



# Position of StreetNet International on the Platform Economy and the digitalisation of the informal economy in view of the International Labour Conference - June 2026

As the global labor community convenes for the 114th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC), StreetNet International wishes to assert the voice of street and market vendors and hawkers in the discussion about platform economy and the overall digitalization of the world of work, particularly of the informal economy.

Our core mission is the defense of the own-account workers within the framework of the Decent Work Agenda and the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), which argues that the inclusion of platform workers in all social dialogue and labor protections is a requirement for a just transition to formality, as expressed in the ILO Recommendation 204, an imprescindible international instrument for everyone advocating in the space of informal economy.

## The Platform Economy as the "New Informal Economy"

The conceptualization of the platform economy is pivotal for the global labour movement. It demands strategic regulation. The International Council of StreetNet, during their most recent meeting, held in Nairobi in April 2026, has identified three critical drivers for a convergence of the interests of platform workers and street and market vendors. We firmly believe that own account workers working in the informal economy have several interests in common.

- **Active Participation in Online Vending:** Our members are not passive victims of technology; they are active participants, utilizing digital tools to buy and sell goods as a modern extension of their physical stalls.
- **Market Displacement:** Digital platforms have in many cases overtaken traditional sources of work, effectively moving the "street" into the digital space and necessitating a presence on these platforms for economic survival. This does not mean that platform workers have to be seen as competitors, but rather that our interests are aligned in demanding rights and recognition as workers.
- **Identity as "Own-Account Workers":** We reject the label of "micro-entrepreneurs", which does not reflect our genuine identity and reality. Our members remain own-account workers who possess a universal right to labor protections, regardless of whether their transactions occur on a sidewalk or through an application.



Digitalisation does not erase worker status: it complicates the mechanisms of exploitation by utilizing algorithms to obscure the responsibilities of the employer. **Digital and physical own-account workers have interests in common, namely a transparent regulation of platforms, and extension of labour rights to the informal economy workers through rights-based path to formalisation.**

### Structural barriers to formalisation

The path to formalization is currently blocked by structural barriers. Those are common struggles for us street vendors and for platform workers:

**Exclusion from Social Dialogue:** Traditional trade unions often maintain a prevailing right over social dialogue that effectively closes tripartite systems to both workers in the informal economy and platform workers, plus, the lack of recognition from governments about our status also excludes us from collective bargaining platforms.

**Employer Evasion of Duty:** Both platform workers and street and market vendors do not have employers, but they do have an economic dependency of structures that govern their work. In the case of platform workers, it is the digital platforms. In the case of street and market vendors, it's the municipalities, the market administration or owners, and other relevant authorities. These entities routinely evade their responsibilities in ensuring Decent Work for the own-account workers that depend on them.

**Taxation without Representation:** Governments are increasingly eager to tax platform workers while simultaneously denying them the rights and recognition that should accompany such contributions. **This situation is similar to the one of street and market vendors, who often pay both formal and hidden (direct or indirect) taxes to be able to work but see little in return. We demand that taxation should be progressive and be tied to the granting of full labor rights and a transition to formality.**

### Strategic Recommendations for the 114th Session of the ILC

«The survival and future of the labor movement depends on its ability to represent both the digitalised and the physical informal economy workers. **Global solidarity is the only tool capable of countering the rise of authoritarianism and the erosion of worker rights, facilitated among other factors by digital platforms.** By recognizing platform work as the digital evolution of more “traditional” forms of informal economy, we can ensure that the future of work is not one of exploitation and “taxation without representation,” but one of dignity, collective power, solidarity and human rights.

**We call upon all stakeholders at the 114th Session of the ILC to join us in securing a rights-based smooth formalization process for every own-account worker across the globe.**