

# NYC food delivery workers face a 'harrowing world'

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New York City's app-based delivery workers—a lifeline to city residents during the COVID-19 pandemic—regularly face nonpayment or underpayment, unsanitary or unsafe working conditions and the risk of

violence, according to a new report released Sept. 13 by Los Deliveristas / Worker's Justice Project and the Cornell University ILR School's Worker Institute.

The report, "[Essential but Unprotected](#)," examines the working conditions of app-based [delivery](#) workers engaged by [digital platforms](#) such as UberEATS, Doordash and GrubHub to deliver food to consumers in New York City.

"New York City's food delivery workers risk their lives to bring hot, fresh meals to the doors of thousands every day," said Ileen A. DeVault, professor of labor history at the ILR School and academic director of The Worker Institute.

"This report reveals the harrowing world these workers live in. They face danger everywhere—on the busy streets, in constant exposure to health threats, through low wages that trap their families in poverty, and through discrimination and unfair treatment by many 'employers,' restaurant owners and customers," DeVault said. "This report is a starting place for desperately needed reform."

The experience of app-based food couriers in New York City illustrates the challenges that workers and advocates confront in achieving labor protections in the digital platform economy, researchers said. Like all workers in the gig-economy, platform workers fall in gray areas or outright gaps of existing legal frameworks, such that their employment status and relationship with the platforms remain unregulated.

The [survey results](#) revealed that the already precarious work conditions of food couriers only worsened during the pandemic, including issues of underpayment or nonpayment of base pay and tips. Around 42% of workers who participated in the study reported experiencing non-payment or underpayment.

The survey also found that for delivery workers, the workplace comprises the city streets, the restaurants where they pick up food, customers' front doors and building lobbies and elevators. Although delivery workers are considered essential workers, they lack basic safeguards and sanitary conditions at work. Forty-nine percent of [survey respondents](#) reported having been in an accident or crash while making a delivery. Of these workers, 75% said that they had paid for the medical care with their personal funds.

The most serious danger that delivery workers confront is becoming victims of violent assault when their electric bikes are stolen. This widespread issue also worsened during the pandemic. Fifty-four percent of the survey participants reported having experienced bike theft, and about 30% of these said that they were physically assaulted during the robbery.

The report involved both primary and secondary research, including a survey of 500 app-based couriers doing deliveries in New York City, focus groups with workers and individual interviews. The study details the harsh working conditions workers face in the unregulated industry.

The goals of the research, funded by the Workers' Justice Project, with additional support from the ILR School and the state of New York, are to raise awareness among stakeholders about the pressing issues that app-based delivery workers face in the largely unregulated platform economy and to help inform policy and organizational solutions to such issues.

Provided by Cornell University

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