

LOW PAY, NO SUPPORT: Sri Lanka Delivery Drivers Fight for Worker Rights

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Sri Lanka Delivery Drivers
Fight for Worker Rights





"We are not employees of Uber; according to the company, we are just consumers of their service. This means the company doesn't concern itself with our leave or safety. We don't have any rights."
- Jayasinghe Lanka, 52, seven-year Uber driver



As in many countries, the gig economy in Sri Lanka is expanding, spurred in part by job loss during the COVID pandemic and the country's severe economic crisis. Sri Lanka's app-based taxi drivers and delivery workers are classified as freelancers or self-employed workers, an independent worker status outside labor regulation. They are not covered by hard-won labor laws that mandate a minimum wage, social protections, and the right to join or form a union and bargain collectively. The Solidarity Center surveyed and interviewed Sinhalese and Tamil platform workers in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to learn about the conditions they are working to change in the country's growing informal economy.

App-based drivers and delivery workers shared their everyday struggles of being "managed" by algorithmic platforms that determine how they get paid and reported that they sometimes get cheated out of hard-earned wages. They also indicated earning less than what they previously did for the same jobs, even as inflation is pushing up the cost of fuel and other business expenses. Drivers and delivery workers reported that the companies behind these platforms take little responsibility for providing a living wage, job safety or basic benefits like health care and sick leave.

Low Pay Drives Long Hours

Union contracts establish reasonable work hours and breaks that protect workers' health and safety and guard against exploitation. A union backing can ensure employers respect internationally established worker rights, enabling app-based taxi drivers and delivery workers to earn decent wages without unreasonably long hours. While platform workers reported attempting to organize themselves into unions, they face obstacles from the absence of a regulatory environment and also resistance from employers.

93% of those surveyed work 11 or more hours daily, and many work 16 hours or more each day.



Work Hours	Percentage
8-10 hrs	6%
11-12 hrs	30%
13-15 hrs	26%
16+ hrs	37%

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