



The Group Portrait: Deliveristas Unidos, the Essential Workers of Takeout

Organizing the delivery workers
who keep much of the city fed.

By Valeria Ricciulli

FOLLOWING A STRING OF E-BIKE ROBBERIES in the spring, Gustavo Ajche, a delivery worker from Guatemala, was messaging with his fellow *deliveristas* in the WhatsApp group chat for workers in their neighborhood about how they could protect one another (those bikes, which they have to pay for themselves, can cost up to \$2,000). The conversation shifted to how their already poor working conditions had worsened during the pandemic: a lack of PPE, nowhere to take breaks during lockdown, and meager pay. Such workers, considered “independent contractors,” are sometimes paid below minimum wage. Determining one’s take-home pay is often confusing and varies wildly for each service: DoorDash lists its base pay as a range of \$2 to \$10 per order (though many workers claim it’s often more like \$4),



Relay's base rate is roughly \$11.80 per hour, and GrubHub uses a complicated calculation based on time spent and mileage traveled. At times, between waiting at the restaurant and having to bike up to 70 blocks to bring the food to diners' doors, workers can spend an entire hour completing a single order. "I have to support my wife, my son, and another baby on the way. I worry if I get sick," says Jonán Huerta, a *deliverista* from Mexico. "Who's going to help me with my rent? There's no support."

"We take care of each other. We've created our own network," Ajche says in Spanish. He went to the Worker's Justice Project (he's a longtime member) about organizing to capture the city's attention—and Los Deliveristas Unidos was born. Ajche, Huerta, and their fellow immigrant workers pictured here are

among the estimated 80,000 *deliveristas* in the city right now, as unemployed members of the restaurant and hospitality industry have turned to delivery apps to survive. On October 15, this group and nearly a thousand others (many of whom are now in a citywide WhatsApp chat) protested for the first time to demand better pay and improved worker protections. Together, they rode from 72nd Street down to City Hall, chanting "*Si nosotras nadie come*" ("Without us, no one eats"). And now that winter has arrived and indoor dining is again shut down, they're once more being called to the front lines. "After eight months without economic relief and working under inhumane conditions, we are tired," Huerta says. "It's time to raise our voices." ■