

The Impact of COVID-19 Laws on Street Vendors and Market Traders: Trends and Insights from Latin America



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for WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing)

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Cover Photograph: Diana, 35, street vendor at an open-air market in the Gustavo A. Madero Municipality, Mexico City. Photo credit: César Parra

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For the first time, laws and regulations recognized informal food vendors as essential economic actors. Rules however differed depending on whether vendors worked in markets or on streets: 12 countries allowed market food vendors to continue working, seven let street food vendors continue their activity, and only two explicitly designated them as essential workers.

Local authorities had a primary role in the regulation of access to public space and informal vending during the pandemic - by imposing health and safety measures to prevent the spread of the virus, relocating street vendors, and supporting informal vending by waiving or reducing fees and local taxes.

In all countries but Bolivia, the cost of cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment needed to comply with health and safety protocols was left to workers to bear. In Bolivia local authorities assumed responsibility for the sanitation of public markets.

Latin American countries legislated many social protection laws and regulations in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This signals a shift in the way that governments address citizens as holders of justiciable social rights, rather than as “aid beneficiaries”.

For the first time in the region, social assistance laws and regulations expressly included informal workers as beneficiaries. Fourteen national governments instituted cash transfers and 10 of them recognized informal workers as entitled legal subjects in their own right.

Other common social protection measures, legislated in 14 countries, included distribution of goods in kind, waivers, suspensions or implementation of social fees for utilities, and price control for essential items and tax relief.

In seven countries, access to housing was also guaranteed through social protection laws and regulations.



Street vendors in Lima, Peru (left and centre) and Mexico City, Mexico (right) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo credits: Victor Mallqui (left and centre), César Parra (right)



Tianguistas (street vendors) at an open-air market in the Gustavo A. Madero Municipality, Mexico City at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo credit: César Parra

"If we don't work every day, we don't eat."

– **Carlos Cruz, general-secretary of the *Asociación Sindical de Motociclistas, Mensajeros y Servicios* in Argentina** (Página 12, 2020)

"I can't stop. If I don't sell, I don't eat. It's as simple as that."

– **Leonardo Meneses Prado, a food vendor in Mexico City**
(Sample and Kitroeff, 2020)

I. Introduction

On 26 February 2020, Brazil registered the first case of COVID-19 infection in Latin America (Tobar and Linger 2020: 199-212). Months later, the region reached the highest number of confirmed cases globally, accounting for more than forty per cent of the cases worldwide (Ocha 2020). Since then, governments across the region closed their countries' borders and started enacting and implementing regulations to give effect to a full or partial lockdown of the population. These regulations had a tremendous impact on the livelihoods of the 140 million informal workers (Salazar-Xirinachs and Chacaltana 2018: 150), who make up a significant portion of Latin American countries' economically active population, as **Figure 1** shows.

In particular, many of the laws and regulations in response to COVID-19 had a deeply negative impact on informal vendors, whose income depends on access to public space and social interaction. Their sales plummeted due to curfews shortening their workdays,

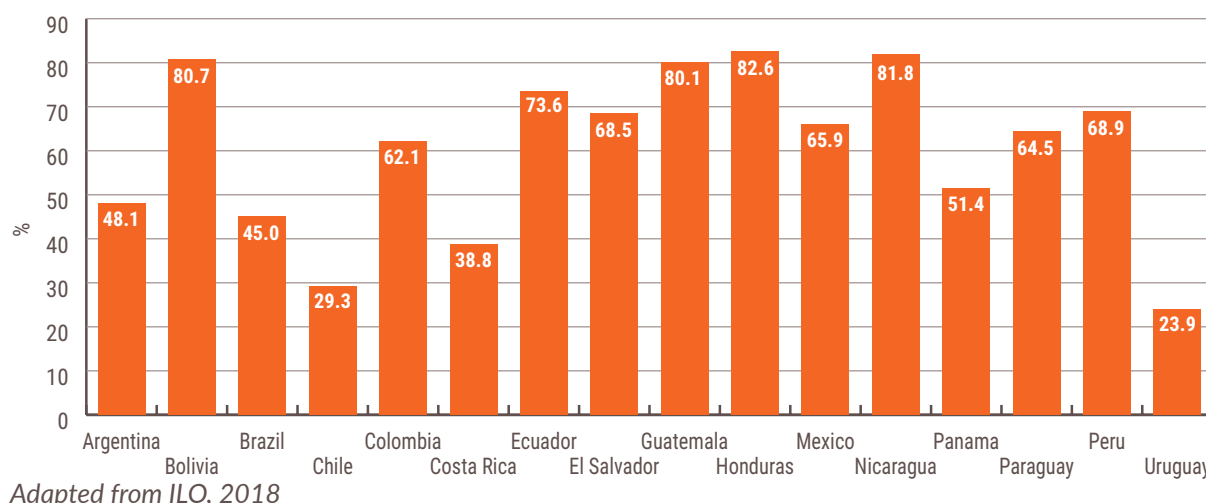


Figure 1 - Informal workers as a percentage of the economically active population

reduced foot and vehicular traffic and limited public transportation. Many decided to break the law to survive. With little or no savings to tap into, lack of social protection or unemployment benefits, and a narrow prospect of alternative sources of income, those living in a hand-to-mouth economy lost their livelihoods almost immediately (Reliefweb 2020). As captured by the International Labour Organization, “[t]o die from hunger or from the virus’ is the all-too-real dilemma faced by many informal economy workers” (ILO 2020).

This study¹ examines the laws and regulations passed in response to the COVID-19 crisis in Latin America, and their impact on informal vendors, including market and street vendors. Our analysis covers 16 countries in the region – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. Our study focuses on informal vendors for several reasons. First, informal vending is one of the most visible and dynamic sectors of the regional informal economy (Roever 2010). Second, this was the sector most immediately and noticeably affected by laws and regulations in response to COVID-19, many of which focused on blocking or reducing customers’ and vendors’ access to their workplace – streets and markets. Finally, informal vendors are an essential part of urban supply chains, ensuring food security for all urban dwellers, in particular for the most vulnerable groups (WIEGO n.d.), since they provide goods in very small quantities and at affordable prices.

To conduct this analysis, WIEGO's Law programme collected national and local laws, decrees, executive orders, regulations, and court decisions from the countries listed above. We accessed government websites, legislative databases and ministerial press releases and collected data spanning from March to October 2020. We also consulted secondary sources, including research reports and online newspaper articles.

¹ This paper is part of a series analyzing the government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on informal workers in 64 countries in [Africa](#), Latin America and Asia (forthcoming). It expands on the WIEGO Law Programme newsletter, Law and Informality Insights, of August 2020, [The Impact of COVID-19 Laws on Informal Workers: A Review of 51 Countries](#).

The analysis focuses on the following five categories of laws and regulations in response to COVID-19:

- declarations of national emergency;
- lockdown regulations, including restrictions on movement within and across national borders, restrictions on economic activities, and identification of essential economic activities;
- conditions under which essential services may operate, including health and safety requirements and/or time restrictions;
- forms of direct support to informal economic activities; and
- social protection.

The data collected show a composite picture. All but one country (Nicaragua) responded to the pandemic with a combination of emergency regulations. Thirteen countries adopted national hard lockdown laws in the early stages of the health crisis (March and April 2020), including closure of non-essential businesses and, in some cases, stay home orders for the general population. Only two countries (Brazil and Uruguay) opted for a softer approach and limited interventions, mostly out of concern for the consequences of an economic downturn.

Lockdown laws and regulations mandating general closure of businesses included lists of essential activities that were allowed to continue operating. Governments regulated informal vendors in different ways, depending on whether they sold in markets or on streets, and whether they sold food or other non-food items. As national governments focused on ensuring food security by minimizing disruptions to the food production and distribution chain, they designated food distribution activities as essential and allowed these activities to continue operating. In some countries (Argentina, Costa Rica and Ecuador), exceptions were expressly limited to formal establishments (such as wholesale markets, supermarkets, and neighborhood shops), and home delivery platforms. In 12 countries, however, some form of informal vending was allowed to continue: in Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama only market vendors could operate, while laws in Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay allowed all food distribution activities.

Across the region, local governments² (Selee 2004) played a prominent role in the response to the pandemic, regulating access to public space and the activity of informal vendors – not always in line with national regulations. In Guatemala, Colombia, Uruguay, Panama and Peru, local governments waived or lowered the fees for accessing or working on public and/or market space, set up health and safety protocols for markets, and adopted social security and other regulations aimed at supporting the poor and vulnerable groups. In Argentina and Ecuador, in line with the restrictive stance of national governments, the cities of Buenos Aires and Quito prohibited fairs and public markets, and banned all kinds of street vending. In Brazil and Uruguay, where national governments opted for a softer response to the crisis, local governments adopted stricter regulations imposing mandatory isolation and limiting access to public space.

² Most Latin American countries underwent decentralization reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, which strengthened the role of local and regional governments, granting them extensive legislative and executive power.

Recognizing the socioeconomic impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses to it, as early as March 2020, national and local governments approved laws and regulations that instituted social assistance measures to compensate for the drastic drop in income of several groups (CEPAL 2020). These included cash transfers and food distribution, waivers of utilities fees and temporary prohibition of evictions. Ten countries provided direct support for informal workers in the form of cash transfers, explicitly recognizing them as a particularly affected group. By examining these laws and regulations, we not only interrogate what this recognition – a novelty in the region – entails, but also critically assess their distributive scope.

In the following sections, we analyze these trends in more detail. Section II discusses countries' emergency responses to the COVID-19 crisis. In Section III, we examine the emergency legal framework that determines whether and how informal vendors have been able to work during the height of the pandemic. Section IV provides an overview of the most relevant social protection laws and regulations adopted by countries and their impact on informal vendors' livelihoods. Finally, Section V outlines the conclusions we draw from the data analysis.

II. Countries' Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In mid-March 2020, as Asia and Europe already struggled with the health and socioeconomic consequences of the spread of the coronavirus, the pandemic hit Latin America. In rapid succession, national governments across the region adopted emergency laws seeking to curb the spread of the disease. By the end of March, all but one of the countries surveyed had declared some kind of emergency (**Table 1**).

Table 1 – Types of emergency declared

Type of emergency as defined in laws	Countries ³
State of emergency	Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru
Health Emergency	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay
Health Alert	Chile
Public calamity	Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala
No emergency law	Nicaragua

Whether identified as a national emergency, a health emergency or a public calamity, the purpose of these measures was to invest certain state actors with extraordinary powers to facilitate swift decision-making. Indeed, governments enacted COVID-19 laws and regulations mostly by presidential or ministerial decrees, declarations or orders. These are legislative instruments whose adoption process bypasses or simplifies parliamentary scrutiny and approval. Although warranted by the exceptional situation and the need for a rapid response in an ever-changing scenario, these extraordinary

³ Some countries appear twice in the table because they changed their regulatory approach to the crisis as it evolved, according to WHO's categorization, from a health emergency of international relevance to a pandemic.

powers often encompass the suspension of individual rights and freedoms, and provide heightened enforcement powers (including, in some cases, authorization for the use of force by the police and the military). The low capacity of health systems to respond to the crisis, the high levels of poverty and inequality, and the limited access of scores of citizens to clean water in some of the surveyed countries are often the rationale behind these measures. Nonetheless, these emergency regulations also allow abuse, often against the most vulnerable groups.

Chile, for example, first declared a health alert, giving public health authorities extraordinary powers to respond to the international health emergency. Soon after, a declaration of a state of constitutional exception of catastrophe due to public calamity shifted authority to the heads of National Defense, increasing their powers to ensure public order. Popular protests challenging structural inequalities erupted during lockdown (Montes 2020). Honduras adopted a similar approach to ensure public order. Upon the declaration of a state of health emergency, the President suspended fundamental rights, including freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of movement. Human rights bodies widely criticized the President's actions,⁴ especially as they disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, including informal vendors, who faced arrest in response to protests demanding access to social protection (WOLA 2020). In El Salvador, the declaration of a national emergency was followed by the *Law of Temporary Restriction of Concrete Constitutional Rights to Address the Pandemic COVID-19*, also referred to as "State of Exception Law," which authorized the President to suspend constitutional rights, and endorsed the use of force to curb violations of quarantine measures. In Bolivia, the President declared a national emergency in early March authorizing extraordinary public expenditure in response to the crisis and granting special powers to ministries to enact the measures necessary to contain the spread of the virus. When the government declared a national health emergency that imposed a total lockdown, Bolivian informal vendors took to the streets to protest the prohibition of work and were met with violent repression by state police (Villa 2020).

In contrast, other countries adopted a softer response to the crisis. Argentina designed its legal response to be the least restrictive possible, prioritizing respect for fundamental rights, such as the right to information and to be treated with dignity and without discrimination. Unique among the countries surveyed, Nicaragua never acknowledged the seriousness of the health crisis, did not declare a state of emergency, and let citizens and businesses, including informal vendors, carry on their daily activities without restrictions. Nicaragua is therefore not included in any of the categories examined in this paper.

⁴ The UN Human Rights High Commissioner called on the Honduran government to revise the restrictions: <https://twitter.com/OACNUDHHN/status/1240747548828106754>.

III. Working during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Confronted by the need to contain the spread of the virus and at the same time to preserve individual livelihoods and support their countries' economies, Latin American governments enacted a combination of economic and public health laws and regulations. These laws and regulations had a significant impact on informal vendors' livelihoods. On the one hand, the use of public space – informal vendors' workplace – became the focus of restrictions and regulations that sought to control gatherings and limit vehicular and foot traffic. The effects for vendors were disastrous: due to the combination of stay home orders, fear of contagion that emptied the streets, and arbitrary enforcement of lockdown measures, informal vendors struggled to make ends meet. On the other hand, a number of government interventions – albeit limited and uneven – sought to support vendors to continue their activity.

Laws and regulations adopted in response to COVID-19 impacted informal vendors' livelihoods in a number of ways, depending on:

- the severity of lockdown measures;
- whether or not informal vending was identified as an essential service;
- the type of health and safety regulations applied to market and street vending; and
- the specific measures adopted to support informal vendors' ability to work throughout the pandemic.

Lockdown measures

Table 2 below summarizes the different levels of lockdown adopted by countries in our study. With the exception of Nicaragua, all countries issued regulations restricting circulation and economic activities, which included closure of borders and mandatory quarantine for those allowed into the country, school closures, prohibition of large gatherings, curfews, and restrictions on public transport. The majority of governments opted for strict lockdown measures, and adopted regulations mandating work from home for public and private sectors, closure of non-essential businesses and, in some cases, such as Bolivia and Colombia, home confinement for the general population.

Table 2 – Types of lockdown mandated by laws in the first phase of the emergency

Types of lockdown	Countries
Full lockdown ⁵	Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru
Partial lockdown ⁶	Brazil, Uruguay

⁵ "Full lockdown" denotes those instances where governments adopted regulations severely restricting the social, cultural and economic life of citizens. These regulations typically mandated border closures, restrictions of movement within national borders, mandatory work from home where possible and closure of non-essential businesses and economic activities, school closure, ban on public gatherings and events, restrictions on domestic public transport, curfews, and, in some cases, stay home orders for the general population.

⁶ "Partial lockdown" denotes those instances where governments adopted fewer and less restrictive regulations affecting the social, cultural and economic life of citizens. While these regulations included border closures, and other restrictions, they did not include stay home orders or closure of non-essential businesses.

Full lockdown measures hit informal vendors the hardest. In Quito, Ecuador, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, local laws expressly prohibited public fairs and closed markets, and banned informal trade, while in Bogota, Colombia, starting in June 2020, local regulations outlawed informal sale of food, tobacco and soft drinks. In several countries, such as Honduras, Mexico, and Panama, while there was no express prohibition of informal vending, regulations that heavily restricted the use of public space with bans on gatherings and pedestrian and vehicular circulation⁷ amounted to an indirect prohibition of informal vending.

Some governments adopted partial lockdown regulations. In Uruguay, national regulation was limited to the suspension of public events, closing of tourist locations, banning of public gatherings, mandating the cleaning and sanitation of public and private spaces, and adopting health protocols for essential workers and users of public transport (BBC News Mundo 2020). In Brazil, given its President's negationist stance (The Lancet 2020: 1461), national law merely required government workers to work remotely when possible and authorized online classes in the federal education system.

In the absence of country-wide full lockdown regulations, local authorities in both Uruguay and Brazil stepped in to regulate access to public space. In Montevideo, the local government restricted the activity of open air markets, kiosks and other forms of street vending. The *intendencia* (*municipal authority*) prohibited street trade, with the exception of vendors of essential goods and street markets selling food (and in particular, fruit and vegetables) and allowed their operations between 6 am and 2 pm (La Gente d'Italia 2020).⁸

In Brazil, contrary to the federal government's stance, several states and cities instituted full lockdowns. This gave rise to a dispute over which federal entities could legislate in response to the pandemic – municipalities, states or the Union. The Brazilian Supreme Court decided that “the Union, states, and municipalities may each restrict the right to movement within the country in order to contain the spread of the pandemic according to their respective constitutional powers; but they shall not limit the free circulation of the essential goods and services” (Federal Supreme Court of Brazil 2020). This decision thus recognized local authorities' power to define what counted as essential services, meaning that the regulation of informal vending varied extensively across the country.

Most countries restricted internal movement, leaving streets almost empty. Even in countries like Mexico and Brazil, where home confinement was voluntary and vendors kept working, these regulations resulted in a reduction of informal vendors' income (Cajina 2020). The Director General of the Health Protection Agency of Mexico City noted that “unfortunately, given the nature of their activity, we cannot stop [street vendors]; however, the low demand on the street is what is limiting their sector” (Navarrete 2020). Emergency legislation in Guatemala, Ecuador, Chile, Colombia

⁷ In Chile, for example, people were allowed to leave their home only for urgent matters. Urgent matters included: health emergencies, reaching the workplace for those identified as essential workers, and buying goods of first necessity.

⁸ The resolution applies to holders of permits for sale in food street markets, movable kiosks selling food, street vending stalls of fruit and vegetables, *periferias* (group of informal vendors who set up shop around and in the vicinity of a *feria* (market)) and the like.

and Panama mandated curfews that limited circulation and economic activity in the public space to a few hours per day. **Table 3** below provides a breakdown of restrictive regulations adopted by the countries in our study.

Table 3 – Types of restrictions to circulation imposed by laws

Types of restrictions to circulation	Countries
Border closure	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay
Domestic transport restrictions	Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Uruguay
Curfews	Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay (Montevideo)

Regulation of informal vending during the pandemic

The lockdown regulations that restricted movement and economic activities provided for a number of exceptions, listing businesses that could continue to operate amidst general closure. These regulations affected informal vendors differently depending on what they sold – food or other items – and whether they sold in markets or on streets.

In twelve countries, regulations allowed some form of informal vending. Uruguay was the only country in our sample where market and street vendors were allowed to work irrespective of what they sold. The Uruguayan President explained that prohibiting informal vendors from selling would put them in the paradoxical situation of having to choose between remaining home without income or breaking the law and face harsh sanctions. Talking about his decision, he observed: "who, in all seriousness, is willing to arrest, take before a judge [...] someone who goes outside to earn their [...] daily bread?" (BBC News Mundo 2020).

For informal vendors selling food, the situation was different and more nuanced. All countries covered by this study, seeking to minimize disruptions to the food supply chain (*cadena de abastos*), declared activities related to food production and distribution as essential. However, while markets were expressly mentioned in the lists of essential activities in five countries, street vendors were explicitly qualified as essential only in Montevideo and in a few municipalities in Guatemala.

Legislators used different formulations to identify essential food distribution activities, which impacted informal food vendors in different ways. **Table 4** shows how the countries in this study regulated informal vending at the height of the pandemic.

Table 4 – Regulation of informal food vending at the height of lockdown

Content of the Laws and Regulations	Country
Regulations allow all forms of informal trade	Uruguay (except for Montevideo)
Regulations qualify food street vendors as essential	Montevideo (Uruguay); municipalities in Guatemala
Regulations qualify food distribution as essential without further specification	Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru
Regulations qualify food distribution as essential and specify permitted channels of distribution, including markets	Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama
Regulations qualify food distribution as essential and specifically permitted channels of distribution, including only formal establishments	Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador

In six countries – Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Paraguay – clauses identifying essential activities referred broadly to “food distribution activities” without specifying who could perform them, thus potentially including informal vending. This was the case in Paraguay, where a strong stance in support of informal vendors underpinned the country’s regulation of economic activities, as evidenced by the words of the Minister of Interior: “street vendors have the right to work [...] what we ask from them is to avoid agglomeration” (ABC TV 2020). Yet, the regulations’ vague reference to food distribution left local governments in charge of implementing these provisions, with ample room for interpretation. The municipality of Comas, in Lima, Peru, for example, chose to apply stay-home orders strictly, evicting and fining informal street vendors irrespective of the nature of the products they sold.

In eight countries, legislators specified the channels through which food distribution could take place. In these cases, essential activities were limited to those listed, while all other activities were prohibited. In five of these countries – Colombia, Honduras, Panama, El Salvador and Guatemala (national level) – regulations included markets among the permitted food distribution channels, while omitting, and thus prohibiting, other forms of informal vending. In Mexico, national law allowed markets to remain open.⁹ In Argentina, Costa Rica and Ecuador, regulations permitted food distribution only through formal establishments, such as supermarkets and shops, thus banning all forms of informal vending.

Local governments – in capital districts and other municipalities – adopted their own regulations on economic activities. In Montevideo, Uruguay, contrary to the national government’s softer approach, local authorities imposed restrictions on the use of public space. While prohibiting street vending, however, the government of Montevideo issued legislation that recognized the importance of informal food vendors, declaring them essential economic actors and allowing them to continue their activity. Similarly, in a number of municipalities in Guatemala, local governments adopted regulations that expressly recognized informal food traders as essential workers. In La Paz, Bolivia, a municipal regulation allowed street vendors to leave their homes to work only once a week, according to a rotation system based on their ID numbers, the type of goods they sold and whether or not they sold from stalls. In Cochabamba, although municipal regulations allowed informal vendors to operate during the same time period as formal shops, they were banned from selling in the area surrounding local markets (*centros de abasto*). In Quito, in line with the national government’s decision to allow only formal establishments to operate, the municipality expressly banned all street vending, including the sale of food. The mayor issued a resolution prohibiting the use of public space, including squares, and suspended licenses for economic activities as well as permits for self-employed vendors. Some local regulations also banned selling in some of the street vendors’ natural markets, such as the metro, metro stations and walkways (Panama City), prohibited sale of certain goods such as second-hand clothes (Los Cabos, Baja California Sur, Mexico) or food, tobacco and vegetables (Bogota, Colombia).

A few countries issued specific regulations supporting work continuity for informal workers, including vendors. A number of local governments waived or suspended fees

⁹ These do not include street markets (*tianguis*) and itinerant markets (*mercados sobre ruedas*), which were closed until June/July.

for the use of public space. The city of San Miguelito, in the Panama City metropolitan area, exempted street vendors, along with other workers, from the payment of all local taxes for the year. In Guatemala, several local authorities suspended the payment of fees for vending in public spaces. Similarly, in Uruguay, the *Intendencia* of Montevideo temporarily waived fees for commercial use of public space, including for market and street vendors,¹⁰ and extended the validity of the yearly authorization for mobile food kiosks. These support measures show, on the one hand, the key role that local governments play in regulating informal trade. On the other hand, supporting vendors' livelihoods by lowering the costs of accessing and using public space hints at an official recognition of informal vendors' role in the local economy, and in particular in the food distribution chain.

Measures to ensure health and safety in the workplace

All surveyed countries passed occupational health and safety regulations during imposed lockdowns for those categories designated as essential. In most cases, measures to ensure health and safety in the workplace targeted formal enterprises. Where informal vendors were allowed to work, authorities issued some form of health protocols regulating their activity. Most regulations targeted markets. Only in a few cases, local governments issued health and safety regulations covering street vendors.

Health and safety regulations covering vendors in the public space focused on two main strategies to curb the spread of the virus: 1) avoiding overcrowding in markets and around stalls and 2) ensuring the observance of proper hygiene by vendors and customers. Regulations included minimum distance between stalls, routine cleaning of markets, rotation of vendors, reorganization of vending spaces and wearing of masks and gloves. Notably, it was local, rather than national governments, that adopted these regulations. For example, the municipality of Montevideo, Uruguay, provided detailed hygiene guidelines for all street vendors, covering social distancing, cleaning and sanitizing stalls, and handling of products – adding to previous regulations that “recommended” that citizens must “try and minimize the length of their stay in high traffic commercial areas”.

In Guatemala, local authorities adopted health protocols for municipal markets, mandating distancing and the use of PPE. In an effort to better manage the implementation of health and safety regulations (Municipal Council of Ciudad Vieja 2020), a few local governments mandated food vendors to relocate to specific spaces, prohibiting sales in any other location. The Municipal Council of Santa Caterina Mita issued a regulation (*acuerdo*) ordering the relocation of all vending activities¹¹ to

¹⁰ The resolution talks about “enterprises”, and article 2 talks about micro, small and medium enterprises and explains that, in order to get the waiver, one needs to prove their registration with PYME; however, article 1 talks about: *ferias especiales, ferias permanentes, mercados vecinales, venta callejera, escaparates, quioscos fijos, quioscos rodantes, garitas de vigilancia, paradores, juegos en parque, emprendimientos apoyados por la Unidad Mypes y productores familiares*, (special fairs, permanent fairs, neighborhood markets, street vending, shop windows, stationary kiosks, moving kiosks, guard posts, inns, games in the park, enterprises supported by the Mypes Unit and family producers) which are unlikely to be registered as enterprises.

¹¹ The *Acuerdo* includes both formal and informal vending establishments, and expressly mentions vendors selling on streets or in neighborhood (mini) markets.

designated spaces – a multipurpose space in *Barrio del Centro*, the central market, and the *Centro Commercial Municipal*. The municipality of Ciudad Vieja issued an ordinance making it mandatory for street vendors to relocate to markets, and banning all informal vending on streets.

When the infection rate started subsiding at the beginning of the summer 2020, countries faced the challenging task of balancing health concerns with the need to reopen the economy. In Mexico City, local authorities adopted regulations that permitted reopening of markets, while containing and preventing the spread of the virus by specifying the distancing of stalls and mandatory routine cleaning. On 22 May, the municipality of Coyoacan issued a resolution (*acuerdo*) regulating that vendors at street markets (*tianguis*) and itinerant markets (*mercados sobre ruedas*) be at least 3 metres apart, and allowed only market vendors of essential items, including food, hardware and cleaning supplies, to operate. Notably, the regulation stated that these provisions did not extend to street vendors, who were still banned from vending. On June 8, the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico* of Mexico City issued a health protocol regulating the operations of the central market (*Central de Abasto*), including sanitizing, distancing of stalls, and mask-wearing. Mexico City's *Jefatura de Gobierno* (Head of Government) mandated a routine cleaning of *tianguis* and *mercados sobre ruedas*, to be carried out at least 6 times per day, and closure at 4 pm.

On August 26, just past the peak of the pandemic, the city of Bogota, in Colombia, started reopening its economy. A local government resolution set the rules of the “New Reality”, a plan that allowed economic activities to resume within mandatory opening hours and days. Under the plan, which sought to “ensure care and self-care in the public space”, informal vendors could go back to work in designated areas between 5 am and 9 pm from Wednesday to Sunday, following “biosecurity protocols” that mandated mask wearing, distancing of at least two metres, and periodic cleaning and disinfecting of the workplace and products.

In São Paulo, Brazil, where the local government adopted lockdown regulations, informal vendors were allowed to go back to work on July 20 under a strict biosafety protocol, adopted with the participation of vendors' associations and unions. Working hours could not exceed a maximum of six per day, and vendors had to observe a minimum distance of 1.5 metres between their stalls, wear masks at all times and provide their customers with hand sanitizers. In addition, they could only help one customer at a time and commerce of non-essential goods was prohibited.

In contrast, few national authorities issued health and safety regulations covering street vending. In Chile, the Ministry of the Economy, Development and Tourism, and the Minister of Agriculture approved an extensive health and sanitation protocol (Government of Chile, Ministry of the Economy, Development and Tourism and Ministry of Agriculture 2020) to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 in the so-called *ferias libres* (markets) (Rivera and Matus 2020). These large hubs for food vendors scattered throughout the cities proved vital for the provision of healthy food at affordable prices at the height of the pandemic. In Bolivia, as early as June 2020, a national law ordered all autonomous territorial entities to disinfect public spaces, public markets and *centros de abasto*.



Doris Barrientos, 35, the daughter of street vendors, has been selling vegetables independently for 15 years in Lima, Peru. She lives with her 3 siblings, whom she supported during the COVID-19 crisis. Photo credit: Victor Mallqui

The provision of health and safety guidelines regulating informal vending points to local governments' recognition of informal vendors as essential economic actors. By creating safe conditions for vendors and customers, these regulations strike the balance between protecting public health and supporting the fragile livelihoods of those working day-to-day. Yet, workers found themselves burdened by extra costs and obligations, facing heavy sanctions in case of violations of the health and safety protocols, including confiscation of their goods. With the exception of Bolivia, where local authorities assumed responsibility for the sanitation of public markets, regulations left workers with the responsibility to acquire PPE, supply handwashing stations and cleaning products, and sanitize their workplace and products.

IV. Social protection

Across the region, governments acted swiftly in instituting temporary social protection measures to tackle the unprecedented socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic. With the exception of Nicaragua, all the surveyed countries passed national legislation creating new or expanding already existing mechanisms of social assistance¹² that either directly or indirectly targeted informal vendors.

Fourteen national governments enacted legislation instituting cash transfers and ten of them innovated by recognizing informal workers as entitled legal subjects in their own

¹² For a comprehensive view on social protection for informal workers, see WIEGO. 2019. *Extending social protection to informal workers*.

right. Another common measure – legislated in 14 countries on both local and national levels – was the distribution of goods in kind, particularly food, immediately upon the adoption of lockdown measures, ensuring that people remained home without starving. In 14 countries, legal provisions on utilities instituted exoneration from or suspension of fees, mandated the maintenance of services regardless of payment, or implemented social fees, charging rates lower than usual, and thus acknowledging the lack of income to pay for these services. Finally, in seven countries, laws guaranteed access to housing, and, in 14 countries, other forms of support were provided, such as price control for essential items and tax relief.

The table below summarizes these main forms of social protection responses identified in the laws and regulations passed in Latin America, mostly by national governments, but in some cases, also by local governments, detailing country information for each of them.

Table 5 – Social protection measures legislated by Latin American governments in response to the pandemic

Countries	Types of measures legislated				
	Cash transfer (new programs and/or expansion of existing ones)	Delivery of goods (food, medicine, masks and basic hygiene items)	Utilities – water, electricity, gas, phone, mobile, TV and internet (suspension or exoneration of payment, maintenance in lack of payment, implementation of social fees)	Housing measures (prohibition of eviction, rent control/freeze and/or new housing programs)	Other forms of support (tax relief and price control of essential items)
Argentina	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bolivia	✓	✓	✓		✓
Brazil	✓	✓	✓		✓
Chile	✓		✓		✓
Colombia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Costa Rica	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ecuador	✓	✓	✓		✓
El Salvador	✓	✓	✓		✓
Guatemala	✓	✓	✓		✓
Honduras	✓	✓	✓		✓
Mexico	✓ (Mexico City)	✓			✓
Panama	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Paraguay	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peru	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Uruguay	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

In the following sections we discuss some of the requirements imposed by social protection laws and regulations, as well as features of the measures they established, examining whether and how they potentially benefited informal vendors.

Cash transfers

The great majority of the countries surveyed approved national laws that put in place at least one, but often more than one, cash transfer program. These programs were either specifically tailored to respond to the economic needs created by the pandemic, or consisted of an expansion in coverage and/or amount of resources distributed through existing social assistance programs.

There are two general trends in the laws creating cash transfers. First, and foremost, informal vendors are, on paper at least, beneficiaries of these programs, either as informal workers – a novelty in the region – or as part of the poor and/or vulnerable population. Second, the laws showed a strong political willingness to identify and reach their beneficiaries through adopting innovative ways of registration and delivery by using digital technology and multiple platforms.

Ten countries enacted laws creating cash transfer programs that explicitly named informal workers, self-employed workers or people working in the informal economy as their entitled beneficiaries, along with other groups. These were Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. The description of some of these laws that we provide below is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather aims to highlight the ways in which they recognized informal vendors and framed their emergency needs.

Paraguay was the first country to explicitly acknowledge the impact of the pandemic on informal workers' livelihoods in late March 2020. The same national law declaring the state of emergency and establishing administrative, fiscal and financial measures in response to it, authorized the executive branch of government "to implement measures to safeguard the income of workers in informality". As such, the Minister of the Economy set up a benefit corresponding to 25 per cent of the minimum salary for self-employed workers and workers in micro, small and medium enterprises. While the law stated that beneficiaries did not have to be registered in the national taxpayer system, it excluded anyone who was already a recipient of other forms of social support. Registration for the program could be done through a website, a hotline and WhatsApp.

The newly established emergency income in Argentina expressly recognized the impact of the pandemic, and particularly, the lockdown measures, on informal workers' livelihoods. In the preamble of the law on *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia*, the President acknowledged the insufficiency of existing social protection policies to safeguard the income of households "whose immediate subsistence depends on what they make day by day with their work". The law mandated that a sum of ten thousand pesos (USD 113) be transferred to those unemployed, working in the informal economy, and autonomous and domestic workers.

Similarly, the Brazilian national law that created the *Benefício Emergencial* of 600 reais (USD 223) explicitly named informal workers as one of the beneficiary groups. Studies have shown that the benefit proved particularly important for informal vendors, who are among those most suffering from job loss due to the pandemic (de Carvalho et al 2020). The regulation provided that those already receiving some public benefit would obtain the amount automatically. All others had to register on the program's website or through a phone app. Even though more than 50 million Brazilians used their phones

to apply for a digital bank account and receive the emergency benefit, street vendors reported difficulties in accessing it (de Oliveira 2020). The city of São Paulo, recognizing their specific needs, adopted a municipal law creating a temporary additional benefit of 100 reais (USD 18) for informal vendors registered in the local street vending database.

In announcing the law regulating the national economic emergency plan, Chile's President specifically named informal workers as one of the beneficiary groups, stating that "this will especially benefit the 2.6 million informal workers, without labor contract, who do not have the unemployment protection today" (Government of Chile Prensa 2020). And, indeed, the law on *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia* was directed at families with informal income. Through the law that established *Plan Panamá Solidario*, Panamanian informal workers, including vendors, were the first group to receive cash transfers, along with the unemployed and formal workers with suspended labor contracts. In Guatemala, the law that established the emergency cash grant named informal and self-employed workers as beneficiaries, as did the Honduran law that created the *Bono Único*, which distributed 2,000 lempiras (USD 136) per beneficiary.

Peru was by far the country with the largest cash transfer initiative in the region, managing to reach almost 70 per cent of its population with some form of legislated social relief (Rubio et al 2020). In addition to three programs targeting vulnerable and poor families, *Bono Urbano* (*Yo me quedo en casa*), *Bono Rural* and *Bono Familiar Universal*, a national law instituted a program aimed specifically at own-account workers, called *Bono Independiente*. The program was the result of coalitional advocacy work that included WIEGO, the media and several actors, who pushed for the recognition of own-account informal workers, including vendors, as among the most adversely affected by the lockdown. Similar to other countries, the government faced difficulties in identifying the intended beneficiaries and WIEGO shared lists of workers – including 10,000 names from multiple sectors – with the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion and the Ministry of Environment to seek their inclusion (Ogando and Abizaid 2020).

On the local level, a municipal law in Montevideo created the *Programa de empleo solidario*, which provided a minimum salary for 1,000 people with no formal income, for three months. The beneficiaries among 47,000 applicants were chosen by lottery, with quotas for afro-descendants and transgender and disabled people, as well as gender parity.

Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Uruguay (with the exception of Montevideo) legislated only cash transfer programs directed at individuals and families in conditions of poverty and/or vulnerability, with no explicit recognition of informal vendors. And in two countries (Mexico and Nicaragua) we did not identify any law or regulation instituting a national cash transfer program. However, while Nicaragua simply ignored the issue, in Mexico there were some local legislative measures. Mexico City passed a municipal law instituting the distribution of a grant of 3,000 pesos (USD 151) for street vendors preparing and selling food in July 2020. In September, the local *Secretaria de Trabajo y Fomento al Empleo* set up another cash transfer benefiting domestic, non-salaried, seasonal, autonomous/informal workers, and market and street vendors. Finally, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Paraguay also extended already existing money transfer programmes to either expand their coverage or increase the amount of support.

Delivery of goods

Across all the countries surveyed, food security was a common concern, reflected not only in the laws and regulations that sought to avoid disruption of the food supply chain but also in legislation mandating the distribution of in kind goods for the most vulnerable groups. In addition to food, several local and national governments supplied sanitation and personal hygiene products, and in some cases, medicines. Among the countries that legislated the distribution of food were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. Most of these countries targeted children at school age, ensuring they would access the meals they would have enjoyed had schools been open. Honduras supplied 800,000 families in need with basic food baskets through its *Honduras Solidaria* programme and also distributed hygiene kits for vulnerable groups. Argentina, in turn, supplied medicine for patients with chronic diseases, and hygiene items for poor families. In Mexico, the national program addressed especially the needs of indigenous and Afro-mexican communities, while local legislation in Mexico City established the delivery of food baskets for people in need. The city of São Paulo, in Brazil, ensured that the poor had access to breakfast, lunch and dinner. And the municipality of Montevideo, in Uruguay, provided food and cleaning supplies for the most vulnerable groups. Because of the challenges faced by informal vendors in accessing the cash transfer programs, the distribution of food, medicine, sanitation and personal hygiene items was an important measure to ensure they would have the minimum essentials at the height of the crisis.

Exoneration from fees, social fees for utilities and prohibition of suspension for non-payment

The majority of countries across the region passed national laws prohibiting the suspension of utilities for lack of payment, including water, gas, electricity, telephone, cable and internet. A few countries took a step further and exonerated poor families from payment for a certain period, while others instituted so-called social fees, charging rates lower than usual.

In Argentina, for example, a national law prohibited the suspension of the supply of water, gas, electricity, telephone, cable and internet services, for the duration of the pandemic, and established a social fee for water. As telecommunication was declared essential, any increase in the respective tariff was also prohibited. Neighboring Uruguay passed a law banning the disconnection of telecommunication and electricity services due to non-payment, and Chile mandated sanitation, gas, electricity, telephone and internet services provision to continue to low income households in spite of lack of payment. Similarly, Panama banned the suspension of electricity provision for lack of payment during the state of emergency and later provided free utilities, electricity, telephone, mobile and internet, a measure also taken by Paraguay. Bolivia took several legislative measures to ensure utilities for those who had lost income, namely by reducing electricity and water supply fees, providing telecommunication services free of charge for the duration of the quarantine and prohibiting discontinuation of services due to lack of payment for the duration of the emergency.

Other countries took limited measures. For example, a national law in Brazil only ensured the provision of electricity regardless of payment and Costa Rica ordered the freeze of utilities fees, while also ensuring free access to water.

Housing measures

A few countries approved laws creating new housing policies, to ensure that individuals and families had a place to shelter and could thus comply with stay home orders and quarantine obligations. Argentina, for example, passed national laws suspending evictions, extending rental agreements and determining the freeze of rental prices until January 31, 2021. In Brazil, the city of Belo Horizonte, which has a long history of participatory budgeting for housing and a strong and well-organized homeless movement, provided housing support for low-income families. In Uruguay, where evictions were prohibited by national law, the local government of Montevideo instituted housing benefits for up to two months for individuals and families living in temporary housing. The preamble of the resolution justified the measure referring to the abrupt loss of income experienced by both formal and informal workers as a result of the pandemic. Interestingly, the policy also included coordination with a strategic litigation clinic to facilitate access to legal aid for individuals and households whose right to housing might have been violated due to the emergency. Costa Rica passed legislation instituting rent relief measures and prohibiting evictions, as did Paraguay. Panama suspended all eviction procedures and mandated a freeze on residential rental for the duration of the emergency, in addition to passing a national law that created a solidary housing fund for families in both the formal and informal economy.

Other forms of support

Latin American countries were also creative in legislating other forms of emergency support that could help address the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, and which also benefited informal vendors. Argentina, Honduras and Chile passed laws that fixed maximum consumer prices for food and hygiene items, and health services, to ensure people's continued access to such essential goods.

Tax reduction or exemption, loans with low interest rates, and extension of time limits to solve tax debts with no late fees and interest, were another common measure adopted across countries, both through national and local regulations. These measures, however, rarely benefit informal vendors as they operate, for the most part, outside of the tax system. Uruguay was among the few exceptions that explicitly targeted self-employed workers from vulnerable groups who either produce or distribute goods or services, passing a law that reduced their taxes by 40 per cent. A municipal law in Bogota, Colombia, suspended, for the entire duration of the emergency, the payment of fees for the use of space in markets. The measure benefited vendors prohibited from working due to lockdown, including the elderly, those observing preventative isolation, those selling non-essential goods and individuals at high risk of infection.

Overall, the volume of social protection laws and regulations passed by Latin American countries in response to the pandemic is, in and of itself, remarkable. However, even more striking is the fact that laws and regulations were indeed the preferred instrument to do so. Historically, social protection has been treated as a form of humanitarian relief, an assistance provided at the discretion of power holders, for a limited period of time, to recipients often treated in demeaning ways as "aid beneficiaries" (Devereux, McGregor and Sabates-Wheeler 2011: 11). Therefore, the use of the legislative tool to enshrine social protection, at a time of crisis when rapid responses are required, is more than a mere

step forward in comparison to the latter model. It signals a shift in the ways governments address citizens as holders of social rights, which are also justiciable in case of non-compliance by states. To keep governments in line with the COVID-19 social protection laws and regulations enacted, there are several examples of civil society initiatives across the region that took the matter to Courts.

V. Conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis is both a health and an economic crisis. Our analysis points to two dimensions of COVID-19 laws and regulations in Latin America that are particularly relevant for informal vendors: 1) whether such laws and regulations designate informal vendors as essential, allowing them to work while protecting their health and safety; and 2) whether laws and regulations include informal vendors in social assistance measures, allowing them to stay home to avoid contagion without losing their income.

We identified emergency laws and regulations that recognized informal vendors as workers by protecting their health and supporting their livelihoods. Twelve countries adopted regulations allowing informal vendors selling food to continue their activity. This is an express recognition of the essential role they play in the food distribution chain and in ensuring food security. Similarly, legislation in 10 countries expressly named informal workers as beneficiaries, along with other social groups, of the new cash transfers created to respond to the loss of income caused by the pandemic. Both forms of recognition were enshrined in legislation for the first time in the region.

The recognition that COVID-19 laws and regulations afforded informal vendors was, however, limited and uneven and, in some cases, failed to produce its intended effects. First of all, in all countries, with the sole exception of Uruguay, emergency legislation mandated vendors selling items other than food to suspend their activity. A second limitation was governments' preferential regulation of markets over street vending. This was the case in Colombia, Honduras, Panama, El Salvador and Mexico, where regulations included detailed lists of authorized food distribution activities. Such lists expressly mentioned markets, omitting street food vendors. Only in Montevideo (Uruguay), and in Guatemala did regulations expressly designate informal food street vendors as essential workers. In other countries, the lack of an express recognition of informal vendors as essential workers left them vulnerable to discretionary interpretation of the law by those in charge of its implementation; this happened in the municipality of Comas, Lima, where street vendors were fined and evicted for violating stay home orders, irrespective of whether they sold food (Ogando and Abizaid 2020).

Another issue worth reflecting on is the allocation of costs for the implementation of health and safety measures and the supply of PPE. With the exception of Bolivia, health regulations and protocols expressly mandated essential food vendors to clean and sanitize their vending spaces and buy masks and sanitizing gel, and, consequently, to bear the related costs. Conversely, occupational health and safety regulations covering essential wage workers, like those issued in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Guatemala, Peru, and Uruguay, clearly established the obligation of employers to provide PPE to employees, to ensure a safe workspace and to provide information and education about

COVID-19 prevention. This situation points, once again, to the rights deficit affecting informal vendors, who, as self-employed workers, bear the responsibility and financial burden of ensuring OHS in their workplace, while their fragile livelihoods can hardly sustain the additional cost of PPE and cleaning products. Unique among the countries in our sample, Bolivian local authorities took it upon themselves to cover these additional costs of doing business during the COVID-19 crisis. This example is a step towards the recognition of informal vendors as workers and a measure of social and economic justice, which local authorities in other countries should consider following.

Access to social assistance was also problematic. While informal vendors were expressly recognized in cash transfer programs as an economic sector to be supported during the pandemic, reports across the region show the difficulty they faced in effectively accessing these funds. For example, in Argentina, street vendors could not access the *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia*. Such was the case in Buenos Aires, where 77 per cent of vendors are migrants, many of whom are undocumented and are thus unable to fulfill legal requirements. Organizations such as *Vendedores Ambulantes Independientes de Once* (VAIO), *Vendedores Ambulantes Organizados* (VAO) and the section of workers in public spaces of the *Unión de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de la Economía Popular* (UTEP) assisted vendors, who often lacked information and access to internet, to enroll in the programs, and distributed food to those who could not access the benefit (Hopp, et al 2020). In Brazil, even though more than 50 million people used their phones to apply for a digital bank account to receive the emergency benefit, street vendors reported difficulties in accessing the benefit (de Oliveira 2020). Similar to other countries, the Peruvian government faced difficulties in identifying the intended cash transfer beneficiaries and WIEGO shared lists of informal workers – including 10,000 names of workers from multiple sectors – with the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion and the Ministry of Environment to seek their inclusion. Even so, only 50 per cent of the workers interviewed in Lima said they had received cash transfers as of June 11, 2020 (Ogando and Abizaid 2020). Informal vendors' lack of access to the cash transfers is a good example of how legal recognition alone is not enough; public policy needs to be designed with their participation and knowledge so it can effectively match their lived reality and needs. However, this was not the rule in COVID-19 policymaking in the region.

Another gap in Latin American governments' responses to the pandemic is the lack of participation of informal vendors in their planning and design. Our data shows that while some countries, such as Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Panama, created institutional spaces for enabling social dialogue in the design of public policies to tackle the pandemic, these spaces were largely technocratic and focused solely on the health crisis. Participation of informal vendors' organizations in the making of the regulations affecting them under the ongoing pandemic is nonetheless crucial for at least two reasons. First, their participation ensures that regulations reflect the needs and demands of informal vendors, and thus are effective in addressing the specific impact of the pandemic upon their members. Second, as a matter of democratic legitimacy, those affected by states' laws and policies must have the opportunity and means to influence the decision-making process. Therefore, informal vendors' organizations not only should have been included in the deliberative processes but should also have been guaranteed the conditions to do so in effective and meaningful ways (ILO 2020). Where informal vendors' organizations were able to influence COVID-19 policymaking processes, this was the result of their continuous

struggle and political strategy, rather than an official invitation to participate. Some successful examples include an agreement signed between the city of São Paulo and several representatives of the street vending sector, which allowed street vending activities to resume on July 13, 2020; StreetNet affiliates' successful advocacy for the suspension of a fee for the use of public space by street vendors in Bogotá, Colombia (Semana 2020); and the ability of informal workers in the so-called triple frontier region (Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina) to secure a cash transfer benefit for the months of November and December 2020, and January 2021, in addition to an exemption of payment for water and electricity services (Gomez 2020).

The COVID-19 crisis laid bare pre-existing structural inequalities caused by the lack of recognition of informal vendors as workers entitled to labour rights and protection. Notwithstanding a lack of consistent and deliberate governmental strategies supporting informal vendors, our review found promising examples of first-time legal recognition that could lead the way to further and more durable gains. The challenge for Latin American governments, at both national and local levels, is to use the post COVID-19 recovery phase as an opportunity to expand and consolidate these advances. This requires rethinking their approach towards informal vendors, by building on the good practices of recognition and protection established during the crisis, and capitalizing on the potential of informal vendors to contribute to the inclusiveness and sustainability of urban economies (United Nations 2017). It entails adopting legislation that enhances the “livelihoods, working conditions and income security, legal and social protection, access to skills and other support services” (United Nations 2017: 17) of informal vendors. Finally, it includes recognizing their right “to organize and to be represented in relevant rule-setting, policymaking and collective bargaining processes” (Chen 2012: 14), so that they have a voice in the design and implementation of policies affecting their livelihoods.

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About WIEGO

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