# Covid-19 lockdown may be a boon for gig workers with unusual partnerships

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As the lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) progresses, companies, especially those employing gig workers, are looking at innovative partnerships to keep their businesses going. They also letting gig staff be employed meaningfully this time.

Over the past week, several unusual partnerships among start-ups, traditional businesses and hospitals have been announced, and several more are likely to materialise soon. "Gig workers have no social security and government advisories about keeping employees safe from layoffs don't cover them. Companies are now thinking in terms of how to continue giving livelihood to these people," said Amit Vadera, assistant vice-president at staffing firm TeamLease Services.

For example, Uber last week announced two new businesses-to business partnerships — UberMedic — a 24X7 service that will work with health care authorities. It will arrange transport for front-line health care providers to and from their homes and medical facilities. The other one is with bigbasket where driver partners will help with last-mile delivery of everyday essential items in four cities. Its Bengaluru-based rival Ola Cabs has agreed to give 500 vehicles to the Karnataka government for transporting doctors and for other Covid-related activities. Flipkart is exploring collaboration ideas. It is currently having talks with cab aggregators and the Indian Railways to ensure smooth and hassle-free movement of essential products from vendors to customers.

"To achieve the objective of moving grocery and essential supplies across the country from our seller partners to customers, we have been ramping up onground support.

We are hiring in addition to offering incentives to supply chain and delivery executives," said a Flipkart spokesperson.

TemaLease's Vadera expects more such partnerships to continue. "Gig employees are mostly migrants in the urban sector. Several wanted to, and have gone back to their hometowns following the nationwide lockdown. Organisations are not sure about how much reverse mobilisation they will see once the lockdown is lifted," he added.

The trend could see increased importance of gig workers, who are taking considerable risk to deliver goods to people in the time of a pandemic. "The gig economy and people working from home are going to pretty much become as important as the mainstream,"

said software services industry body National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom's) president Debjani Ghosh.

In the last few years, the gig economy or people who work in jobs enabled by a tech platform where workers are not bound to the organisation and can choose to work as long as they want in a stint, have continued to evolve and increase. Even traditional sectors are now tapping into unique ways to ensure supply of essentials to their customers.

Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) major ITC has partnered Jubilant FoodWorks, the master franchisee of the Domino's brand in India. Mumbai-based Marico has partnered Swiggy and Zomato to introduce Saffola Store on the foodtech platforms.

"At ITC, we have redoubled our efforts to ensure that consumers are not inconvenienced during this pandemic and our frontline warriors are battling all odds to reach essential products to consumers," said an ITC spokesperson.

A marked difference in these new partnerships is the focus on safety of gig workers.

Vadera said some of the gig employers are sending staff for certification courses run by the likes of Apollo Hospitals, which teaches them safety and wellbeing. It also teaches them how to keep safe while delivering goods and services to customers.