

60% of food delivery riders in Singapore signed up during Covid-19 pandemic: Survey

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SINGAPORE - About 60 per cent of food delivery riders here entered the gig economy during the Covid-19 pandemic, a survey by the three major food delivery platforms here has found.

But almost two in three of the 4,200 riders polled said they delivered food only on a part-time basis, with 54 per cent working fewer than 20 hours a week on average, according to the survey released on Tuesday (March 29).

Carried out between March 4 and 17, the survey is the first to be jointly conducted by Grab, Deliveroo and foodpanda.

A link to the poll was distributed via the platforms' mobile applications and rider communication channels.

The results showed that 29 per cent of the riders relied on food delivery work for all of their income, and just 25 per cent said they did gig work for more than 40 hours a week.

When asked for their motivation for pursuing gig work, 57 per cent cited flexibility as the main draw.

The food delivery platforms said gig work remains largely misunderstood in Singapore, citing what they claimed was a common misconception - that delivery riders are low-wage workers.

Data from last year across the three platforms showed that median hourly earnings for riders here were between \$12 and \$18.

This, the platforms said, is higher than the \$7 to \$11 per hour advertised for food and beverage (F&B) roles, and \$8 to \$9 per hour paid to cleaners and security guards.

In the latest survey, 52 per cent of the delivery riders said gig work had materially improved their financial position.

The platforms told *The Straits Times* that they chose to focus on food delivery riders as the experiences and issues they encountered are often conflated with those faced by third-party logistics drivers and ride-hailing drivers.

"It is important that we strengthen understanding of each segment of the gig economy suitably, accounting for the unique motivations and expectations," said the platforms in a joint statement.

The survey found resistance among riders towards mandatory contributions to the Central Provident Fund (CPF), which is a measure that an advisory committee on platform workers set up by the Government is considering to help improve their retirement and housing adequacy.

Platform workers in this case refer specifically to delivery workers, private-hire car drivers and cabbies, and the advisory committee is leading a review of the protections afforded to these workers.

While 43 per cent of the delivery riders polled by the three platforms already contribute to their CPF accounts, 61 per cent said they did not want CPF contributions to be deducted from their gig work earnings.

About 20 per cent said they would be open to it only if the deductions made up less than 10 per cent of their income.

Meanwhile, 55 per cent also said they are unwilling to pay any fees for third-party union representation, another measure being considered by the advisory committee.

The survey results have been shared with the Ministry of Manpower and the advisory committee, which is expected to complete its review later this year.

The platforms said: "It is important that... misperceptions are addressed as they will inform the Government's ongoing review and, in turn, impact not just riders and platforms, but also the broader ecosystem of merchants, F&B vendors and consumers."

This latest survey comes on the heels of two earlier studies on gig work here.

In February, the Institute of Policy Studies published a working paper warning of the risks and dangers of platform work in the longer term.

While the researchers were able to survey only 958 private-hire car drivers, they also conducted in-depth interviews with a number of delivery riders and observed them at work.

Last week, research group Blackbox published its own study and found high job satisfaction and a strong sense of financial security among food delivery riders.

Blackbox's poll of 175 riders and a qualitative study involving two focus groups also found that many riders felt their work was often misunderstood and their views under-represented.

In a statement on Tuesday, the Advisory Committee on Platform Workers said it will consider the feedback from such surveys and work towards "sustainable solutions".

"As platform companies grow, it will be increasingly important for such companies to provide support to their platform workers," added the committee.

"Unmet needs of workers today could potentially impose costs on future generations of Singaporeans."