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# Relocation Without Borders: Migration Patterns and Economic Adaptation in Online Gig Work

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## Abstract

While online gig platforms are often described as geographically neutral labor markets, early evidence suggests that spatial location continues to shape economic outcomes. This study investigates how cross-border migration functions as a form of strategic behavior within platform-based work. Using individual-level, semi-annual data from one of the world's largest online labor platforms (~750,000 active workers), we identify 15,370 workers who relocated across countries, linked to 384,846 completed and ongoing projects. This dataset allows us to examine both who moves and how they adapt after relocation.

We focus on two key questions. First, who are the movers, and why do they move? Drawing on Borjas' (1987) model of self-selection, we aim to examine whether higher-skilled or higher-earning workers are more likely to migrate. We compare stayers and movers across income quartiles, task types, and skill categories to identify selection patterns and explore how unequal returns to skill across locations may shape migration behavior.

Second, what happens after migration? We expect that relocation triggers behavioral and economic adjustments, such as changes in hourly earnings, client mix, or project types. We examine whether workers adapt their strategies - such as pricing, task specialization, or work intensity - in response to new living costs or regional labor market conditions. These adjustments may reflect how workers navigate structural inequalities embedded in global platform economies, where formal legal entry barriers are often lower than in traditional labor markets.

As a policy-relevant case, we will analyze workers who relocate to EU/EEA countries under digital nomad visa schemes. This is an important case because, unlike traditional offline labor migration - which typically involves changes in job roles, employers, or sectors - platform-based digital nomad migration alters only the worker's geographic location, while the nature of the work and market context remain unchanged. This creates a quasi-natural experiment for studying migration behavior and its socio-economic effects, grounded in theories of labor migration and platform economies.

Combining descriptive analysis with fixed-effects models and potentially a synthetic difference-in-differences approach, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of platform labor as a transnational economic space, where geographic mobility may reflect both strategic positioning and adaptation to varying economic conditions across countries.

**Keywords:** Digital labor, Cross border migration, Online gig work

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