



## **Advancing Inclusive Social Dialogue for Street Vendors and Informal Economy Workers: Position of StreetNet International prepared for the International Labour Conference 2026**

StreetNet International emphasizes the importance of understanding and participation of informal economy workers in the processes of social dialogue and tripartism, and further promotes strengthening inclusive nature of social dialogue, which will be outlined at the ILO Conference during the Recurrent Discussion Committee on Social dialogue and Tripartism.

Social dialogue is the foundation of democratic labour governance and social justice, and an essential tool to face the global challenges we face today. It also meant to ensure promoting decent work for all workers despite their formal or informal employment relationship.

StreetNet International – a global alliance of membership-based organizations of street and market vendors from 56 countries, uniting over 800 000 members, strongly believes that a meaningful social dialogue cannot exist while millions of workers remain excluded from dialogue spaces and decision-making processes that directly impact their lives - particularly, street and market vendors.

Street and market vendors, as one of the categories of informal economy workers, are usually excluded from traditionally existing social dialogue forums at national or local levels, despite the fact that the majority of the global workforce are engaged in informal employment.

Street vendors are among the workers most affected by informality and exclusion. Therefore, legal recognition of street and market vendors as legitimate social partners capable of speaking on behalf of themselves, is one of the key strategic goals of StreetNet and its affiliated organizations worldwide.

### **Street Vendors are Workers and Legitimate Social Dialogue Actors**

Street vendors contribute significantly to local economies, food systems, distribution networks, employment creation, and the social life of cities. Yet in the majority of countries, they continue to face harassment, criminalization, forced evictions, confiscation of goods, exclusion from social protection, and denial of labour rights. This systematic exclusion is linked to the absence of institutionalized social dialogue mechanisms that include organizations representing workers in the informal economy.

Decisions regarding urban planning, public space management, licensing systems, market infrastructure, law enforcement, and local economic development are usually made without consultation with the workers most affected.

For street vendors, participation must go beyond symbolic consultations. Representative organizations of democratically organized and governed street vendors must be recognized as legitimate negotiating actors with the right to engage in collective bargaining, policy dialogue, and decision-making processes concerning their livelihoods and working conditions at all levels.

This is consistent with the principles established in the ILO Recommendation No. 204, which emphasizes the importance of organization, voice, representation, and participation in social dialogue for workers in the informal economy. It also reflects the rights established under the ILO Fundamental Convention No. 87 and ILO Convention No. 98.



## Inclusive Social Dialogue requires structural change

Inclusive social dialogue requires approaches capable of reaching workers facing the greatest barriers to participation, especially women. Street vending presents specific realities that require sector-sensitive approaches rather than one-size-fits-all formalization models.

Formalization processes must not become mechanisms of exclusion that displace workers from their livelihoods through restrictive licensing systems, privatization of public space, or punitive regulation. Thus, we strongly insist that a fair formalization means workers should not be taxed excessively without granting them rights and representation within institutional structures.

Instead, formalization should be gradual, participatory, and rights-based. It should expand access to:

- Legal recognition
- Inclusion into social protection schemes
- Safe and accessible workplaces
- Proper gender-responsive infrastructure and services
- Access to credits, financial services and transparent digital payments
- Opportunity for skills development
- Democratic participation in governance

An enabling environment for inclusive social dialogue also requires:

- Respect for freedom of association
- Effective protection from violence and harassment
- Accessible justice mechanisms
- Political commitment to democratic participation for all citizens and workers
- Support for alternative and workers led economic models such as social and solidarity economy
- Independent labour movements

## Key Demands:

In line with the principles of social and economic justice and democratic labour governance, also, considering global unrest, shrinking civic spaces and attacks on democratic values and practices, StreetNet International calls on governments, employers' organizations, trade unions, and the International Labour Organization to:

### 1. Recognize Street Vendor organizations as Legitimate Social Partners

Ensure the legal recognition of street vendor unions and organizations and guarantee as well as respect their right to freedom of association, collective representation, and participation in social dialogue at different levels, including at Tripartite Forums at national level.

### 2. Institutionalize Inclusive Social Dialogue mechanisms

Create permanent and accessible platforms at municipal, national, and international levels that include representative organizations of street and market vendors.

### 3. Ensure Participation in urban governance

Guarantee the direct participation of street vendor organizations in decisions directly affecting their daily work and livelihood, such as: public space management, urban planning and market infrastructure, licensing systems, local economic developments etc



#### **4. Protect Workers from violence, harassment, and evictions**

End forced evictions, confiscation of goods, arbitrary penalties, and violence against street vendors. Establish accessible and transparent grievance and justice mechanisms.

To limit or stop privatization processes in cities and public spaces that promote exclusion and enable further violence and evictions of street vendors.

#### **5. Promote Rights-Based Formalization**

Ensure that formalization processes are smooth and don't harm but rather protect labour rights, livelihoods, social protection, income security, and economic opportunities of those already engaged in informal employment.

#### **6. Strengthen data collection and visibility**

Improve official data collection concerning street vendors to support evidence-based policymaking and recognition of value and essential contributions made by street and market vendors within labour and economic statistics.

#### **7. Support capacity building and alliances**

Invest in strengthening organizations of street and market vendors and promote alliances with trade unions and other labour movement organizations to expand and strengthen representativeness, unity and solidarity.

#### **8. Promote gender-responsive Social Dialogue**

Ensure that women street vendors, who make up a large share of the sector globally, are fully empowered and represented in leadership, decision-making processes and all forms of social dialogue.

## **Conclusion**

There can be no genuinely inclusive social dialogue while millions of workers in the informal economy remain excluded from the institutions that shape labour, economic, and urban policy.

Traditionally existing social dialogue forums should be extended and even reshaped, fitting the dialogue for non-standard employment relationships, including being able to accommodate self-employed workers' representation at the negotiation table.

All forced evictions of street vendors must be replaced by negotiations and collective bargaining processes to ensure that only through inclusive social dialogue, we can achieve decent work, justice and dignity for all workers.

Building resilient, democratic, and inclusive societies requires recognizing street vendors as legitimate social partners and ensuring that **"Nothing for us Without us"** becomes a lived reality for everyone and everywhere.

[streetnet.org.za](http://streetnet.org.za)