



Women in Informal Employment:
Globalizing and Organizing

MBO Newsletter

A Newsletter for Membership-Based Organizations
of Informal Workers

Greetings friends and colleagues!

As always, we hope you enjoy this issue of the WIEGO MBO Newsletter. We love to hear from you! Megan MacLeod is coordinator of this newsletter. If you have questions or comments about this newsletter, or if you would like to submit content for the next issue, please email Megan at

megan.macleod@wiego.org

Contact us at WIEGO!

Address:

Women in Informal
Employment: Globalizing and
Organizing (WIEGO) Limited
79 JFK Street #32,
Cambridge, MA 02138 USA

Tel.: 44-161-819-1200

email: wiego@wiego.org

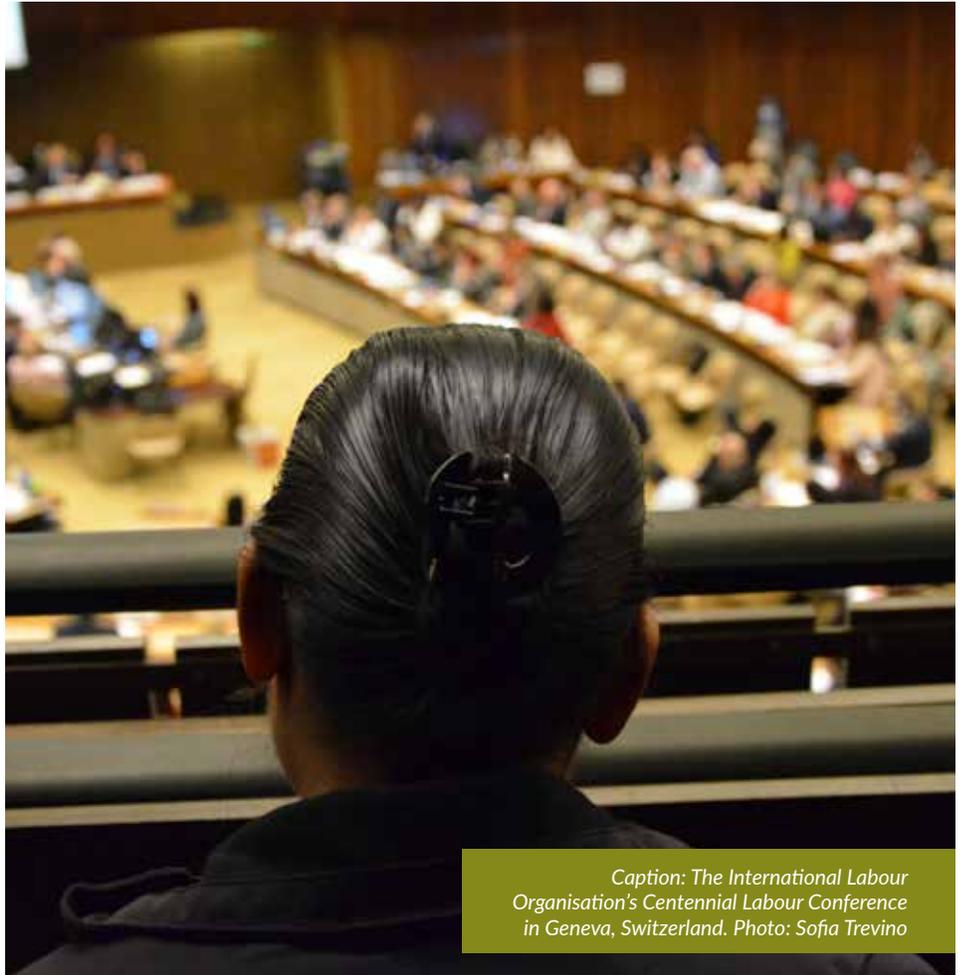
Web: www.wiego.org

Facebook: [wiegoglobal](https://www.facebook.com/wiegoglobal)

Twitter: [@wiegoglobal](https://twitter.com/wiegoglobal)

What's going on at WIEGO?

Take a look at our [recent and upcoming events and activities!](#)



Caption: The International Labour Organisation's Centennial Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. Photo: Sofia Trevino

Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work

In a historic victory for informal workers, and particularly for women, this year's [International Labour Conference \(ILC\)](#), held in Geneva, Switzerland, saw the adoption of the instrument on [Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work](#) (the vote: 439 for, 7 against, 30 abstain).

This marks a significant moment for informal workers whose organizations have advocated tirelessly to ensure International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 190 can protect some of the world's most vulnerable workers. Many of these organizations were represented by worker leaders in WIEGO's delegation, including representatives from [StreetNet International](#), [HomeNet South Asia](#), and [International Domestic Workers Federation \(IDWF\)](#), among others.

In this special issue of the MBO Newsletter, we'd like to centre the voices and efforts of these workers with excerpts from a series of interviews conducted during the ILC. Below, worker leaders from all over the world, working in different sectors, spoke with us about why ILO Convention 190 is important to them, and how they believe it will change their lives for the better.

Shirley Price, President of the Jamaica Household Workers Union, Jamaica

Could you please tell us a little about your occupation?

I was a domestic worker for 31 years. Now I have evolved and do social work; I work with the lowest set of people — low-income — most of them are still domestic workers.

This year, the focus is Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. Can you talk a little about how violence and harassment in the workplace has affected you and/or your colleagues?

Violence and harassment is a scourge that needs to stop. It has affected domestic workers right across the board. Every country globally has the same cry with violence and harassment for domestic workers.

I must pity the image of violence and harassment of domestic workers because I was also violated, I was also abused, as a domestic worker. [...] At one point, when I was trying to go to school to better myself, my employer [...] locked me out of the house and I had to sleep in a dog house for months.

So it has affected all of us.

In my Union, there are many cases where domestic workers testify of the abuse of employers and employer's children. And time has come that we have to take a stand and say "no more violence against us." And that's why we launched the Time's Come Campaign two years ago, to say "enough is enough". You have to make a choice to say, "stop, stop now! Time's come: no more violence or harassment against domestic workers. Time's come."

What are you hoping will come up during these discussions?

I would like to see a strong convention with a strong recommendation [...] because we need laws to be in place in our own country to protect workers, and especially domestic workers because they are the most vulnerable of all the workers because we work in the private homes, and we don't have anybody to look out for us, [so] we have to look out for ourselves. So we must get a strong convention.

Wisborn Malaya, Secretary General of Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations, Street Vendors

Could you please tell us a little about your occupation?

When I finished school, it was unfortunate that in Zimbabwe the economy was not very friendly. And I did not have access to formal employment. Then I decided to identify any form of work that I could do for a living. So I became a member of the informal economy, selling in the streets. [...] That was when I was identified by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and they invited me to become a member of the organized informal workers association.

I have been a member of the [Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economies Association](#) since 2002 when I was a little boy. [...] Ever since, I have been growing in the system until I was elected to become the Secretary General.

This year the focus is Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. Can you talk a little about how violence and harassment in the workplace has affected you and/or your colleagues?

[...]The wish that I have is to make sure that Violence and Harassment in the World of Work Convention is endorsed because we suffer a lot of violence in the informal economy. In our work spaces, all the work we do is highly criminalized. [This Convention] will also help us to push our governments, to make sure that they also ratify the convention so that there is a law which decriminalizes the occupations of informal workers.

What are you hoping will come up during these discussions?

I am hoping for a convention which is supported by a recommendation on ending violence and harassment in the world of work. This convention should also incorporate the issues of informal economy workers so that they are also protected by the same convention.



Worker representatives at the centenary International Labour C.onference. Photo: Sofia Trevino

Nohra Padilla, Colombian National Association of Recyclers, Informal Recycler, Colombia

Could you please tell us a little about your occupation?

I've been doing [informal recycling] for more than 40 years, now. [...] I started when I was 8 years old, so the trade has passed on from generation to generation. We are already the third generation of recyclers in Colombia.

This year the focus is Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. Would you be willing to talk a little about how violence and harassment in the workplace has affected you and/or your colleagues?

I believe that throughout the world, recyclers are experiencing great pressure, which, translated into the ILO's terminology, can be called workplace violence and harassment. For example, many women are sexually harassed in order to have access to the final deposition sites or to the sites where they can pick up material. Many men and women are harassed by the authorities, who withdraw their merchandise and harass them so that they will stay away from certain areas. [...] There's discrimination, not only for being poor but also for the trade we practice.

Generally speaking, recyclers are harshly repressed. I would say we experience extreme violence, considering that many of our leaders are threatened with death. The authorities provide no protection, [and] the bidding schemes for waste management have become very

aggressive as there are high interests behind it. For many years, I would even say decades, recyclers have been threatened with trade displacement. This represents extreme violence against a group that makes a living out of waste, and which as a result of being threatened, must change its trade because the impoverished situation is worsening to the level of extreme poverty. In my opinion, that is the highest expression of violence.

What do you expect to see as a result of this debate?

Well, not only for us, recyclers, but also for domestic workers, street vendors, and for all kinds of work expressions — because there are millions of people who need to make a living out of something. I would say that for all of them, we need to be assured that we will have a safe workplace, where our jobs are respected, that the State will provide special protection to the different forms of labour, and above all, to rest assured that the workers' leaders will not be persecuted for defending our basic and fundamental rights [...]. We hope that in this meeting, the ILO will use its power to give workers guarantees, and to gain respect for our right to work, for the trade of each worker and for the activities conducted by the workers organizations.

Gabriel Vazeilles, Domestic Workers Union (UPACP), Argentina

Could you please tell us a little about your occupation?

I belong to the [Domestic Workers Union](#) (UPACP), from Argentina, we represent the Union. I work in the labour advisory sector, where we provide advisory services to domestic workers.

This year the focus is Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. Would you be willing to talk a little about how violence and harassment in the workplace has affected you and/or your colleagues?

Domestic workers are not only affected by the violence they experience in their own homes, but also by the violence that sometimes occurs in their workplaces. So, it's double violence, both at work and at home.

Do you think that one of the forms of violence suffered by domestic workers is the issue of labour informality? Why is this Convention so important in your country?

Yes, it's essential that this Convention may be approved with the Recommendation, because one of the main forms of violence experienced in the field of domestic work is not receiving your salary payment in due time. Moreover, mistreatment is frequently naturalized — maybe because of the experiences at their own homes. So, with this Recommendation, we could start conducting awareness-raising workshops in order to identify the problems they are experiencing both at home and at work.

Which actions will be conducted by your organisation, the UPACP, after this meeting?

There will be awareness-raising workshops, so that people will realize the scope of this Convention once it is ratified in Argentina, and so that they will know the rights and duties of both employers and workers.

Myrtle Witbooi, General Secretary of the South Africa Domestic Workers Union (SADWU), President of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), South Africa

Could you please tell us a little about your occupation?

I am from South Africa, I am the General Secretary of the [South Africa Domestic Workers Union](#) (SADWU), and I am also the President of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF).

Can you talk a little about why this ILC is an important one for domestic workers?



Myrtle Witbooi, representing South African domestic workers. Photo: Sofia Trevino

I think that for the domestic workers and vulnerable workers this is a most important conference because violence in the world is affecting domestic workers — mainly women.

And for us, if we can have any convention at this conference, it will strengthen convention 189, which is already there for domestic workers. We believe that the two conventions together will make it even more powerful.

[... W]e also want to make sure that domestic workers understand the convention. We need to make sure that education will be given to workers in vulnerable sectors so that they understand that this is not just a paper — this is a paper that will work for them. And this is why we are here.

We are excited to be here. We are also sometimes getting very angry when employers and governments don't want to agree with us. But we believe if we empower women, if we empower the vulnerable workers, we will be able to make this convention work for us when we go back [home].

And when we go back we must make sure to put pressure on our governments, to say this is about us. This is about our rights. Because at the moment violence is destroying our countries. Violence is affecting our women and we need to make sure that this is a safe world for us to work in.

More information:

- Read WIEGO's press release: <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/PRESS-RELEASE--Informal-workers-applaud-new-international-labour-standard-on-violence-and-harassment.html?soid=1102011005007&aid=dKOY2YMhn1U>
- Event page: <https://www.wiego.org/events/wiego-international-labour-conference-2019>
- Blog: <https://www.wiego.org/blog/workplace-violence-and-harassment-informal-workers-also-need-protection>