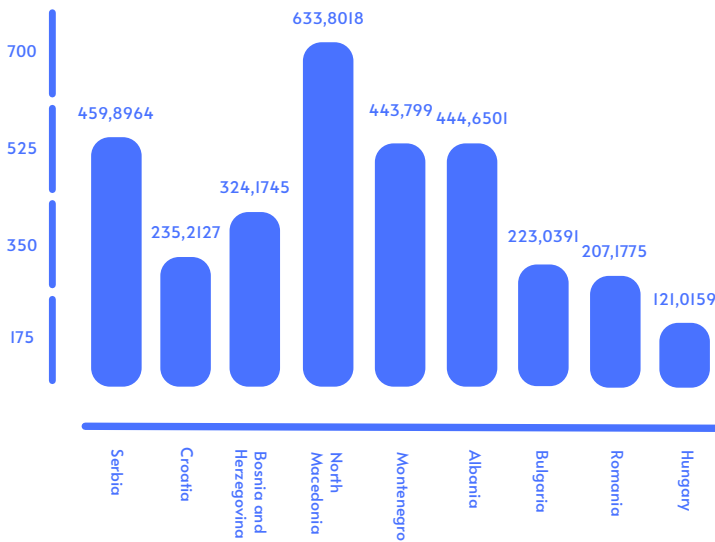
A. Size and growth of the platform economy in the country

Based on the Gigmetar data analysis for the Western Balkan region, Albania ranks third in terms of gig workers, boasting 444.7 such workers for every 100 000 inhabitant. This standing behind North Macedonia, leading with 633.8 gig workers for 100 000 residents, and Serbia, with 459.9 gig workers for the same population size



In terms of gender distribution, Albania has a fairly balanced ratio, though it leans towards males, with 55.8% male gig workers compared to 44.2% female. This is considered the most balanced gender spread among the platforms in the region.

Gig workers per 100.000 inhabitants



In the Albanian market, Upwork commands the largest portion of gig workers at 59.84%, followed by Freelancer at 33.01% and Guru at 7.16%.

B. Demographic profile of platform workers

The demographic profile of gig workers in Albania, as gleaned from the Gigmetar data, provides insights into the composition and characteristics of this part of the labour market. The data reveals a dynamic and growing gig economy in Albania, with a

notable presence on major platforms such as Upwork, Freelancer, and Guru. The gender distribution, though skewed towards males, is relatively balanced compared to other countries in the region with 44.2% females and 55.8 % males. This demographic profile reflects a diverse and engaged gig workforce that is integral to the broader labour market in Albania.

C. Types of platform work and sectors involved

Albania's gig economy is diversified and robust, with significant participation across various sectors like creative fields (23.4%, the highest engagement in the gig economy), software development (21.2%, showing the significance of the tech sector), and clerical and data entry (18.6%). The professional services are the least represented sector in Albania, suggesting a focus on other professional fields. However, Albania has a relatively balanced distribution across various professions, in contrast to countries like Serbia which have a significant focus on creative and multimedia (35.3%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasize clerical and data entry (32.3%). The gender distribution is relatively balanced, although some discrepancies exist in earnings between male and female workers.

D. Income levels and earnings of platform workers

Albania's total earnings in the platform Upwork (USD88 245.78) are moderate compared to other countries, with Romania (USD223 482.62) and Serbia (USD228 351.80) having the highest earnings, and Montenegro (USD28 125.66) having the lowest. Albania's hourly wages are in the mid-range compared to other countries, with Croatia (USD25.14) and Hungary (USD24.21) having higher hourly wages, and North Macedonia (USD17.22) having the lowest.

IV. Qualitative Analysis (Workers interviews + round table)

A. Work conditions and challenges faced by platform workers (interviews)

B. Impact of platform economy on employment (interviews)

The typology of online platform workers we have interviewed work as project – based or task-based ones who are typically well – qualified and work as IT, teachers, managers, trainers, consultants, interpreters, architects, creative works etc . Most of the interviewees have been introduced to Upwork or other platforms from their friends highlighting so the importance of network in this sector.

Vala (45, F) A colleague of mine persisted me continuously to register and work for Upwork, since two years ago. But I was not very convinced. Until several months ago when he had already too many projects ongoing and couldn't afford them alone. So he kind of sub-contracted me (only by the word of mouth), and so I surrendered and decided to accept his offer. I then realised what a fertile ground it could be, so I created my profile as well.

One of the main advantages of working for this platform, interviewees consider the fact that Upwork is like a guarantee for them, so they do not prefer to talk privately to the employer, unless it is a very trustful one.

Anton (30, M) Sometimes the communication with the employers go on outside the platform. This is not very good for me, as the platform is the payment guarantee...

Working without a definite time-table and choosing the time of working by themselves is one of the main advantages online platform workers continuously highlighted. But this is a two-sided coin which should be carefully managed because, in the interviewees' words "this freedom becomes a trap, no days off, no holidays, not the right division between the day and night". From our interviews, we realised that most of the workers prefer to work part-time in the online platform, for some main reasons: They do not want to lose the main job (which is often in a public institution) or they do not want to completely detach from the social life. But there is a difference between young people, which consider social life quite divided from the work environment, and older ones, more traditional in the importance of work networks in the social life. Additional incomes are the main

reason of choosing to work for an online platform.

Mandi (29, M) The source of incomes which is higher because it is a global labour market, the flexibility of the schedule, which is very important. I would mention as well that when you work online you work far away from the pressure or the supervision of someone, you are quieter while working, with no stress.

Platform workers do not consider necessary the introduction of new regulations and policies from the state, nevertheless in the Albanian Law there is not yet a proper division between the self-employed – employed or freelancer status for this category of workers.

Eri (37, M) If the states intervene, it will ruin everything, just leave us alone in our own environment ...

Online platforms offer a variety of employment possibilities diversifying the opportunities even for people with disabilities, a marginalised group which is still not targeted with the right policies in Albania.

Eda (42, F) Due to my physical problems, I can't go out of home without assistance. Every job I have tried to do, resulted to be too hard to reach, because we don't have here in Albania the right infrastructure. I then decided to work from home and created my profile at Upwork. But it was difficult for me to use it, couldn't find the proper way to find the most suitable jobs for me. It would be good if someone – governmental bodies, or non-governmental organisations offer courses or trainings for this group of people.

C. Opportunities and benefits for workers and the economy (round table)

While the labour market and the relationships between employers and employees in the online sector have evolved fast, the public institutions need still time to adapt to this dynamic new sector. According to the Regional Employment Office Representative, different digital services are offered to the employers when searching for employees, or to the unemployed such as to look for a job; to apply for a job; to find new trainings possibilities (Coding Programme among them) etc. But there are still not proper policies and trainings to target online work. Even though there is a lack for employees in all sectors, companies prefer to find workers through other means, still they do not trust in public institutions as intermediaries. This lack of awareness on the importance of this employment sector is seen in the way questions are organised in the Labour Force Survey where there are not proper questions to tackle this category of workers. Since Albania has the most specialized and best paid workforce in the platform economy, this could be something that the new Skills and Employment Strategy 2023 - 2030 could exploit on so many levels such as skills development, handling migration issues because there can be "movement" of labor services without workers necessarily moving/immigrating to the place where they work; ICT curriculum developments; Profiling of the VET curricula; trainings for digital literacy etc.

V. Policy and Regulatory Landscape

A. Existing policies and regulations related to the platform economy in the country

With the rise of gig economy, labour regulations become complex. Currently, Albania's labour laws may not fully cover the unique circumstances of gig workers, and there might be a need for specific regulations addressing their rights and benefits. Traditional labour laws in Albania might not clearly define or recognize gig workers, leading to ambiguity in their legal status. Without clear classification, gig workers might miss out on protections and rights typically afforded to full-time employees. The tax framework for gig workers might be unclear or inconsistent, particularly concerning income reporting and tax obligations. Lack of clear guidelines may lead to non-compliance or evasion, either intentionally or inadvertently. It is worth to consider that gig workers often fall outside the conventional social security network, and there may be no specific policies to address their unique employment situation. They might lack access to essential benefits like healthcare, unemployment support, and pensions, underscoring the need for tailored policies. Occupational health and safety regulations designed for traditional workplaces may not cover gig workers, especially those in diverse or home-based environments. Specific guidelines to ensure the safety and well-being of gig workers may be lacking. The contractual nature of gig work

requires clear regulations regarding contract terms, payment conditions, and dispute resolution mechanisms. A lack of tailored regulations might leave gig workers vulnerable to unfair practices. Gig work often involves the handling of personal and sensitive data. Albania's alignment with international data protection standards may cover gig workers, but specific guidelines and enforcement might be needed. For those involved in international gig work (such as freelancing), there might be a lack of clear policies related to cross-border taxation, legal obligations, and other regulatory aspects.

B. Gaps and challenges in the current regulatory framework

Albania, like many other countries may face (before mentioned) challenges in regulating the gig economy. Challenges regarding the definitions and classifications of gig workers, their rights and benefits, taxation and compliance, health and security regulation, resolution mechanisms, data privacy and security and the need to align with international regulations are some of them. Addressing gaps and challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including comprehensive legislative review, stakeholder engagement, and continuous monitoring of the sector's evaluation. The development of specific policies and regulations tailored to the gig economy's unique characteristics would likely play a crucial role in ensuring a fair and thriving gig economy in Albania.

C. International best practices and policy approaches (EU Directive)

Analysing international best practices and policy approaches, particularly those adapted within the European Union, can provide valuable insights regulating and nurturing the gig economy. The EU is working towards clearer classifications of workers in the gig economy to distinguish between employees and self-employed individuals. Introducing clear legal definitions to classify gig workers, thus ensuring that those who meet certain criteria receive employee protections. In relation to social protection and benefits, the EU has recommended that member states extend social protection to all workers, including non-standard and self-employed workers. It would be best if implementing policies that provide gig workers with access to essential social benefits like healthcare, pensions, and unemployment insurance. It is key also to ensure that gig workers receive written information about their working conditions, including pay, working hours, and other key terms. The Transparent and predictable Working Conditions Directive aims to ensure that all workers have clear and transparent working conditions. Developing regulations that cover diverse gig work environments, including home-based and mobile workers, ensuring the safety and well-being is fundamental. Therefore, the EU emphasizes the importance of occupational health and safety for all workers, including those in the gig economy. A major issue is also the support of associations and unions for gig workers to represent their interests and negotiate collectively. Efforts are being made within the EU to ensure that gig work-

ers have the right to organize and bargain collectively. The EU also encourages fair taxation and financial transparency within the gig economy as implementing clear tax guidelines for gig workers and platforms, ensuring compliance and fairness is vital. It is also important to ensure compliance with data privacy regulations, protecting both workers' and consumers' personal information. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) sets robust data protection standards, applicable to gig workers and platforms. It may be said that the EU's approach to the gig economy reflects a balance between promoting flexibility and innovation while ensuring fair treatment, social protection, and legal clarity to gig workers. By adopting the best practices, policymakers can create a supportive and responsible gig economy. The international practices offer valuable insights for countries like Albania and others seeking to regulate the gig economy in a way that aligns with modern labour market trends while safeguarding workers' rights. The continuous dialogue with stakeholders and monitoring of emerging trends will be key to adapting and evolving these practices over time.

VI. Policy Recommendations

A. Enhancing worker protection and rights

It is key to create clear legal definitions to classify gig workers, differentiating between independent contractors and employees. This

can extend proper legal protections and obligations to gig workers based on their status. This way it makes possible developing policies to provide gig workers access to essential social benefits like healthcare, unemployment support, and pensions. This would help gig workers with security and stability, akin traditional employees. It is so important also to enforce transparent and fair working conditions, including clear agreements on pay, working hours, and job responsibility. Enhancing the transparency and fairness of working conditions will protect gig workers from potential exploitation. Guaranteeing the safety and well-being of gig-workers, regardless of their working environment would be possible through adapting existing occupational health and safety regulation to covers diverse gig work environment, including home-based workers.

Safeguarding privacy and enhancing the professional reputation of the gig economy through aligning with international standards like the GDPR to protect the personal information of gig workers.

Ensuring that policies remain relevant and effective in ever-changing landscape of gig economy through engaging stakeholders, including gig workers, platforms, and consumer groups, and invest in ongoing research to understand the evolving needs and trends (Ivanović et al., 2023).

The policy recommendations align with a vision of a responsible and supportive gig economy in Albania, balancing the need for flexibility and innovation with essential worker protections and rights. Collaborative efforts, international alignment, and ongoing engagement with dynamic nature of the

gig economy will be vital in successfully implementing these recommendations.

VII. Implementation and Monitoring

A. Strategies for implementing the recommended policies

In the bustling streets of Albania's burgeoning digital economy, the gig workforce is thriving, but a need for comprehensive policies is evident. The government, together with various stakeholders, is poised to embark on a strategic journey.

- A carefully crafted tapestry of legislation and regulation becomes the foundation. New laws, tailored to nuances of the gig economy, are designed, balancing innovation and protection. Clear regulatory guidelines are delineated, becoming the road signs guiding platforms, workers, and consumers.
- The channels of communication are opened wide, with forums and platforms where stakeholders can discuss, debate, and devise. The spirit of collaboration is ignited, turning dialogue into a dance where each voice is tailored.
- Education transforms uncertainty in understanding, as stakeholders learn the implications and intricacies of the new policies. Capacity is bolstered within regulatory authorities, strengthening the hands that will enforce these new rules.
- Digital bridges are built, connecting platforms, workers, and authorities.

Technology becomes the catalyst for compliance and communication, while infrastructure investments ensure that the path is smooth.

- A delicate balance is struck with incentives to reward innovation and compliance, while support mechanisms stand ready to aid those navigating the new terrain.

B. Roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders

In this landscape, various actors play their parts, each with unique roles and responsibilities.

- Government and regulatory authorities. The guardians of the public interest, shaping the laws, enforcing compliance, and nurturing dialogue.
- Gig platforms and businesses. the innovators and entrepreneurs, adhering to the new rules, supporting their workers, and contributing to the economy tapestry.
- Gig workers and unions. The backbone of the gig economy, they advocate for their rights and adhere to the regulations, their voices resonating in consultation chambers.
- Consumers and advocacy groups. The beneficiaries and watchdogs, ensuring that their interests are not lost in the shuffle, and their needs are met.
- International organizations and experts. The guiding stars, providing wisdom, sharing best practices, and ensuring alignment with global norms.

C. Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating policy effectiveness

The journey doesn't end with implementation. A vigilant eye must be kept on the unfolding scenario.

- **Monitoring and reporting systems:** Regular checks, data collection and reporting ensure that the pulse of the gig economy is constantly monitored.
- **Evaluation and feedback channels:** Independent assessments provide unbiased insights, while feedback channels act as the ears, listening to the whispers of challenges and successes.
- **Transparency and public accountability:** A transparent process ensures trust, while accountability mechanisms stand like sentinels, guarding public interests.
- **Adaptation and continuous improvement:** The landscape evolves, and so must the policies, adapting and growing, learning from successes and failures, both near and far.

The road to a thriving gig economy in Albania is complex but navigable. With well-defined strategies, a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, and robust monitoring mechanisms, the nation can transform its gig economy into a model of innovation, fairness, and resilience. This journey, embarked upon with determination and collaboration, promises to sculpt a future where the gig economy is not merely a fleeting trend but a lasting pillar of Albania's economic landscape.

VIII. Conclusion

A. Summary of key findings and recommendations

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis in this research provided a holistic view of the gig economy in Albania. While quantitative data offered a macro-level understanding of the trends and patterns, the qualitative insights helped in delving into the micro-level intricacies of the lives and work of gig workers. This multi-faceted approach ensures a rich, comprehensive, and grounded understanding of the subject, which forms the basis for analysis and recommendations made in this report. Analysing the data from Gigmetar, Albania's gig economy shows a balanced distribution across various professions with a slightly higher focus on creative and multimedia. The gender distribution is comparatively equitable, with a higher percentage of females than most other countries in the region. Income levels and earnings are moderate, reflecting the balanced nature of the distribution across sectors. Policymakers in Albania may focus on further diversifying the gig economy and improving overall earnings, possibly through targeted educational and professional development.

Some of the main challenges platform workers face during their job are: time management skills, unfavourable gap between their qualification, the task they take for the platform and the payment they get; lack of skills to properly use the platform and especially to negotiate wages and timetables.

B. Implications for the future of the platform economy in Albania

The future of the gig economy in Albania holds great promise but also presents considerable challenges. It represents a paradigm shift in the way work is conducted and how labour market is structured. The implications are multifaceted, and addressing them requires concerted effort by government, industry, and society. (Andjelkovic et al., 2021) evaluate three basic indicators for setting the readiness of a specific economy for digital transformation: level of internet usage, level of internet access in the households and level of overall digital skills. Studies show the covid era gave a burst to the internet usage and governments has gone through some initiatives to burst digital literacy for young people to consider engaging in the gig economy (DataReportal, 2022; Leka, 2021a, 2021b). The future of the gig economy in Albania, reflecting the growing trends of flexible work arrangements and digital platforms, has wide-range implications. These implications span social, economic, legal, and technological dimensions:

- ① Economic implications. The gig economy can stimulate economic growth by creating new markets, opportunities, and fostering innovation. This is particularly true if matched with supportive policies and infrastructure. On the flip side, the flexibility inherent in gig work can lead to income instability and lack of traditional job benefits. Managing this dichotomy will be a key challenge.
- ② Social implications. The gig economy may offer more flexible work arrangements,

potentially improving work-life balance for many. However, this could also blur the boundaries between work and personal life for some. Changes in the makeup of the workforce, including gender ratios and age distribution, could occur. For instance, more opportunities for women or younger individuals may merge, but this requires careful examination of underlying inequalities.

- ③ Legal and regulatory implications. The unconventional nature of gig work necessitates the rethinking of traditional labour laws. Crafting new legal frameworks that provide adequate protection without stifling innovation is a delicate balancing act. The fluidity and cross-borders nature of gig work may complicate taxation and regulatory compliance. A clear and comprehensive framework is needed to navigate this complexity.
- ④ Technological implications. The gig economy is heavily reliant on technology. Therefore, investments in digital literacy and infrastructure become paramount. Failure to address these could create a digital divide. With increased digitalization comes the responsibility to protect data and privacy. Robust measures must be in place to secure both worker and consumer information.
- ⑤ Global alignment. As the gig economy transcends borders, aligning with international best practices and standards can position Albania favourably on the global stage.

If handled with foresight, the gig economy can be a catalyst for positive transformation in the country, fostering growth, inclusivity, and adaptability. However, it also demands careful consideration of potential pitfalls and the crafting of policies that honour both the

uniqueness of the gig model and the timeless principles of fairness, security, and human dignity. The path Albania takes in shaping gig economy will undoubtedly be a defining aspect of its socio-economic landscape in the years to come.

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