

Worker Organizations Uphold Democracy Amid Rising Conflict and Authoritarianism

On International Workers' Day, we stand united as a global movement of workers in the informal economy with a simple message: join hands with us in our fight to defend democracy, justice and the rights and liberation of all workers and communities.

Amid rising conflict and authoritarianism, our call for workers' unity and solidarity is urgent.

Militarism, War and Authoritarianism Threaten Workers' Rights and Protections

The rise of global insecurity, including conflicts in Ukraine and Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the escalation of the war across the Middle East, has led to devastating loss of civilian life and displacement and damage of critical infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. Migrant workers – including domestic workers – in the Middle East are among those [hardest hit by the ongoing military conflict](#), as well as thousands of workers in different countries displaced and suffering from border closures and trade blocks. Many are facing job loss, unpaid wages and barriers to evacuation, all while providing essential services.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has led to disruptions in oil, gas and fertilizer supply chains, resulting in price increases and fuel shortages, with experts predicting a [COVID-like economic shock](#). Stories are already emerging of [waste pickers unable to afford food](#) in India, street vendors in Indonesia seeing [prices double for packaging](#), and home-based workers in Bangladesh and Pakistan experiencing power and fuel shortages. Major supply chain disruptions are leading to reduced demand, fewer work opportunities and decreased incomes due to unpaid wages. As with the pandemic, workers in informal employment are likely to face the worst impacts of the fuel crisis given that many rely on a daily income and lack a safety net. Without immediate support such as cash grants, these socio-economic impacts could be felt for months, if not years.

At the same time, hard-fought labour protections are being stripped back by regressive neoliberal governments in [Argentina](#), [India](#), [EU countries](#) and many more. This is a clear pattern: in countries with more established labour regulations, governments are rolling them back, which will inevitably lead to more informal and precarious work. In countries where informality is widespread, governments have done little to address systemic exclusion, lack of consultation and lack of recognition. Or, they are actively [repressing and policing livelihoods](#), particularly street vendors working in public space. This comes at a time when inequality is rising, public services are increasingly underfunded and workers are among the most affected by the climate crisis. Workers who once had rights and workers who have never had rights are increasingly finding themselves in the same situation.

Worker Voice is the Counterbalance to the Power of Predatory Elites

We are essential workers who sustain economies and communities and protect the environment. Our networks, together with local and territorial organizations, seek to be schools of democracy led by the working class. Through collective practice and horizontal exchange, we build and defend transparent and accountable leadership, take democratic decisions, and organize together to challenge power and drive policy change. We make circularity and a just transition a reality by transforming discarded materials into value and preventing environmental harm.

Together with the organized labour movement and civil society organizations, our democratic organizations serve as the strongest antidote to the erosion of labour rights and the protection of democratic principles. Our hope lies in our collective power to ensure that the voice of the people creates a counterbalance to powerful government and business interests. When we respect people's right to a livelihood and to participate freely in public life, it reflects a democratic culture that values inclusion and decent work.

A Vision for a Just, Inclusive and Democratic Future

All workers have the right to work in safe, healthy and decent working conditions. Drawing from the shared demands of HomeNet International, the International Alliance of Waste Pickers, the International Domestic Workers Federation, StreetNet International and WIEGO, we demand to be recognized as workers with a seat at the table:

1. **Recognition and Rights:** Every person who labours – whether they have an employer or not – must be recognized as a worker who is entitled to basic labour rights and protections.

Governments must implement appropriate legal frameworks that guarantee labour rights to all workers in informal employment, including own-account workers (such as home-based workers, street vendors and market traders). The ILO Recommendation on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy (No. 204) sets out key steps governments can take to prevent the informalization of formal employment and to support rights-based formalization processes. Sector-specific demands include ratification and implementation of ILO Convention 189 (on domestic work) and 177 (on home work), protecting and recognizing waste pickers' right to a just transition in local and national circular economy policies and investments, and enacting city regulations that allow vendors to access and use public space for their livelihoods.

2. **Social Protection for All:** Access to social protection and healthcare is a right, regardless of employment conditions, place of work or migration status. Achieving universal social protection requires significant financing. In the current economic context, where workers' incomes are stagnating or declining, strengthening the role not only of the state but of capital in the financing of social protection is crucial. Workers should not have to bear the full cost of social protection on their own. To cope with the fuel crisis, government relief measures such as cash grants are essential in helping workers meet basic needs.
3. **Inclusion in Collective Bargaining and Social Dialogue:** ILO core labour standards on the Right to Organise (C87) and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining (C98) apply to all workers, regardless of whether workers are in an employment relationship. We demand a seat at the table and to be included in tripartite structures and all spaces where policies affecting our lives are shaped.
4. **A Just Ecological Transition:** Any transition towards a greener economy must be fair and inclusive, leaving no workers behind. The transition of workers in informal employment into formal labour systems should be recognized as a key pathway to sustainability, as it can improve livelihoods, strengthen labour rights and enhance environmental outcomes. The 34 million waste pickers who already sustain circular economies must be at the core of just transition policies.

This International Workers' Day, we recognize the strength of collective organization and global solidarity in countering authoritarianism and the erosion of labour rights. Through our networks, we are building power across borders, advancing workers' rights and responding collectively to crises. The path to social justice is clear: organize, unite, and transform systems together.



About HomeNet International

HomeNet International is a global network of membership-based workers' organizations that represents more than 1.5 million home-based workers, from 71 organizations spread across 30 countries. Visit www.homenetinternational.org.

About IAWP



The International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP) is a global union of 50 waste picker organizations, representing more than 460,000 workers across 34 countries. The IAWP is committed to advancing the rights and strengthening the organizing efforts of waste pickers. Visit www.wastepickersinternational.org.

About IDWF



The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) is internationally recognized as a Global Union Federation. Made up of 93 affiliates from 70 countries, the IDWF serves a membership of over 675,900 domestic/household workers. Most are organized in trade unions and others in associations, networks and worker cooperatives. Visit www.idwfed.org.

About StreetNet International



StreetNet International is a global organization of committed informal traders, with the goal to promote and leverage an autonomous and democratic alliance of street vendors, market vendors, hawkers and cross-border traders. StreetNet International is present in more than 50 countries and represents over 800,000 members worldwide. Visit www.streetnet.org.za.

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.