

M4Jam among elite of gig economy platforms for worker protection

Covid-19 has decimated economies and employment worldwide. In a country like South Africa, already struggling with ballooning unemployment figures, temporary and contract workers have typically borne the brunt of the effects on our economy, with many losing any work they had.

However, local gig technology company, M4Jam was recently included in a worldwide study by The Fairworks Project, on how the gig economy had responded to the Covid-19 pandemic and placed among the top 10% of platforms for shielding its members from the economic fallout.

Out of 191 gig economy networking platforms in 43 countries surveyed, M4Jam ranked in the top 20 globally for its policies on fair pay, fair working conditions and fair management. This is a feather in the cap of a wholly South African digital networking platform designed to link workers with temporary work opportunities.

Georgie Midgley, M4Jam's CEO, says while legislation and policymaking is usually geared towards creating permanent formal jobs, the gig economy is creating opportunities to improve working conditions for those who have been unable to find jobs in the formal sector.

"Of course a permanent job in the formal sector, with all the associated protection and benefits, is first prize for most people. But the reality is that the gig economy is growing quickly and provides a way for people to earn income that can be life-saving in times like these. We have demonstrated that temporary, part-time work need not be exploitative or in any way prejudicial to workers," she says.

In March 2020 The Fairwork Project, which draws on academic research capabilities from prominent universities around the world, began investigating how gig economy platforms were responding to the pandemic, and released its findings of surveys conducted between March and August 2020. The findings showed that gig workers had lost two-thirds of their income during the pandemic.

While they may be working part-time or temporary jobs, gig workers can still be performing functions essential to society, and needed protection and assistance from governments, networking platforms and policymakers.

The researchers found that fair pay was by far the most important issue for workers, yet 10% of the platforms surveyed provided pay loss compensation – and M4Jam was among them. “Instead, platforms have tended to deflect responsibility to governments in order to avoid future liabilities,” the researchers said.

Most workers were not supported with personal protection while working during the pandemic by having virus safety knowledge and healthcare assistance provided. Again, M4Jam passed these conditions with flying colours.

“This report serves as motivation for gig economy platforms who do not currently provide such protection and support for workers to improve their service offerings. Ultimately, what we would like to see is all gig economy platforms create a supportive and worker-friendly baseline that will improve working conditions for those in the informal economy,” says Midgley.

Indeed, the researchers found a gap “between rhetoric and reality” in terms of what platforms were actually providing for workers. “Platform responses to a large extent have targeted shareholders, investors and customers before workers,” they said.

Fairwork also found that many platforms loaded safety and illness recovery responsibilities onto workers rather than pulling their own weight in protecting workers who used their platforms.

“Gig workers maintained essential public services during the pandemic, and the number of gig workers will continue to increase. As the sector grows, formalises and becomes more recognised as a contributor to the economy, we hope to be able to play a greater role in defining fair and positive working conditions for those who rely on the gig economy for their livelihoods,” says Midgley.

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About M4Jam

M4Jam is a Gig technology company that connects organisations to communities through its mobile platform. The platform enables businesses to quickly and cost-effectively evaluate, activate and optimise new or existing markets, even in the hardest to reach informal communities.
