



Network of Homebased workers in South Asia



Women in Informal Employment:  
Globalizing and Organizing

# HOME-BASED WORKERS – CHECKING THE FACTS

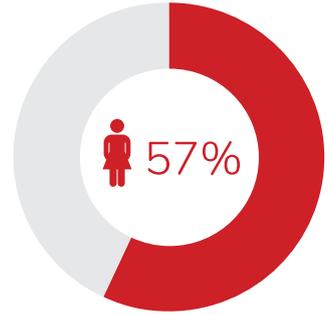
*Globally, 260 million women and men produce goods or provide services from in or around their homes:*

*86% (>224 million) in developing countries and 14% (>35 million) in developed countries.*

Photo Credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

About **147 million (57%)** are women, who must juggle their income-earning activities alongside childcare and domestic responsibilities. And almost two-thirds of the [world's home-based workers](#) are in Asia and the Pacific.

[Research](#) has found that home-based workers make significant contributions to their households, society and the economy, including:



- *Their earnings keep their households out of extreme poverty.*
- *While working from home, they can care for children and older people in their households.*
- *They are important to the social cohesion of their communities.*
- *Since these workers do not commute daily and often rely on bicycles, walking or public transport, they reduce emissions and congestion.*
- *They are economic agents, buying supplies, raw materials and equipment, and paying for transport and services. They pay taxes on raw materials, supplies and equipment they purchase.*

## DISPELLING THE MYTHS

### Myth

All workers who work in homes are home-based workers.

### Fact

Only those workers who do paid work from their own home are called home-based workers.



The term “home-based worker” is used to refer only to workers who carry out remunerated work within their own homes or in the surrounding grounds. It does not refer to either unpaid housework (in their own homes) or paid domestic work (in the homes of others).

### Myth

Home-based work is an outmoded form of production and is not linked to the modern formal economy.

### Fact

Home-based work is linked to the modern formal economy.



Many informal home-based workers purchase materials from, and sell to or produce for, formal companies. In fact, home-based workers constitute a significant share of the workforce in many global value chains led by high-end name-brand firms in the textile, apparel, shoe and sporting goods sectors. Export-led growth is associated with the expansion of home-based production in many countries as global competition has increased pressure on firms to cut costs through flexible work contracts or sub-contracting production.

**Myth**

Home-based workers are largely engaged in labour-intensive manufacturing.

**Fact**

Home-based workers are found in a variety of sectors.



Although many home-based workers are involved in manufacturing and assembly (e.g., sewing and packing) they are also found in a variety of other sectors, including:

- Artisan production: weaving, basket-making, embroidery and carpet-making
- Personal services: laundry, beautician and barber, dressmaking, lodging and catering
- Trade: small shops or bars run from home
- Repair services: shoe repairs; bicycle, motorcycle and auto repairs
- Clerical work: telemarketing, bookkeeping, accounting
- Agriculture: sorting, value addition, and packaging

**Myth**

– Home-based workers, particularly women, prefer or choose to work from home.

**Fact**

– The fact that so many women are home-based workers may be due to different factors: gender norms regarding women's role and mobility; the hiring practices of companies; and the lack of other employment opportunities.



Compared to women workers in factories, home-based women workers tend to be older and are more likely to have children. Home-based work allows them to juggle unpaid care work with paid work. This does not necessarily mean that women prefer to work at home. Also, in many sectors and countries, there are more home-based work opportunities than factory-based work opportunities for women. This is because employers prefer to outsource work to home-based producers to avoid social security contributions, to pay lower wages, and, thereby, to increase profits. Also, the lack of formal job opportunities forces many workers to take up work from home.



Photo Credit: HNSA Sadhna Udaipur



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**Myth**

Home-based workers are not organized and are difficult to organize.

**Fact**

Many organizations and several networks of home-based workers exist.



While it is true that most home-based workers are not organized, there are organizations of home-based workers in many countries. These organizations are linking up to form national and regional networks. One challenge to organizing, in addition to the isolation of home-based workers, is that self-employed home-based workers need different types of services and policy support than sub-contracted home-based workers. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India is the world's largest trade union of women informal workers. SEWA has been instrumental in achieving higher piece rates for sub-contracted home-based workers, new products and markets for self-employed home-based workers, and better working conditions for both groups of home-based workers across many industries.

**Myth**

It is not possible to measure home-based work.

**Fact**

Home-based work can be measured in national labour statistics, provided that questions regarding "place of work" are included.



Data on home-based workers have begun to improve, but challenges to counting this "invisible" workforce remain. To develop a full statistical picture of home-based workers, information must be gathered on status in employment, type of contracts, mode of payment and place of work.

**HomeNet South Asia (HNSA)** is a regional network of home-based workers' organizations that empower women home-based workers and lead regional processes to build solidarity, strengthen collective voice, and influence policies to promote better economic opportunities. Since its inception, HNSA has promoted the inclusion of home-based workers in national statistics and government programmes and has promoted workers' rights. Operating across eight countries, HNSA emerged as the leading voice for home-based workers in the region, strengthening their capacity to improve their lives and livelihoods. Visit: [www.hnsa.org.in](http://www.hnsa.org.in)

**Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)** is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, protection and voice. WIEGO promotes change by improving statistics and expanding knowledge on the informal economy, building networks and capacity among informal worker organizations and, jointly with the networks and organizations, influencing local, national and international policies. Visit: [www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org)