



Workers in informal employment stand in solidarity with care workers and call for high-quality care services for all

The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), StreetNet International, HomeNet International, the International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP), Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India, and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) welcome the report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on Decent work and the care economy, prepared for the [112th Session of the International Labour Conference](#).

Care is central to human, social and economic well-being, as well as to sustained economic development and decent work. A common understanding of the care economy and its composition, and recognition of care as a public good are critical. We support the [IDWF's definition of care](#) and the **5R framework** proposed by the ILO to **recognize, reduce and redistribute** women's unequal share of unpaid care work, **reward** care workers fairly for their tremendous contribution, and ensure the **representation** of care workers – many of whom are women workers in informal employment – through their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

1. The right to care services and social protection

All workers have the right to high-quality, accessible, adaptable and acceptable care services in order to participate in the labour market.¹ Most workers in informal employment live in poverty and earn low and irregular incomes. Given the deeply gendered nature of care work, the lack of access to high-quality care services, such as child care and care for older persons, disproportionately increases women's unpaid care work and affects their choice of employment, working hours, place of work and earnings. This is one factor that contributes to a higher proportion of women than men in informal employment across Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America.²

Globally, workers in informal employment are less likely to benefit from social protection that supports care provision, such as maternity protections, health-care coverage, pensions, and child, disability and sickness benefits. These workers are the "missing middle" in social protection policies as they are not covered by social insurance (contributory) or by targeted social assistance (non-contributory) schemes.³ This continues despite recognition of the right to social security for all workers under ILO Convention No. 102 and other relevant labour standards:

Ratification and implementation of ILO Convention No. 156 and Recommendation No. 165 on Workers with Family Responsibilities, which outline measures to promote equal opportunities and equal employment treatment to men and women with family responsibilities.

¹ Moussié, Rachel. 2020. "[Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers.](#)" Policy Brief No. 2. Joint production of the ILO and WIEGO.

² ILO. 2018. [Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture \(third edition\)](#).

³ ILO. 2021. [World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future](#).

C156 prohibits employment discrimination based on family responsibilities and recognizes the need to alleviate the excessive workload carried by these workers, particularly women.

Ratification and implementation of ILO C189 and R201 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, which grants domestic workers rights and protections equal to those applicable to other categories of wage workers. It defines basic rights, conditions of employment, working hours, remuneration, occupational health and safety conditions, child labour standards, migrant labour, and social security guidelines – including maternity protection.

Implementation of ILO R204 on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy, which centres the exclusion of workers in the informal economy from social protection by clearly recommending that member States extend – in law and in practice – social security benefits, including maternity protection, to all workers in the informal economy (art.18). R204 also calls for the provision of child care and other care services to enable women workers to seek more secure employment in the formal economy (art. 21).

2. Extending maternity protections to self-employed workers in informal employment

Globally, self-employed workers represent 64 per cent of workers in informal employment⁴. The overwhelming majority are not employers but own-account workers and contributing family workers. Women workers in many low- and middle-income countries are concentrated in these forms of employment and often lack access to maternity protections. ILO Convention on Maternity Protections (no. 183) has been ratified by 43 countries. The ILO estimates that only 14 per cent of self-employed women live in countries where the law provides for mandatory maternity benefits for self-employed mothers.⁵ For governments to extend maternity coverage to self-employed workers, a mix of non-contributory and contributory measures are needed. For example, Mongolia has a multi-tiered design for maternity protection, including 1) mandatory social insurance contributions for formal-sector employees, 2) voluntary contributions to the same social insurance scheme for herders, self-employed workers and workers in informal employment, and 3) maternity cash benefits under the Social Welfare Scheme provided to all pregnant women and mothers of infants regardless of their contribution to the social insurance scheme, employment status or nationality.⁶

3. Expanding high-quality public child-care services for workers in informal employment

Workers in informal employment, especially women, are demanding high-quality public child-care services that are accessible from their homes in low-income areas, or near their workplaces, and that are open during their working hours.

Home-based workers may rely on kin networks for child care or pay for unregulated child-care services in their neighbourhoods. Keeping young children at home while women work is not safe or desirable for many reasons including their exposure to hazardous materials used by home-based workers. In addition, caring for a young child while working negatively affects home-based workers' productivity and reduces their earnings as many are paid on a time or piece rate basis.⁷ The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) initiated innovative child-care centres called Balsewas,

⁴ ILO. 2018. [Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture \(third edition\)](#).

⁵ ILO. 2022. [Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work](#), pg. 75.

⁶ ILO. 2016. [Maternity cash benefits for workers in the informal economy](#).

⁷ [Cooperatives meeting informal economy workers' child care needs](#) – a joint ILO and WIEGO initiative. 2018. [Childcare Center](#) – Khokana Women Awareness Society.

which provide safe, high-quality and affordable child-care services primarily for women in informal employment.⁸ Balsewa centres are run as cooperatives and have helped home-based workers increase their days of work and thereby their income.

As **street vendors and market traders** often have no other option than to bring their children to unsafe workplaces,⁹ they are highlighting their need for appropriate child-care facilities near their workplaces. Workers' organizations in Ghana, Rwanda and South Africa have, to varying extents, worked with municipal authorities to establish infrastructure for the provision of child-care services in and around markets, and early childhood development guidelines.¹⁰ Child-care services in and around markets enable women traders to continue breastfeeding as per World Health Organization guidance and provide a safe place of learning for young children who accompany their caregivers to markets.¹¹

For **waste pickers**, a key resolution adopted at the founding congress of the IAWP is to promote strategies among its affiliates for the eradication of child labour and supporting education and socio-community care projects. It is a priority to keep waste pickers' children away from dumpsites, landfills and/ or sorting centres so they are not exposed to hazardous materials, chemicals and waste, and do not engage in child labour. Creating spaces and support networks focused on the care, recreation and education of waste pickers' children around the world is critical. In Argentina, FACCyR UTEP set up child-care cooperatives for waste pickers' children that operate in the evenings when waste pickers collect recyclables from office buildings. These cooperatives are worker-run and owned, with high-quality service delivery and high levels of trust between child-care workers and parents. The cooperatives receive subsidies from the state, which reduce the running costs and fees.

Domestic workers face a cruel double burden in that they provide both direct and indirect care for their employers' households while taking on the lion's share of unpaid care work in their own homes. Though domestic workers account for 25 per cent of care workers globally, their work is undervalued and underpaid, and they are often without adequate labour and social protections. They also lack the time and resources to ensure their dependants receive adequate care. Migrant and live-in domestic workers often have to leave their children to be raised by kin with inadequate access to high-quality public care services, even though their earnings and remittances contribute to their countries' economic development.

4. Providing long-term care services and social protection for older workers

Globally, formal long-term care services are scarce, with a significant number of older individuals lacking coverage. Staggeringly, 84 per cent of the world's population lives in countries where long-term care services are neither universal nor free, significantly affecting 250 million older persons. Out of 179 countries, only 89 have established statutory provisions for public long-term care services for older persons. Moreover, in 70 countries, legal obligations are imposed on family members to care for their older relatives, exacerbating the already burdensome caregiving responsibilities placed on women.¹²

⁸ [Balsewa Benefits: SEWA's Innovative Child Care Centres and Workers.](#)

⁹ Latam Gremial. 2024. [El trabajo de la venta ambulante: cómo una pareja de líderes obreros guatemaltecos lo ha equilibrado todo.](#) Video with [Nuria's testimony](#) (from Costa Rica).

¹⁰ <https://www.wiego.org/child-care-markets>

¹¹ Horwood, C., Surie, A., Haskins, L. et al. 2020. [Attitudes and perceptions about breastfeeding among female and male informal workers in India and South Africa.](#) BMC Public Health 20, 875.

¹² ILO. 2022. [Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work.](#)

Data from several countries indicates that older persons with lower socioeconomic status and educational attainment often have greater long-term care needs.¹³ Workers in informal employment face a heightened risk of requiring long-term care due to exposure to health hazards and limited access to adequate health care throughout their working lives. They also often do not have enough savings and pensions to afford long-term care services. This disproportionately impacts women, who have longer life expectancy, more limited financial resources, and are expected to serve as caregivers for their family members well into their later years.¹⁴

We share the ILO's stance that long-term care rights are integral to **universal social protection and health care**, emphasizing governments' obligation to develop comprehensive national policy frameworks that consider the intersectional needs of women workers in informal employment.

5. Solidarity with all care workers

The ILO recognizes that many care workers are women in informal employment who are from disadvantaged situations, including migrant workers, women from racial, caste and ethnic minorities, and women from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds. The ILO estimates that 81 per cent of domestic workers are informally employed.¹⁵ The IDWF organizes and mobilizes domestic workers so that governments respect and promote their rights at work.

Labour and social protections must also be extended to child-care workers and community health-care workers who form the backbone of care services and are often women in informal employment.¹⁶ Better labour-force statistics are needed to make visible this essential workforce. SEWA has long worked to train community health workers to link women workers in informal employment to government social security schemes and care services.¹⁷

6. Nothing for us without us

Social dialogue is critical in shaping and embedding the 5R framework in national contexts. Organizations of workers in informal employment must be included in decision-making processes and be able to negotiate collectively on issues that impact them. For example, in Thailand, HomeNet Thailand – a home-based workers' organization – sits on the National Health Security Board to ensure that the occupational health and safety needs of workers in informal employment are represented alongside other workers and population groups in the national health coverage scheme.¹⁸

Organizations of workers in informal employment actively engage in broad civil society coalitions calling for universal social protection and high-quality public care services. This advocacy is strengthened through the collaboration of trade unions and organizations of workers in informal employment.

¹³ Lou Tessier, Nathalie De Wulf and Yuta Momose. 2022. [Long-term care in the context of population ageing: a rights-based approach to universal coverage](#). ILO Working Paper No. 82.

¹⁴ ILO. 2022. [Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work](#).

¹⁵ ILO. 2024. Decent work and the care economy, ILC 112/Report VI.

¹⁶ Moussié, Rachel. 2020. ["Extending childcare services to workers in the informal economy: Policy lessons from country experiences."](#) Policy Brief No. 3. Joint production of the ILO and WIEGO.

¹⁷ Annie Devenish and Laura Alfes. 2019. [Bridges to Better Lives: SEWA's Community Health Workers](#). WIEGO Workers' Lives No. 7.

¹⁸ Laura Alfes and Chidchanok Samantrakul. 2019. [Integrating Occupational Health into Public Health Provision: The Case of HomeNet Thailand](#). WIEGO Policy Brief No. 18.