



New Report To Update Decade-Old Data On The Nation's Gig Economy Workforce

Insights

5.14.18

How much has the gig economy changed in the last 13 years? We're (finally) about to find out. [According to Tyrone Richardson at Bloomberg Law](#), the United States Department of Labor's [Bureau of Labor Statistics \(BLS\)](#) is scheduled to release a report on "contingent and alternative employment arrangements" on June 7, 2018. To put in context how much things have changed since the last time the BLS released such a report—February 2005—that was the same year [Destiny's Child](#) split up and two years before [the first iPhone](#) was released. Many of these on-call workers and independent contractors are [not included in the BLS's monthly jobs report](#) despite [studies](#) that suggest these types of "alternative" arrangements accounted for 94 percent of net employment growth in the U.S. economy over the last decade.

The June 7 report will include information about workforce size, demographics, compensation, health insurance coverage, occupation, and industries represented. The BLS also added four new questions to the survey to identify workers who found short tasks or jobs through an app or website. The BLS is expected to publish the findings of this app-based employment data at a later date.

The 2018 report is expected to show an increase in the nation's gig economy, triggered by the popularity of app platforms such as Lyft, Postmates, and Uber. How much of an increase is not clear. The [2005 BLS report](#) showed contingent workers accounted for just 1.8 to 4.1 percent of the total employment, numbers that were substantially similar to what they were when the BLS conducted the same survey in 2001. Although some research conducted in the last several years suggest anywhere from 16 percent to more than a third of the workforce is involved in the gig economy, the BLS data will likely be much more comprehensive than these prior surveys and, potentially, much more influential in spurring new legislation.

[According to Richardson](#), lawmakers are already preparing to use the BLS report to draft new legislation as well as update federal laws. Because gig workers are often treated like independent contractors, they do not receive the traditional employee protections like minimum wage, overtime pay, or workers' compensation. Gig businesses are sometimes wary of offering benefits because it could make it more likely that the worker would be classified as an employee. Earlier this month, Senator Bernie Sanders introduced a [bill](#) that would narrow the definition of an independent contractor and revise federal law to increase protections for workers in the gig economy by extending them rights to collectively bargain. Other federal and state lawmakers, on both sides of

the aisle, as well as businesses like Uber, are considering changes such as adding a new worker classification and creating a portable benefits system that gig workers can take with them from job to job. Whether any of these proposals will gain traction remains to be seen, but at least we'll be in a better position to gauge the reach of the gig economy once next month's report comes out.