



A Future of Work for All: WIEGO's Position on the ILO Centenary

For 100 years, the ILO has advanced the cause of social justice by strengthening the bonds of mutual accountability between governments, employers and workers. On the occasion of the ILO's 100th anniversary, WIEGO applauds the ILO's achievements and recognizes the role it has played in bringing fairness and dignity to workers worldwide.

Everyone who Works is a Worker

From the beginning, the ILO has recognized the need to extend the principles of fairness and justice to all workers. Around the time of its 50th anniversary in 1969, the ILO accepted the Nobel Peace Prize for its achievements, while acknowledging that the benefits of progress had only extended to a small, privileged sector of workers. Three years later, in 1972, the Self-Employed Women's Association of India was born.

Since then, an increasingly broad movement of informal workers — including women, and including the self-employed — have continued the struggle for fairness and dignity for all workers. They work at sites outside of the firm where the actions of employers and governments nonetheless shape their working conditions: on street corners, at waste dumps, and inside homes. The ILO Centenary Declaration's commitment to international labour standards that offer protections covering *all* forms of work means that these sites will need to be understood as central to a just Future of Work.

As new forms of work continue to evolve, this commitment also means that informal workers will need access to and control of affordable new technologies. Technological changes which are freely accessible to ordinary people are assisting new workers and economic units to manage their procurement of supplies and marketing more efficiently, control and manage their access to financial services, and access credit and social protection.

Yet in many instances, labour market regulation has not caught up and adapted to these new forms of work. Practical approaches like dropping the price of data, providing free WiFi in cities, and increasing networks and broadband access in rural areas would extend the vision of social justice to workers in emerging sectors, as well as traditional ones.

The ILO's commitment to a transformative agenda for gender equality must also lead to the meaningful inclusion of *all women workers* — and the meaningful recognition that governments and employers shape all women's working conditions, regardless of where they work. We support the Global Commission on the Future of Work's view that "It is critical that women's voice, representation and leadership is strengthened. Whether in the formal or informal economy, in government, workers' organizations, employers' organizations or cooperative ventures, women must be active participants in decision-making."¹

¹ Global Commission on the Future of Work, *Work for a Brighter Future*, pp.34-35. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

Every Worker Contributes

Social justice cannot be achieved until every worker has decent working conditions and the contributions they make to society are understood and recognized. Women and men who work for firms under informal conditions — as industrial outworkers, dependent contractors, or wage workers without labor or social protections — contribute by creating value for those firms. Women and men who are self-employed contribute by creating their own jobs and generating demand for others in the economy. All contribute by bringing earnings into their households and communities.

These contributions are difficult for society to see. The Centenary Declaration's commitment to reducing informality (Paragraph II (A)(ix)) must be framed not as an attack on informal workers, but as an attack on the structural conditions that keep them in poverty. In practice, informal work is often their only means of livelihood, and attempts to reduce informal working conditions must at the same time protect those means of livelihood. This is essential if the ILO is to heed the words of the 1994 Declaration of Philadelphia that "poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere."

Recognizing that every worker contributes also means that alternative economies need to be explored and developed, as current economic structures have squeezed many workers out of the labour market, increasing poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Worker-controlled institutions of the social and solidarity economies, including different kinds of cooperatives, need to be strengthened in order to reinforce those contributions. ILO Recommendation 204 (R204) on transitions from the informal to the formal economy is the best framework for ensuring a transformed future of work that recognizes the full range of contributions that workers make.

To that end, we welcome the approach of the Global Commission on the Future of Work that "all workers, regardless of their contractual arrangement or employment status, should enjoy fundamental workers' rights," and that "collective agreements or laws and regulations can raise this protection floor" (p. 12).

Every Contribution has Value

The need for a new social contract in the age of globalization is well recognized. This new social contract must take into account the value of every worker's contribution. The Centenary Declaration's call for universal, comprehensive and sustainable social protection is an essential step towards recognizing this value. Also essential is the responsibility of employers to contribute their fair share so that governments can provide the public goods necessary to protect and promote employment of all kinds. As the Global Commission states, in order "to ensure effective protection for all, societies need to fill the gaps and adapt systems to the evolving world of work by extending adequate social protection coverage to workers in all forms of work, including self-employment" (p. 36).

For the value of all contributions to be recognized, more workers' organizations representing workers in employment relationships who have not traditionally enjoyed the fundamental right to representation — including own-account workers and those in new and emerging forms of employment — will need to be at the policy table. Equally, more employers' organizations directly representing economic units in the informal economy will need to be at the policy table.

Bringing these organizations to the policy table is how we believe the goal of “ensuring collective representation of workers and employers through social dialogue as a public good” (p. 12) will become a reality for the 61% of all workers globally who constitute the majority—but who are mostly excluded from decision-making processes that determine their working and living conditions.

While the main responsibility lies with workers’ organizations to “adopt inclusive organizing strategies expanding membership to informal workers” as a “pathway to formalization and a tool for inclusion” (p. 42), we see an urgent need to develop mechanisms and procedures within the ILO and its member States to recognize informal workers' organizations as legitimate representatives of informal workers and thus include them into decision-making processes, including collective bargaining. **A human-centred agenda, in other words, requires a human-centred approach to inclusion.** If tripartite cooperation through social dialogue provides the foundation of successful policy, then it will need to be broadened to include all workers and all forms of workers’ organization, including cooperatives, associations, networks and others.

Toward a Future of Work for All

We therefore echo the Global Commission in its recommendation “that the ILO give particular attention to the universality of its mandate. This implies scaling up its activities to include those who have historically remained excluded from social justice and decent work, notably informal workers” (p. 56).

In order for the ILO Centenary Declaration to meet its goal of going “beyond a mere affirmation” of the ILO Constitution, the Philadelphia Declaration (1944) and other previous declarations, it will need to give direction to today’s world of work by including the majority of workers globally: those in the informal economy.

WIEGO is proud to be a recognized partner of the ILO in its efforts to create a universal and lasting peace through social justice. May the next hundred years build on the foundation of progress and bring us ever closer to the vision on which the ILO was founded.

Milestones of inclusion for informal workers

(a) Conventions and Recommendations

- C177 on Home Work
- C189 on Domestic Work
- R202 on Social Protection Floors
- R204 on the Transition from Informal to Formal Work

(b) Key Statistics

- 61% of the world’s workers are informally employed
- 64% of informal workers in the world are self-employed
- In developing countries, 92% of women’s employment is informal