

COVID-19 and the World's Two Billion Informal Economy Workers

A WIEGO Network Global Solidarity Platform

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Informal economy workers' organizations across the global economy **call on governments at all levels to partner with us** on relief, recovery and resilience efforts that are emerging from the grassroots during this time of unprecedented crisis.

Informal Economy Workers Are – and Have Always Been – Essential Workers

Street vendors and market traders are a crucial link to food security and basic necessities, especially for the poorest segments of society. Waste pickers / recyclers provide sanitation and solid waste services that contribute to public health, lower landfill costs and a healthier environment. Domestic workers are on the frontlines of meeting hygiene standards and providing care, including for the sick and elderly. Home-based workers keep supply chains running and are sewing masks and medical coveralls for the frontline workers. Economies everywhere depend on our work.

The Global Economy Can't Recover Without Us

Lockdowns and other restrictions to contain COVID-19 are negatively impacting 81% of the world's 3.3 billion workers, according to [the International Labour Organization](#). Fully 61% of that global workforce – some two billion workers – are informally employed. In developing countries we make up 90% of total employment.

Public health measures restricting movement have prevented many of our members from working at all. Every day they are unable to work, they are unable to earn. They cannot stay at home without starving and they cannot work without being exposed to the virus. Relief efforts in many countries are not reaching our workers. Brutal evictions and domestic violence against women are pervasive. Our study of the [early impact of the crisis](#) shows the pathways through which earnings in our sectors have been affected. Workers in the informal economy who have long lacked social protection and access to health care are suffering the harshest consequences. Societies need informal economy workers' organizations to help design more effective public policies in response to the crisis, and in view of longer-term recovery and structural reform.

Economies Must Be Reset to Align with Core Principles of Inclusion

The COVID-19 crisis has drawn the world's attention to longstanding inequalities in the way governments and industry deal with the world's massive informal workforce. The International Domestic Workers Federation, StreetNet International, HomeNet South Asia, HomeNet Southeast Asia, HomeNet Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers – as members of the WIEGO Network – urge policymakers to implement the following principles in all their emergency relief and recovery actions, and in their strategies to manage public health and economic activity:

1. **NOTHING FOR US WITHOUT US.** We, the global movement of workers in the informal economy, have decades of experience with organizing and facilitating connections between workers, communities, governments and companies. Our leaders are experienced negotiators and peer educators, know the inner workings of their respective sectors, and are working tirelessly to address the acute crisis facing our grassroots members and to maintain social cohesion in crisis contexts. Including us in decision-making will benefit not just the 61% of the world's workers who are informally employed, but local communities, national economies and the global systems that connect us all.

2. **DO NO HARM.** Policies and practices during and after the COVID-19 crisis must recognize informal economy workers and their organizations, and issue clear directives to enforcement agents to refrain from harassment, violence, bribery, forced evictions, and demolition of workers' assets, including their homes and workplaces. Special attention needs to be paid to risks and costs borne by women workers in the current context and in the long term.

3. **SEE THE TRANSFORMATION.** There is a need for a new model of work and production, equitable and redistributive, that recognizes and values *all* forms of work. The transformation required to achieve that model must begin now, with a commitment to recovery plans that focus on transitions from the informal to the formal economy in line with the rights-based ILO Recommendation 204. Long-term investments are needed to rebuild economies around the understanding that informal economy workers, especially women, sustain households, communities, and economies; are central to the rebuilding of local value chains; and require a guarantee of decent work standards in all sectors.

The undersigned organizations are members of the growing global movement of informal economy workers and together represent over 2.1 million members worldwide.

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