

## Size of the UK's "Gig Economy" revealed for the first time

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### Nearly 5 million crowd workers in the UK

Joint study by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and UNI Europa, carried out by University of Hertfordshire and Ipsos MORI reveals, for the first time, the true size of the UK's 'gig economy'.

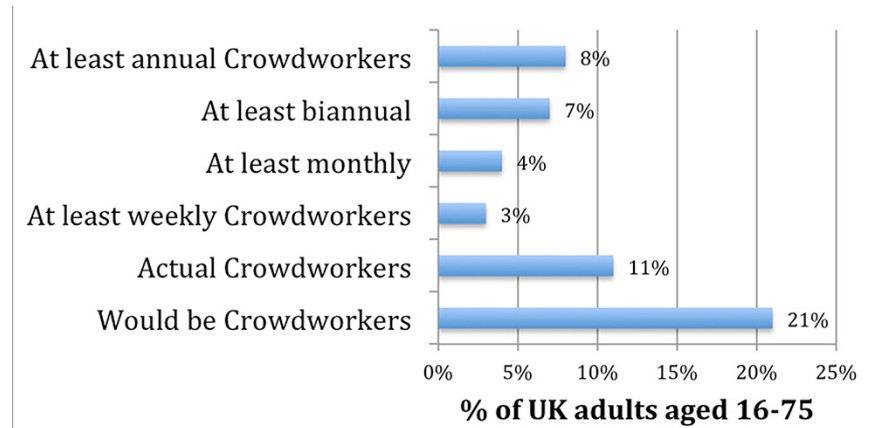
In the online survey of 2,238 UK adults aged 16-75, 21% say they have tried to find work managed via so-called 'sharing economy' platforms such as *Upwork*, *Uber* or *Handy* during the past year, equivalent to around 9 million people – almost one fifth of the adult population. Around 1 in 10 (11%) of respondents said they had succeeded in doing so, equivalent to around 4.9 million people.

Almost a quarter (24%) of UK women responding to the survey claim to have sought work via online platforms, and one third (33%) of 25-34 year olds.

3% of respondents claim to find paid work via online platforms at least once a week, equivalent to around 1.3 million adults, with 4%, or around 1.8 million finding work at least once a month.

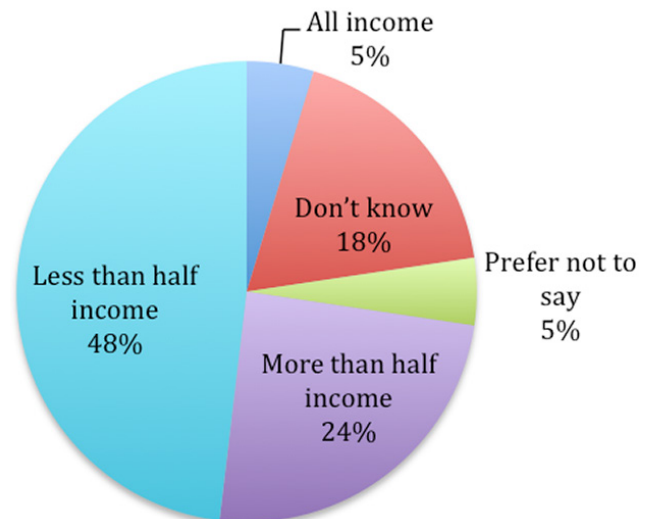
**Main source of work or a supplement to a main job?** It is often thought the gig economy is used either for altruistic reasons or as an occasional income top-up in addition to another main job. In fact, for a substantial proportion of crowd workers, it is the only or main source of income. As figure 2 shows, over a third of those willing to divulge this information (a quarter of all crowd workers) say they rely on this income as their sole or main source of income.

FIGURE 1: UK CROWD WORKERS - OVERVIEW <sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Base: 2,238 online adults aged 16-75 across the United Kingdom

FIGURE 2: PROPORTION OF INCOME FROM CROWD WORK (% OF ALL CROWD WORKERS) <sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Base: 238 UK adults 16-75 who have found paid crowd work online



**Earnings.** The income of crowd workers is generally modest. Four out of ten (42%) of the 238 crowd workers earn less than £20,000 a year before tax and other deductions and only 7% earn more than £55,000 a year.

The majority of crowd workers (81%) are the main breadwinners in their households. This rises to 83% among those who say they do crowd work 'at least weekly'.

**What work are they looking for?**

People looking for work via online platforms are often looking for several different types of work.

A large majority (88%, equivalent to nearly 8 million UK adults 16-75) of the 470 respondents seeking work in this way say they are looking for online work they can carry out from their homes on platforms such as *Freelancer*, *Upwork*, *Clickworker* or *Peopleperhour*. This is work that can be done from anywhere, so they are in a global labour market, perhaps competing with workers in India, Eastern Europe, the Americas or other parts of the world.

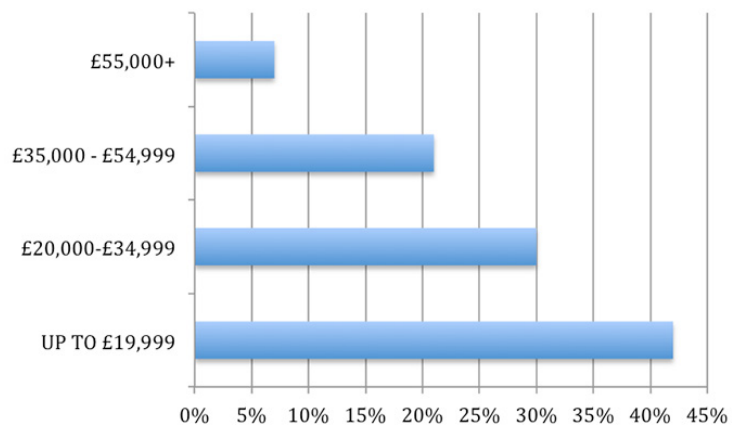
Twelve per cent of UK adults surveyed (equivalent to around five million) are looking for work they can do offline, such as cleaning, carpentry or gardening in other people's premises, for platforms like *Handy*, *Taskrabbit*, *Mybuilder*, and *Mopp*.

Finally, 7% (equivalent to around three million) say they are looking for work as drivers, for companies like *Uber* or *Blablacar*.

**What work are they actually doing?**

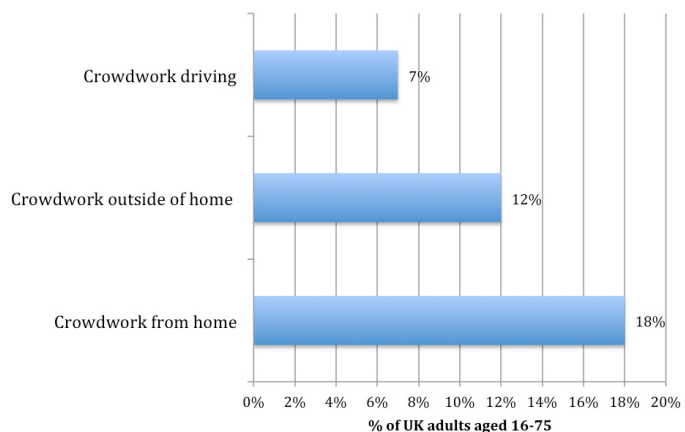
When it comes to what crowd workers are actually doing, it is clear that some do a wide variety of work. The range is extremely broad, from high-skill professional work at one extreme to running errands at the other. The most common type of crowd work, done by more than two thirds of crowd workers, is office work, short tasks and 'click work' done online. However a significant proportion (over 45% in each category) are doing professional work, creative work, providing taxi services or a range of other services in people's homes. The picture that emerges is of people piecing

**FIGURE 3: PERSONAL INCOME OF CROWD WORKERS<sup>3</sup>**



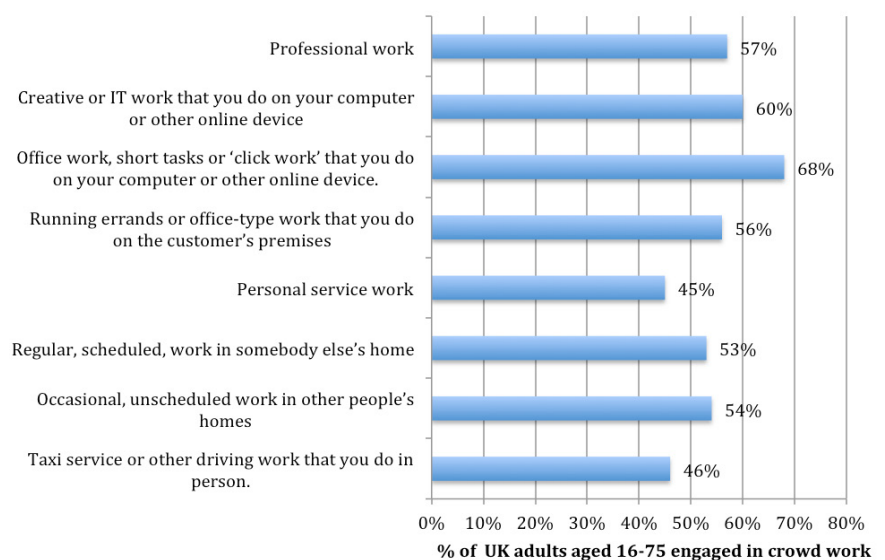
<sup>3</sup> Base: 238 UK adults 16-75 who have found paid crowd work online

**FIGURE 4: TYPE OF WORK SOUGHT ON ONLINE PLATFORMS<sup>4</sup>**



<sup>4</sup> Base: 470 online UK adults 16-75 who have sought paid crowdwork online

**FIGURE 5: TYPES OF WORK BEING CARRIED OUT BY CROWD WORKERS<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>5</sup> Base: 238 UK adults 16-75 who have found paid crowd work online





together a livelihood from a range of different tasks. This picture is reinforced by the finding that most crowd workers were registered on more than one platform, with 61% saying they had registered on 2-5 platforms and 7% on more than five.

**Who are the crowd workers?**

Women are somewhat more likely than men to be crowd workers, with 54% of the crowd workforce female and 46% male.

Crowd workers are generally young, with just over half (51%) under the age of 35. Nevertheless, around one crowd worker in six (16%) is over 55 showing that age is no barrier to participating in the gig economy.

It is often thought that most crowd workers are students. This is not the case. Only 10% of those actually doing crowd work in the sample were students, a proportion that dropped to 6% among those doing crowd work at least weekly. This is in line with the general proportion of students in the adult population of the UK (at around 8%).

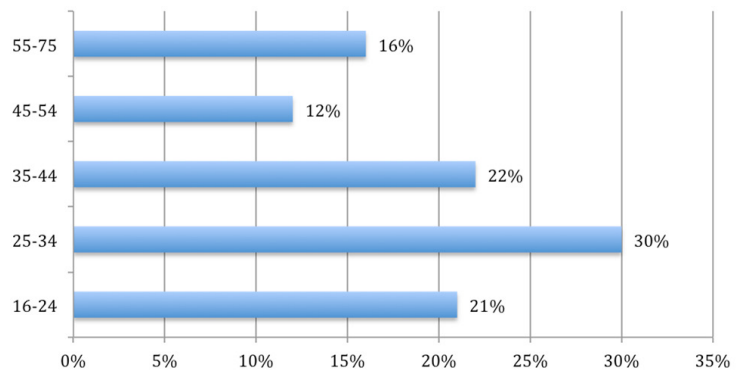
The largest numbers are in England with one in five based in London, just under a quarter each in the South, the Midlands and the North with 7% in Scotland and 3% in Wales. This reflects the general distribution of the UK population.

**Who are they working for?**

More than four in ten (42%) of respondents in the survey said that they have bought services from a crowd worker in the last year, equivalent to an estimated 18 and a half million people in the UK. This figure relates only to work that is directly carried out for the client and does not include services where people rent out their properties like Airbnb.

Customers for crowd work are somewhat richer than the crowd workers who supply them with services, though not dramatically so. The proportion earning more than £55,000 per annum is 11% (compared with 7% for crowd workers) and the proportion earning less than £20,000 is 36% (compared with 42% for crowd

FIGURE 6: AGE OF CROWD WORKERS <sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Base: 238 UK adults 16-75 who have found paid crowd work online

FIGURE 7: CROWD WORKERS BY REGION <sup>6</sup>

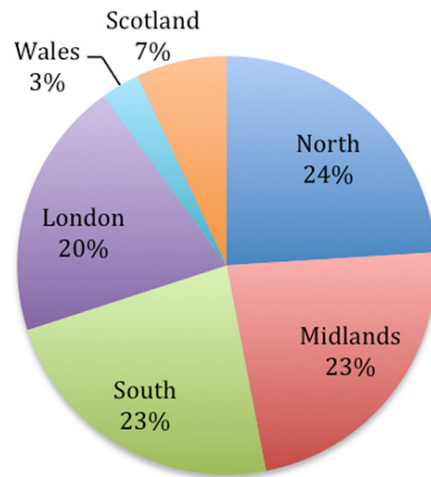
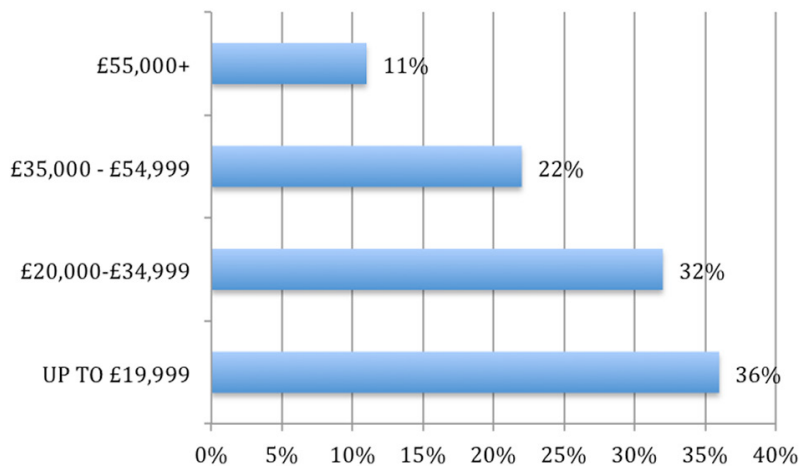


FIGURE 8: CROWD WORK CUSTOMERS BY PERSONAL PRE-TAX INCOME <sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Base: 942 online UK adults 16-75 who have purchased crowd work services online





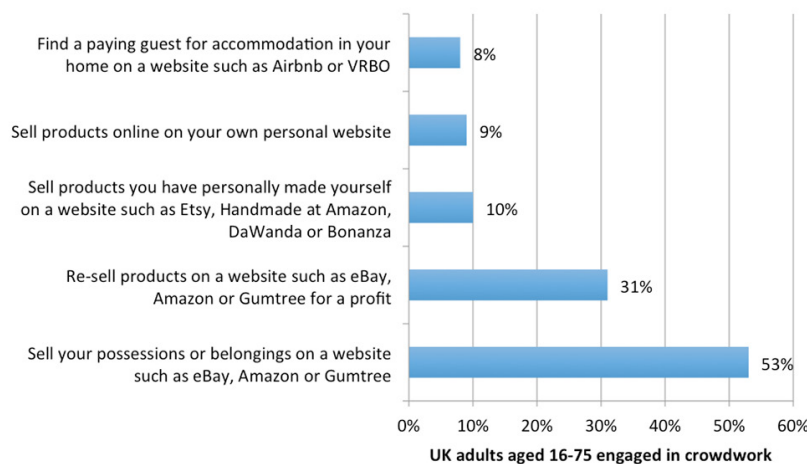
workers).

**Broader involvement in the online economy.** Looking more broadly at the UK population's involvement in the online economy (excluding online grocery shopping)

72% of respondents (equivalent to nearly 32 million people) are either making an income from online activities or buying labour from others. Around 1% of respondents (equivalent to approximately 1 million) are involved in home rental

schemes like Airbnb only (with no other involvement in the online economy). If these are excluded, the number comes down to around 31 million.

**FIGURE 9: OTHER SOURCES OF ONLINE INCOME IN THE UK POPULATION<sup>8</sup>**



<sup>8</sup> Base: 2,238 online adults aged 16-75 across the United Kingdom

**About the research.** University of Hertfordshire, European think tank FEPS and European service workers' union UNI Europa are collaborating on a year-long research project to explore the scale and impact of the growth of crowd working, and provide a more comprehensive picture of the digitalised labour market across the European Union.

For the first stage of this project, Ipsos MORI interviewed an online sample of 2,238 adults aged 16-75 across the United Kingdom using i:omnibus, Ipsos MORI's online omnibus.

Interviews took place between 22nd and 26th January 2016. Data are weighted by age, gender, region, working status and social grade

to match the profile of the adult population aged 16-75 in the UK.

Population estimates are derived according to Eurostat 2014 population figures for adults aged 16-75 in the UK, estimated at 44,250,000, survey percentages are grossed up as a proportion of this figure.

