

Home-based Workers on the Move



Viboonsri Wongsangiyim, a home-based worker in Bangkok, Thailand. Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

Home-based workers are the most invisible of all informal workers, but they may also be the most numerous, with an estimated population of over 100 million around the world. The majority are women. In order to improve their situation they need to gain visibility and recognition as workers and important economic contributors. They need a voice in forums affecting their work and lives, from local to global.

The movement of home-based workers began with the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India in the early 1970s. Organizing in India and other countries gained momentum in the 1990s during the build-up to negotiations on a standard for homeworkers at the International Labour Conference (ILC). This resulted in the adoption of the Home Work Convention (C177) in 1996. During this time, HomeNet International was formed to provide home-based workers with a

"As home-based workers we are facing the same problems. Key challenges are lack of infrastructure, social welfare and no markets. The economy is going down. We have to become strong and work together"

- Lucy Nyambura, Bega Kwa Bega Self Help Group, Nairobi, Kenya; speaking in Delhi 2015

voice at the ILC. Though it didn't survive as an international network, home-based workers continued organizing in Asia through HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) and HomeNet South East Asia (HNSEA).

In 2012, WIEGO was successful in obtaining resources to carry out the project "Strengthening the Movement of Women Home-based Workers." As a result, we were able to reach out to home-based workers in Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe and begin building a global movement. These resources

have unfortunately now come to an end; but the work of movement-building needs to continue. Home-based workers' organizations, WIEGO and other allies, have undertaken this ongoing process. Plans are already in place to celebrate the 20-year anniversary of the adoption

of C177, and to use this to highlight the situation of all home-based workers; to press governments to ratify the Convention and improve legislation and policies; to encourage trade unions to support us; and to convince employers to implement labour standards for homeworkers.

Building Solidarity: The Global Conference on Home-Based Workers



Participants at the Global Conference on home-based workers, 2015. Photo: WIEGO

More than 100 home-based worker representatives and supporters from 24 countries took part in a historic Global Conference on Home-based Workers, organized by HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) and WIEGO in New Delhi, India in February 2015. The results of the meeting were the Delhi Declaration, the first global declaration for home-based workers, and a five-year global Action Plan.

This moment in the global home-based workers' movement was designed to provide a platform of solidarity, of shared experiences and learning, and to move toward unified action. The Delhi Declaration sets out the challenges and demands of home-based workers on issues, from wages and better housing to basic services and social protection. It

"Many of you do not think of yourselves as home-based workers, but as bead makers, bag makers or food processors. But the identity is important to be recognized as workers."

- Marty Chen, WIEGO's International Coordinator,
from her keynote address during the
Global Conference

says, 'We [home-based workers and their organizations] declare our commitment to supporting, building and strengthening our organizations and gaining recognition, rights and representative voice. In order to improve our lives, we are committed to extending our networking and to building global solidarity. To start with, we have also committed ourselves to an action plan.'

Amongst the key recommendations made in the Delhi Declaration are:

- Development and implementation of social protection, labour laws and initiatives, based on decent work principles and workers' rights, so that home-based workers can have a life of dignity, free from discrimination, poverty and deprivation.
- Systematic collection of data on the numbers of home-based workers and their contribution to national economies.
- Recognition of rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining for home-based workers.
- Building better and inclusive markets for home-based workers and the products they sell.
- Formation of effective local and national policies addressing the needs of home-based workers.
- Ratification of the ILO's Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177).

The Action Plan sets out local, national and global targets for awareness-raising activities, expanding organizations of

home-based workers, sharing and learning activities, collaborations and dialogues with key organizations.

The activities following the Global Conference illustrate how knowledge and expertise shared through WIEGO and partner networks and fed into major events is then transmitted into other regional or local networks, and fed back into major global processes. Partners from several countries, including Nepal, Pakistan, and Bulgaria (to name a few) held press conferences in their own countries after the event, taking the opportunity to highlight the Delhi Declaration and reinforce their commitment to take forward the Action Plan. Ms. Zlateva from Bulgaria and coordinator of HomeNet Eastern Europe shared the Declaration in their meetings with trade unions when preparing for the International Labour Conference in June 2015.

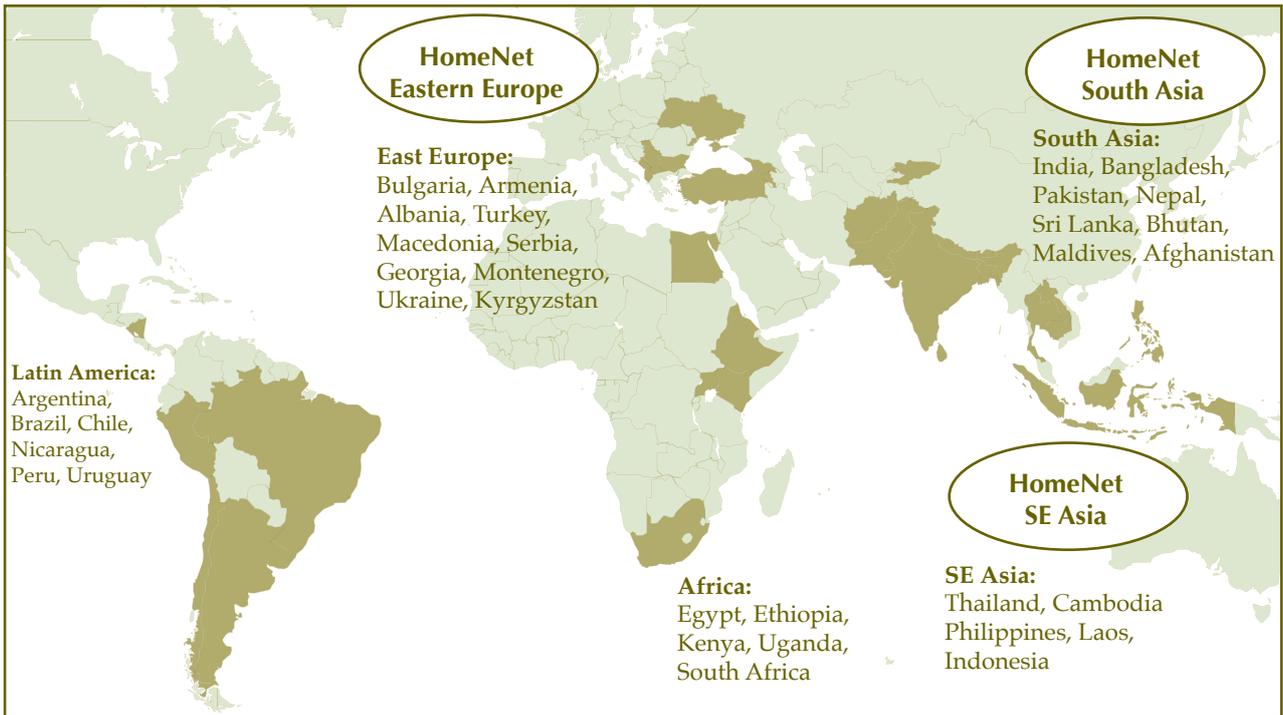
"The home-based worker movement started 20 years ago. It's been a difficult and slow process, but today's achievements are really significant."

- Chris Bonner, Director of WIEGO's Organization & Representation Program, Delhi, February 2015



Bhanva Headod, a home-based worker who runs a beauty salon out of her home. Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage.

Reaching Out to Home-Based Workers around the World



Mapping of Home-Based Workers and Their Organizations

Beginning in 2012, we conducted an extensive mapping exercise in regions where we knew little about home-based workers and their organizations—Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America—to help us identify existing home-based worker organizations (such as groups, unions, and cooperatives) and others taking steps to unite home-based workers. We also wanted to provide a clearer picture on the working and living conditions of home-based workers. Now we know a little more than we did—but there is still much more to do.

Eastern Europe

In all countries (with the exception of Bulgaria where membership figures are already very high), we noted a substantial increase in membership and understanding of what defines a home-based worker. We carried out door-to-door surveys in Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Turkey, with home-based workers themselves doing the mapping and also using it as an opportunity to organize more home-based workers into the small organizations that existed. This was the first time home-based workers had been

identified in the Ukraine and Georgia and, because they both produce and sell their products, they had always considered themselves street vendors—not home-based producers. This is not uncommon, and we found a similar situation amongst some home-based workers in Argentina, South Africa and elsewhere.



Vaska Karafili from Albania. Photo: HomeNet Eastern Europe member

Thanks to contact with HomeNet Eastern Europe (HNEE), some trade unions—particularly those in Georgia, the Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan—opened up to informal workers and have begun developing trade union policies to protect them.

South Africa

Home-based workers' organizations in South Africa tend to be fragile where they exist. Trade unions have not been successful in organizing their ex-members and many groups are supported by NGOs. The type of support differs for craft workers and garment workers. For the former, NGO support tends to be for social groups whose main existence may not be economic, but instead organize



Machinist working out of a garage, Athlone Cape Town. Photo: Vanessa Pillay, WIEGO

for health or other benefits. They are introduced to beading or craftwork only for minimalist income generation. On the other hand, the home-based garment workers who received support from NGOs were supported as part of social enterprise initiatives. These include support for formal registration as cooperatives and wider access to markets.

Is there scope for building a movement in South Africa? Home-based workers in South Africa already network with one another to find work—based on this networking, there is an opportunity to build a progressive movement towards socio-economic recognition.

Latin America

In Latin America, one of the important findings of the mapping process in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay was that home-based workers offer a wide variety of products and services: from garment design and creation to pottery; shoemaking to metalwork; some are chocolatiers and bakers and caterers, while some take care of dogs and other pets; and of course there are many, many other examples.



Danila Oliva, Secretary of SINTRATEDO, a union of home-based textile workers in Chile. Photo: Laura Morillo, WIEGO

Exposure Visits and Experience Sharing

Sharing experiences across countries and continents is a powerful way for home-based workers to gain new ideas to use in their own organizations, to build solidarity, break away from isolation and to empower women leaders. Over the past three years, home-based workers and organizers have travelled to other cities or countries to participate in workshops, meetings and conferences; and to visit home-based workers in their homes and communal working spaces.

To Kampala, Uganda

The workers from different countries had many experiences in common as poor women struggling to survive and earn a living, despite their cultural differences. While the visitors were able to share interesting stories of how they won social protection, better public healthcare, and childcare services; the Ugandan hosts demonstrated how they had grown their initiatives in various ways, such as the thriving urban gardens started by Ngalo Community Group in Kampala and the joint savings by members of the Nurturing Uganda Group in Jinja. At a policy level, participants resolved to use every opportunity to lobby their governments to ratify ILO Home Work Convention No. 177.

India to Bulgaria and Bulgaria to India

Much like the visits to Uganda, participants from Eastern Europe and India agreed that—in spite of cultural and economic differences—the problems of home-based workers are the same. Convinced and inspired by the leadership and learning shared by SEWA, HNEE plans to continue taking an organizational approach towards winning benefits for home-based workers.

“As individual groups who have now met each other we can network and maintain contact with each other even if there are no formal meetings and conferences.”

- Patricia Coñomán Carrillo, CUT, Chile

2013

May: Three organizers from Asia visit Bulgaria and meet with home-based workers from East Europe.

September: Two organizers from Bulgaria share their organizing experiences with home-based workers and supporters from Peru, Brazil, Argentina and Nicaragua, in Peru.

November: Eight home-based workers and organizers from Albania, Macedonia, Turkey and Bulgaria are hosted by members of SEWA, India.



2014

August: Nine home-based worker representatives from India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participate in capacity-building workshop in Nairobi, Kenya together with home-based workers from South Africa, Uganda and Egypt, and make trips to meet with home-based worker groups in rural Kenya and in Nairobi.



2015

February: Following the Global Conference of Home-Based Workers, 27 home-based worker representatives from Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and South East Asia visited RUAAB SEWA Artisans Producer Company in New Delhi, India.

April: Home-based worker representatives from Nepal and Bhubaneswar, India, went to visit the Mahila SEWA Housing Trust (MHT) to learn about taking up issues of housing and urban infrastructure to enable more productive and safe work in their homes.

November: Participants from Chile, Argentina, Thailand, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Kenya participated in an Africa regional workshop in Kampala, Uganda and visited home-based worker groups in rural and urban areas.



Regional Workshops



Patricia Coñomán Carrillo during the Africa Regional Home-Based Worker Workshop, looking at products made by participants. Kampala, Uganda, November 2015. Photo: Carol Wills

There were some major successes from the Regional Workshops between 2012 and 2015. These workshops sought to build connections between home-based workers' organizations and supporters within regions, to share experiences and build solidarity. As a result cooperation and information exchanges have increased, working groups and committees have been created to coordinate and communicate; and plans for mapping, policy analysis, capacity-building and other future activities have been made.

Africa

Participants from Kenya, Egypt, Uganda and South Africa as well as from South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Pakistan) gathered in Nairobi, Kenya in 2014 to share experiences and agree activities for the following year towards building a global home-based workers' movement. The second Regional Workshop in Kampala, Uganda, included home-based workers and organizers from Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe as well as from African countries.

To continue building the home-based workers' movement in Africa participants

"If I had my eyes closed and forgot about the accents I could have been in South Asia 25 years ago because that is the way it started in South Asia."

- Firoza Mehrotra, HomeNet South Asia

in the Kampala Workshop agreed to form an African Working Group that would be responsible for coordinating the ongoing information gathering and capacity-building activities; to raise the issues faced by home-based workers in Africa and to lobby for the recognition and protection of home-based workers as producers and active economic contributors in their respective countries.

East Europe

In 2012, HomeNet Eastern Europe was formed to support home-based workers in Europe and act as a networking channel for home-based worker organizations. The Network held a series of regional workshops discussing legal frameworks, working and living conditions, and the obstacles in organizing home-based workers. The final regional workshop took place in Kyrgyzstan. Home-based workers



The Festival in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Photo: HomeNet Eastern Europe members

of Kyrgyzstan wanted to combine their own Conference with that of HNEE. They wanted to learn from the other countries and to show policy makers in Kyrgyzstan about good practices in Eastern Europe with regard to organizing, law, and practice.

“For us from Argentina, it was a great opportunity to share these experiences with so many committed people of many countries.”

- Gabi Olguín and Norma Sanchís, Argentina

Latin America

The Latin American Regional meeting took place in Lima, Peru in 2013. Twenty-three participants attended from Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua, Peru and Bulgaria. The organizations present were identified during field visits in 2012. This was an opportunity to learn about home-based work (the definitions, characteristics and challenges) as well as ILO Convention 177; to share experiences within the region; and to get to know home-based workers' organizations from Bulgaria and India. Plans were made to continue to networking and exchanging information.

Building Organizational and Leadership Capacity



Home-based workers Rookmani Ram Naryan (left) and her daughter, Kavita Harshires Yemul, roll bidi for a living. Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

Building the capacity of home-based worker women leaders and strengthening organizing and networking within countries forms an important part of our program.

South Asia: A New Approach with “Training Plus”

For HomeNet South Asia, successes included capacity-building and leadership training for more than 100 women home-based workers in India, Pakistan, Nepal

and Sri Lanka; as well as the development of a Training Plus program with SEWA's Mahila Housing Trust. The Training Plus program is aimed at home-based workers in the cities of Kathmandu, Nepal and Bhubaneswar, India. Although the program for Nepal had to be suspended due to the earthquake in 2015, in Bhubaneswar home-based worker leaders now have a greater understanding of the ways in which local authorities can give access to the required resources for the home as a workplace: such as water, sanitation, drainage, and electricity. As a result of this program, rapport with these city authorities has also been strengthened. There have been regular follow-ups to these local discussions and, with the appropriate steps being taken, this has helped home-based workers in Bhubaneswar gain proof of residency and a place in the city's budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

East Europe: Innovative Workshop

In 2015, WIEGO and HNEE jointly organized a training workshop in Sofia, Bulgaria. The focus was on strategic planning for the organization as well as market and product innovation for the separate country networks of Albania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. By the end of the five-day workshop, the hope was that members had an increased understanding of marketing methods and available markets—critically important for own-account home-based workers. This workshop was also central for developing



Innovative Workshop in Sofia, Bulgaria. Photo: HomeNet Eastern Europe members

a Strategic Plan for HNEE moving forward and was an eye-opener for the participants.

South Africa: Capacity-Building for SASEWA

During the regional workshop in Nairobi (2014) the South African Self-Employed Women's Association (SASEWA) was identified as the focal organization in South Africa to lead the organizing and networking process amongst home-based workers. WIEGO facilitated a series of capacity-building workshops for leaders, as well as existing and newly-recruited members of SASEWA.



Visit to the Malembwa Women's Group in Kenya, 2014. Photo: WIEGO

Argentina Takes Up the Challenge

The NGO, Lola Mora and the Confederation of Workers of the Popular Economy (CTEP), hosted two workshops in Buenos Aires. In March 2015, 41 representatives from workers' organizations, including home-based worker cooperatives, NGOs, universities, governmental institutions, and WIEGO all attended. They created an action plan aimed at reviewing existing legislation, developing recommendations for a draft law, and to provide home-based workers with access to tools, social services, and training; as well as organizing a network for marketing products and increasing communication between these organizations. A working group was created in order to implement the proposed action plan. The group met three times and brought in representatives from the



Aracely Tabarez, a member of Cooperativa El Adoquín, CTEP, Argentina. Photo: El Adoquín, CTEP

major trade union federations. The group organized a second workshop in December with 21 participants, where plans were made to continue the organizing and advocacy work in Argentina.

Brazil Home-Based Workers Move into Cooperatives

Two workshops were held in Brazil, one in João Pessoa and one in São Paulo, both in 2015. Eight women representing five cooperatives attended the first workshop, and seven women representing three

cooperatives the second workshop. These workshops were a chance for participants to reflect on both home-based worker and women's issues. They were able to share their own organizing experiences as well as hear about the experiences of SEWA and RUAAB—the artisan producer company of home-based workers—in India. The workers all agreed that the advantages of organizing were many, such as collective work and cooperation, giving value to women both at home and in their working lives, improving the self-esteem of women and workers, economic autonomy, formalization, capacity-building, access to participation forums on public policy, access to projects, access to fairs and medium-scale markets, and the ability to issue tax receipts, to name a few.

In Brazil, cooperatives form part of the Solidarity Economy and special attention is paid to them. The cooperatives are registered with the National Register of Legal Entities, which provides government-level support for capacity-building and training.

Legislation and Policy Analysis in Latin America

Home-based workers are organizing for change. They need to advocate for new policies and laws; they need their organizations to represent them in negotiations with governments, employers and others who have control over their livelihoods. To do this effectively home-based workers need to be aware of the laws and policies affecting them, who is responsible for policy and decision making, and what needs to change.

During work in Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Brazil, Chile, and Nicaragua, we learned that homework (sub-contracted / piece work) is regulated, though differently, in each of those countries; but there are also difficulties in enforcing these regulations due to the invisibility and isolation of home-based workers, as well as the lack of

resources. Although these regulations do exist, Argentina remains the only country in Latin America to have ratified the ILO Convention 177. Peru and Uruguay both, however, have incorporated aspects of C177 into existing legislation.



Home-based workers in Peru. Photo: WIEGO

Strengthening the HomeNets



A home-based bead worker in India. Photo: WIEGO

HomeNet South Asia (HNSA)

HomeNet South Asia was formed in 2000 and formally launched in 2007. Over the years, HNSA learned about membership-based organizations (MBOs) and how the network itself needed to have more decision-making in the hands of its MBO members. It restructured itself as an MBO and adopted a set of rules for both membership and its Advisory Board in 2014. The first General Body Meeting was organized in February 2015, following on from the Global Conference. Here, Advisory Board members were chosen. HNSA currently has 53 member organizations from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

HomeNet South East Asia (HNSEA)

Formed in the late 1990s, HomeNet South East Asia (HNSEA) also underwent changes. In 2014 the Secretariat was transferred from Philippines to Thailand and a new Regional Coordinator was elected. HNSEA has affiliates in five countries: Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Laos. HNSEA and its affiliates organize more than 25,000 home-based workers altogether, with the

focus of their efforts ranging from capacity-building and vocational training, all the way up to micro-enterprise development and advocating for occupational health and safety policies.

HomeNet Eastern Europe (HNEE)

This is the newest HomeNet. At an International Conference in Sofia in March 2012, it was decided to create a Balkan network of home-based workers by signing a Universal Declaration. Representatives



Second International Festival of Home-based Workers in Sofia, Bulgaria, 2013. Photo: HomeNet Eastern Europe

from Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Turkey, and Montenegro were a part of this decision and adopted the Declaration.

During the First International Festival of Home-based Workers in Bulgaria in June 2012, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan joined the network. This prompted the registration of a network named HomeNet Eastern Europe in early 2013.

In 2014 the First Congress of HNEE was held, where resolutions on decent work and a single market act were adopted, and a long-term action plan was voted for. Another highlight from this period was the Founding Congress of the first-ever (for Bulgaria) Informal Workers' Union ("Unity"), on 16th July 2014 in Sofia, Bulgaria. The Association of Home-Based Workers (AHB) in Bulgaria was instrumental in seeing this happen.

The Way Forward for the Home-based Workers' Movement



Coordinators from different regions plan for the future, Istanbul, 2015. Photo Credit: WIEGO

In September 2015 WIEGO convened a strategy meeting in Istanbul. This was a place for WIEGO and its partner organizations to come together and highlight the successes and challenges home-based workers face, and to develop plans for joint global work and joint work in each of the regions—Africa, Latin America, South and Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. Participants all committed to continue building the movement of home-based workers, even though resources are limited.

"I am also happy to see the momentum building across the globe on the empowerment of home-based workers ...the best way to say thank you will be committing ourselves to make the declaration a reality."

- Janathakshan, Sri Lanka (NB Janathakshan is an organization not a person)

Working Together Globally



Neeramol Sutipannapong, a home-based worker in Bangkok, Thailand. Photo Credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

Some exciting global activities and campaigns are planned for 2016:

C177 Anniversary and Campaign

All regions or countries plan to host an activity to mark the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of the Home Work Convention, campaigning for ratification of C177 as well as national laws and policies in support of home-based workers.

In March 2016 HomeNet South Asia, with WIEGO, will kick off the celebrations with a meeting of home-based workers from South and South East Asia. This will take place in Ahmedabad, India, where they will share their country achievements, and plans for marking the 20th Anniversary. Representatives from supportive organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Women, and the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV) will participate, giving their perspectives and ideas too. The meeting will be followed by a celebration of home-based workers addressed by Ela Bhatt—the founder of SEWA—, cultural activities and a Gujarati dinner.

“The Home Work Convention (C177) was adopted in 1996. But, for the most part, it remains a piece of paper...Sad to say, during this 20 years only 10 countries have ratified the Convention. The conditions of home-based workers have seen little change.”

- Suntaree Saeng Ging, HomeNet South East Asia

Global Supply Chains for Home-Based Workers

In June 2016, a group of home-based workers and WIEGO will participate in the discussion on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains at the ILC. Whilst informal workers are to be found all along supply chains, homeworkers are at the very bottom. The delegation intends to ensure that the voices of these workers are heard in the discussions and recognized in the event’s conclusion document.

Home-Based Workers Make Progress: Some Examples

- **Bhubaneswar, India:**

Home-based worker leaders started negotiating with middlemen about their wages. This has resulted in an increase in wages for incense stick rollers (from Rs 7 to Rs 12 per 1,000 incense sticks).

“None of the legislative and policy gains for informal workers were handed to the sector on a silver platter. It is not falling down from heaven owing to the kindness of government. It is due to our struggle, our fighting.”

- Suntaree, during the workshop in Kampala

- **HNSA & HNSEA:**

Both organizations were successful in bringing mayors and city officials from 22 cities of South and South East Asia to participate in a Regional Conference in Thailand in 2015, which gave home-based workers a platform and opportunity to get endorsement from city authorities on urban issues affecting them. This is captured in the Asian Cities Declaration.

- **Macedonia:**

The government has introduced supportive social protection legislation for low income workers, of which also home-based workers can benefit. The government also provides a grant so workers can start their own small businesses.

- **RUAAB SEWA Artisans Producer Co. Ltd (RUAAB):**

This company was formed in Delhi with close to 800 embroidery workers. The company has an export license and connections to major retailers.

- **Eastern Europe:**

Fairs where home-based workers in the region can gather to market their products are now held on a regular basis.

- **Thailand:**

The Home Worker Protection Act (2010) came into force in 2011 after a 10-year struggle by HomeNet Thailand and allies. Informal workers, including home-based workers, now also have access to social protection schemes.

“If we have an organizational approach towards home-based workers, together we will achieve a better life. The informal economy is a huge ocean of problems, but SEWA taught us how to swim, so as not to drown.”

- Violeta Zlateva, President of HNEE

Resources

For more information on the activities of WIEGO and its partners, visit www.wiego.org. Reports on many of the activities outlined in this newsletter are available upon request.

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About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO builds alliances with, and draws its membership from, three constituencies: membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy, and professionals from development agencies interested in the informal economy. WIEGO pursues its objectives by helping to build and strengthen networks of informal worker organizations; undertaking policy analysis, statistical research and data analysis on the informal economy; providing policy advice and convening policy dialogues on the informal economy; and documenting and disseminating good practice in support of the informal workforce. For more information visit: www.wiego.org

