

HOME-BASED WORKFORCE CALLS FOR PROTECTIONS TO SURVIVE THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Millions of home-based workers world-wide demand support from their governments and the employers, contractors and brands that they work for, to ensure that their health, safety and economic survival is urgently addressed.

All over the world, in developing and industrialized countries, women and men work from home or in collective spaces near their home. They make up the home-based workforce, producing goods and providing services in many industries. They sew garments, weave carpets, stitch shoes, make baskets, prepare and sell food and assemble electronics amongst others. Some are self-employed home-based workers and others are sub-contracted waged-workers. The latter are employed by firms and brands and work for domestic and global supply chains.

Home-based workers constitute a significant percentage of the workforce worldwide, and in most countries the majority of home-based workers are women. For instance, it is estimated that over 3,5 million people in Thailand; 35 million in India and 1 million people in Ghana earn their living as home-based workers. Although they make a vital contribution to the well-being of their families and to the national and global economies, they are largely invisible, unrecognised, unheard and unacknowledged as economic actors and contributors.

They are highly vulnerable to the health effects of COVID-19 and the short and long term economic consequences. Their homes, in which they live and work, are often crowded and lack basic services such as running water and sanitation, which means that keeping to necessary hygiene routines and staying in isolation that is recommended or imposed by governments is impossible. And vitally, as most live in poverty and work just to survive, if they are unable to work there is no food on the table. Already, homeworkers, who work for domestic and global supply chains, report that there are no longer any orders as brands and retailers are cancelling their orders¹; orders already completed are not being paid for; and markets and shops where they sell their goods are closed. The inability to continue working literally means starvation for their families.

Some governments and employers are putting in place measures to mitigate the catastrophic effects of loss of income during this crisis, with most measures being applicable to workers in the formal economy. But even where plans are being made to provide relief for workers in the informal economy, home-based workers are left out, or find it impossible to claim such relief due to unrealistic requirements imposed by governments.

¹ See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-bangladesh-jobs-tr-idUSKBN2163QJ>
<https://qz.com/1821511/coronavirus-threatens-jobs-of-garment-workers-in-southeast-asia/>

OUR DEMANDS

We therefore support the common demands of home-based workers globally, noting that these demands take different forms in different countries.

1. From governments we demand:

- Health and Safety
 - Provision of constant water supply and sanitation services
 - Provision of soap, sanitizers and masks
 - Free testing and good quality medical treatment for those infected, even if they have no health insurance
 - Freedom from violence by police and security forces
 - Support for victims of domestic violence
- Income and Food Security
 - Cash grants, so we can feed ourselves and our children
 - Provision of free food
 - Relief from payment of taxes, rentals, and social security contributions
 - Regulation of financial services such as freezing loans, micro credit payments and other debt repayments
 - Use of home-based workers' skills to produce emergency personal protective equipment
- Information
 - Regular, accurate and accessible information, taking into account language and literacy levels, on how to protect our health and safety
 - Access to free/ affordable data so we can communicate

2. From local employers and contractors subcontracted homeworkers demand:

- Income replacement
- Honouring of existing contracts: payment for goods already produced
- The provision of hygiene and safety products

3. From big brands subcontracted homeworkers demand:

- Income replacement
- Provision of hygiene and safety products and/or donations to governments to provide such

4. From financial service providers we demand:

- Freezing of loans, micro credit payments and other debt repayments
- Provision of short-term low interest loans to augment our loss of income

In the longer term governments must recognise home-based workers through laws and policies which protect them and provide opportunities for improved livelihoods. Employers, including big brands, must recognise homeworkers as part of their supply chains and provide minimum wages and social protection

We call on governments, employers, contractors to listen to the voices of home-based workers by consulting with their organizations, and ensuring that measures adopted to protect them actually fulfil their needs.

Issued by the HomeNet International Working Group

We, the HomeNet International Working Group, are representatives from five existing or emerging regional networks of home-based workers that have joined together in global solidarity. We will formally launch our global network – HomeNet International- in October 2020 or as soon as possible thereafter. The network will promote recognition, rights and economic opportunities for home-based workers across the world.

1. African Home-based Workers Regional Working Group- representing organizations in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda:

- Isabel Agol (Uganda)
- Edwin Bett (Kenya)

2. HomeNet Eastern Europe and Central Asia- representing organizations in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Tadjikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan

- Violeta Zlateva (Bulgaria)
- Lijljana Cepic (Montenegro)
- Svetlana Balalaeva (Kyrgyzstan)
- Lavrenti Alania (Georgia)

3. HomeNet South Asia- representing organizations in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

- Firoza Mehrotra (India)
- Janhavi Dave (India)

4. HomeNet South East Asia –representing organizations in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam

- Suntaree Saeng-ging (Thailand)
- Poonsap Tulaphan (Thailand)

5. Latin American home-based worker organizations in Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay:

- Patricia Coñoman (Chile)
- Flor de Liz Feijoo (Uruguay)
- Gloria Solórzano (Peru)
- Edileuza Guimarães (Brasil)

6. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing:

- Vanessa Pillay (South Africa)
- Laura Morillo (Peru/ Germany)
- Chris Bonner (South Africa)

Contact person: Janhavi Dave, HNSA and International Coordinator designate of HomeNet International: janhavi.hnsa@gmail.com

