

# A GUIDE TO THE ILO CONVENTION 177 AND RECOMMENDATION 184 FOR HOME-BASED WORKERS

---



#RATIFY  
C177

## Acknowledgements

HomeNet International (HNI) wishes to thank its affiliates, sister organisations, allies and partners in change that over time have generously supported the home-based workers (HBWs) movement around the world.

We are grateful for the support from organisations that have provided funds for the HBWs movement and for the production of resources for HBWs.

**Ford  
Foundation**

**OPEN SOCIETY  
FOUNDATIONS**

 **Sida**  
SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

With appreciation to the guest collaborators and HNI Secretariat who made this booklet possible:

**Writer:** Jenny Grice

**International Coordinator:** Janhavi Dave

**Advisor and former HNI Working Committee member:** Chris Bonner

**Communications and Media Officer:** Laura Revelo

**Programme Coordinator:** Sarbani Kattel

**Digital Communications Officer:** Eduardo Derrico

**Communications Support Officer:** Veronica Robledo

**Finance Coordinator:** Srujana Banala

**Administrative Officer:** Kripa Awale

**Layout and Design:** Lesther Morales

## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	5
2. Who is the booklet for and what is in it?.....	5
3. What is the International Labour Organization (ILO)?.....	6
4. How was the ILO Home Work Convention (C177) achieved? .....	9
5. Key features of C177 .....	10
6. Who does C177 apply to?.....	10
7. What must governments do if they have ratified C177?.....	11
8. Countries that have ratified C177 .....	12
9. How can Recommendation 184 (R184) help? .....	14
10. Short cases of homeworkers who won rights .....	17
11. Conclusion.....	24

## References

12. Annexure 1: ILO C177 the Home Work Convention .....	26
13. Annexure 2: ILO Recommendation 184 .....	30



Somjit Nontri is a homeworker from Nong Chok, Thailand, who sews curtains for a living. Photo Credit: Eduardo Derrico/HNI



Isabel Ñanco Huichalaf is a home-based worker from Puente Alto, Chile, who specialises in designing and producing crafts and textile products using a *Mapuche* loom. Photo credit: Thomas Robert Chenette.

## 1. Introduction

Across the world, there are about 260 million of us; most of us are women and most of us work from home or its surroundings. We work hard to put food on our tables, to pay for things like our children's school fees, for when our family members are ill and we cover many, many more expenses. We are **home-based workers** (HBWs).

Despite our hard work, governments don't see us, employers say we are self-employed and not 'real' workers and society think we are just 'sitting at home'. Our struggles against unfair piece rates, wages and contracts, irregular work, long working hours, lack of protection under labour laws, limited or no social protection, and poor working conditions never stop.

But there is hope. In 1996 unions and home-based worker organisations led by India's Self-Employed Women's Association achieved a milestone – the International Labour Organization's Convention 177 (C177) was adopted. C177 recognises **homeworkers** as workers, those of us who are subcontracted by others and who receive work orders and are usually paid based on pieces produced.

Unfortunately, C177 doesn't recognise **self-employed home-based workers** – individuals who produce and sell their own products – yet C177 still provides a useful guide for our organisations to follow to fight for their rights too.

Now it's up to us. We need to use the rights that are in C177 to improve our lives and those of all home-based workers. Our organisation, HomeNet International (HNI), has agreed on a global campaign. From 2023 until 2027, HNI affiliate organisations in 14 countries will campaign on one of these four activities:

1. to get our country to ratify (adopt) C177
2. to develop new policies for HBWs
3. to improve existing policies that cover HBWs
4. to create guidelines or rules that will help improve HBWs lives

## 2. Who is the booklet for and what is in it?

We've designed this booklet for you – home-based workers across the world. The booklet gives you more information about:

- the International Labour Organization (ILO), what it is, who belongs to it and how it works
- the important documents that the ILO adopts – Conventions and Recommendations and how they work
- ILO Convention 177, the Home Work Convention (C177 for short) and ILO Recommendation 184 (R184 for short).

We also share short cases with you of how different HNI affiliates have struggled to win rights for their members. Some of them have pushed for the ratification of C177 while others have used the contents of C177 to guide

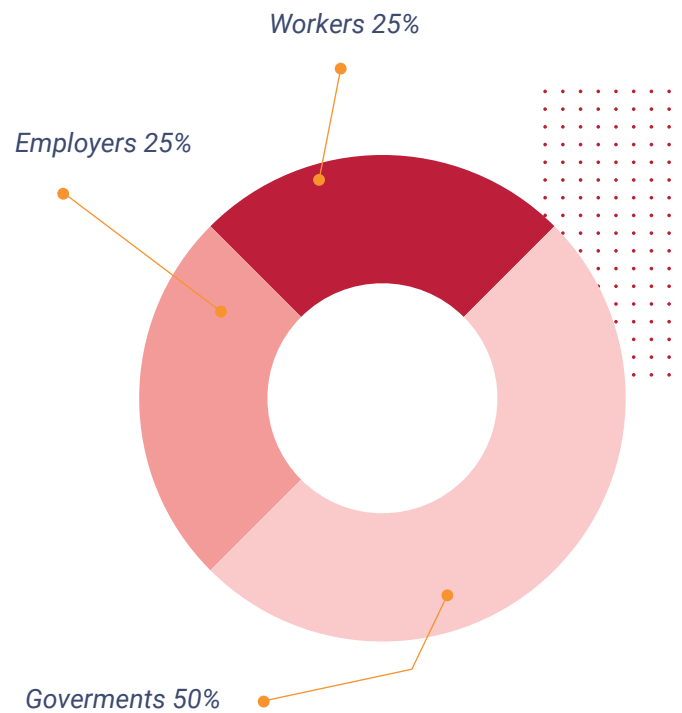
their demands. We hope that reading these cases and discussing the different experiences in these countries will help you work out the best strategy for your organisation.

Be inspired by what can be done when workers unite. And debate how victory won't come quickly. Learn from the lessons of other home-based workers like yourselves. You will have setbacks along the way. Together you must find ways to overcome them and not be discouraged. And debate how you can take your struggles further to help all home-based workers benefit from what you have achieved.

### 3. What is the International Labour Organization (ILO)?

The ILO is a United Nations agency that was set up more than 100 years ago in 1919 just after World War 1 (WW1) ended. WW1 was one of the deadliest wars where more than 20 million people died and more than 20 million were injured. Countries gathered after that war and said that only if there was social justice right across the world could there be a chance for lasting world peace.

The ILO was established to promote social justice and uphold internationally recognised human and labour rights. It operates as a tripartite body, three parties belong to it: workers through their trade unions, employer federations and government representatives from every country that is an ILO member.



These three parties meet every year at the ILO's International Labour Conference (ILC). Here they debate and eventually adopt international labour and social standards. These labour and social standards are called Conventions and Recommendations. A two-thirds majority of votes is required for standards to be adopted. Sub-committees of the ILC monitor how these are implemented in different countries.

1

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organisation, "Introduction: The ILO mandate on sustaining peace through employment and decent work", YouTube, posted on July 5, 2023. : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWzt-qHjRKA>

**An ILO Convention:**

- is a special international agreement that details workers' rights and sets rules for countries to follow. Countries are encouraged to adopt (ratify) Conventions and include these provisions in national laws in their countries. Countries that adopt a Convention must then abide by that Convention.

The ILC also adopts Recommendations to go with each Convention. There are also Recommendations as guiding documents, without a Convention.

**An ILO Recommendation:**

- is a set of guidelines to help countries shape their labour and other relevant laws. They give practical details on how to implement a Convention. Workers and their organisations can use these recommendations for advocacy and in collective bargaining with employers and governments. ILO Recommendations are not binding on governments.

Almost every country in the world is a member of the ILO. This gives every document that the ILO adopts automatic international recognition and legitimacy. It puts pressure on countries to make those Conventions part of their law.

Countries will never just adopt Conventions. Home-based worker organisations like yours should work with other unions and support groups to pressurise governments and employers to ratify these Conventions or to include the rights in the Convention in your country's laws.

The ILO also provides technical support to countries wanting to adopt Conventions. Your organisation can also use this expertise to help your campaign for ratification of a Convention or to educate your members about the Convention.

And if you have problems with how a Convention is being implemented, you can take up the problem or submit reports to the ILO's monitoring sub-committees.

**Here are some examples of ILO Conventions:**

\* **Convention 87** says that every worker has the right to form and join an organisation that they choose.

\* **Convention 155** says that every worker should be protected from being discriminated against if they join a union.

\* **Convention 177** says that governments must make every effort to make sure that homeworkers are treated in the same way as other workers. Homeworkers:

- must be able to form and join an organisation they choose;
- mustn't be discriminated against;
- must be covered by the same social security protection as other workers etc. (More in Section 6.)



Embroidery workers from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.  
Photo credits: Samir Pathak





Newspaper clipping with a photo of Ela Bhatt, former General Secretary of SEWA, India, as she waited for the result of the vote on the adoption of the Homework Convention, Geneva, June 1996.

From appeal by Ela Bhatt, General Secretary of SEWA, India:

In the world labour force, it is estimated that 1200 millions are unprotected in terms of basic work security and social security cover. Although immense progress has been made... nevertheless 77% of the labour force in the Third World is unprotected...

The most heartening fact is that homeworkers are no more invisible. You have made them visible. The other heartening feature of the proposed Convention is that the governments of both developed and developing countries have shown equal concern to improve the lot of their homeworkers, the majority of whom are the poor and women.

Please let not the doors shut when the millions of unprotected workers are entering them. Protecting homeworkers means protecting about 240 million homeworkers in the world, including 170 million from the poorest families.

*Photo: Ela Bhatt waiting for the result of the vote on the adoption of the Homework Convention, Geneva, June 1996.*

## 4. How was the ILO Home Work Convention (C177) achieved?

C177 is called the Convention on Home Work. The ILO adopted it in 1996. We must thank the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India for leading the campaign to get it adopted. But they couldn't have done it alone and it wasn't achieved quickly.

SEWA connected with homemaker organisations in Australia, Brazil, England, Italy and Spain. They helped set up the first international organisation for home-based workers in 1994, lobbied and got the support of international trade union organisations like the:

- International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF),
- the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU),
- the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), and
- the largest Dutch national trade union federation, the Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV)

If you want to find out more details about how this struggle was won see this document: *The What? Why? And How? of ILO Convention 177 on Home Work 1996 and Why it Should be Ratified?*<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Mehrotra, Firoza. 2016. "The What? Why? And How? of ILO Convention 177 on Home Work 1996 and Why it Should be Ratified?" HomeNet South Asia. Available at: <https://www.homenetinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/C177-What-why-how.pdf>

## 5. Key features of C177

*This booklet will only explain some key parts of C177 that we think you will find useful. For the complete text of C177, refer to Annexure 1.*

### Article 4 of C177

The national policy must promote, “as far as possible” equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners. According to C177, homeworkers have a right to:

- a. form and join an organisation they choose to help them achieve their rights
- b. be protected against discrimination in their work
- c. be protected from an unhealthy and unsafe environment
- d. be paid for the work that they do
- e. be covered by social security protection like other workers in factories, shops etc.
- f. get access to training
- g. be protected from working at a very young age
- h. have protection when they are pregnant or have a small baby (maternity protection) e.g. getting maternity leave (paid); not losing their job while they are on maternity leave etc.

## 6. Who does C177 apply to?



Prapaporn Aokham is a homemaker from Nong Chok, Thailand who sews pants and other clothes and is paid by the piece. Photo credit: Eduardo Derrico/HNI

All workers who work from their homes, or nearby in a place they choose, are **home-based workers**. Those who are subcontracted and (usually) are paid by the piece or a wage are a special type of home-based worker. These workers are called **homeworkers**. **C177 applies only to homeworkers.**

But as we struggle for the rights of homeworkers, we also need to win rights and decent work for **all** home-based workers. Only by uniting with **self-employed home-based workers** – individuals who produce and sell their own products – can we make sure that all home-based workers are protected and supported.



Home-based workers from the Western Kenyan community of Kisii, near Lake Victoria, who produce hand-carved soapstone artefacts. Photo credit: HomeNet Africa.

## 7. What must governments do if they have ratified C177?

Ratification of C177 is just the first step. As soon as a country ratifies C177, the government, trade unions, homeworker organisations and employers must agree on a national policy. This policy should be implemented by laws and regulations which guarantee the rights in C177 and suit homeworkers' needs. And these laws and regulations must ensure that employers and sub-contractors (middle-men) comply with the law. The law and regulations must be reviewed from time to time. Two years after C177 is ratified, the government must submit a report to the ILO on implementation progress with 5-yearly reports after that. Your organisation or an employer organisation can submit your own report if you disagree with the government's report. Also, a formal complaint may be submitted to the ILO if your government has failed to implement the Convention properly.

### What must governments do if they have ratified C177

- 1 Government, homeworker organisations and employers to adopt a national policy on homework
- 2 Government to compile statistics, if possible, on homework
- 3 Government to extend national laws and regulations on workplace health and safety to homework
- 4 Government to set out the responsibilities of employers and middlemen
- 5 Government to monitor employers' and middlemen's compliance with laws and impose penalties if repeated violations
- 6 All parties to review the national policy from time to time to improve it

Two years after ratifying C177, the government must submit a report on implementation progress to the ILO and then every 5 years. Worker organisations and employer organisations can also submit their own reports.

## 8. Countries that have ratified C177

Only 13 countries have ratified C177. Homeworkers in four of these countries (shaded yellow) belong to affiliates of HNI – Bulgaria, Tajikistan and Argentina.

Areas	Countries ratified	Dates ratified	Status
Europe	Finland	17 June 1998	In force
	Ireland	22 April 1999	In force
	Albania	24 July 2002	In force
	Netherlands	31 October 2002	In force
	Bulgaria	17 July 2009	In force
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	18 January 2010	In force
	Belgium	2 October 2012	In force
	North Macedonia	3 October 2012	In force
	Slovenia	14 April 2021	In force
	Spain	25 May 2022	In force
South America	Argentina	31 July 2006	In force
Central Asia	Tajikistan	29 May 2012	In force
North America	Antigua and Barbuda	28 July 2021	In force



Brisa Zuñiga is a self-employed, home-based worker from Tiltil, located 50 km north of Santiago, Chile. While she primarily works as a seamstress, she also recycles materials such as bottle caps and plastics, incorporating them into her crafts. Photo credit: Thomas Robert Chenette.

## 9. How can Recommendation 184 (R184) help?

R184 supplements C177. It provides practical guidance/ideas for you and your organisations if you are negotiating for:

- a. national policy after your government has ratified C177
- b. if your country hasn't ratified C177 but you want to develop guidelines/rules, or a policy on homework with government/employers or
- c. you want to improve your existing policy

**But remember:** because it's a **Recommendation**, it is not legally enforceable.

**Some important features of R184 that can help guide your negotiations/campaigns.**

Issue	Rights/guidelines to fight for
<p><b>1. Freedom of association (the right to join the organisation you choose)</b></p>	<p><b>Government</b> should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● remove laws that prevent you from forming or joining an organisation you choose and</li> <li>● make it easy for you to bargain with your employers and intermediaries.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Safety and health at work</b></p>	<p><b>Employers</b> should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● tell you about any hazards in the work that you do and advise you on how to work safely;</li> <li>● provide you with personal protective equipment for free and</li> <li>● check that your machinery etc. has safety devices and is maintained.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Remuneration (wages and payments)</b></p>	<p><b>Government</b> should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● set a minimum wage for homework and</li> <li>● bargain with you and employers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Employers</b> should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● pay you when you deliver completed work or regularly, not more than 1 month after you deliver to them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Social security and maternity protection</b></p>	<p><b>Government</b> should find ways to extend or adapt existing schemes to cover homeworkers.</p>
<p><b>5. Training programmes</b></p>	<p><b>Government</b> should find ways to promote training to improve homeworkers' skills.</p>

Issue	Rights/guidelines to fight for
6. <b>Minimum age</b>	<b>Government</b> should extend its existing laws and regulations that govern the minimum age when you can work, to homeworkers.
7. <b>Supervision of homework</b>	<p><b>Government</b> should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• register employers and any middlemen/ intermediaries of homeworkers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Employers</b> should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keep a register of their homeworkers and list what work they have been given and</li> <li>• inform the government of those on their list.</li> </ul>
8. <b>Termination of employment</b>	<b>Extend national laws and regulations</b> that spell out what steps an employer must follow if s/he wants to terminate a homemaker's employment.
9. <b>Hours of work, rest periods and leave</b>	<b>National laws and regulations</b> should work out how homeworkers will be paid for public holidays, annual holidays and paid sick leave just like other workers. A homemaker should be entitled to daily and weekly rest like formal workers, even if s/he has a deadline to fulfil.
10. <b>Resolution of disputes</b>	<b>Government</b> should help set up a dispute mechanism to resolve disputes between homeworkers and employers/intermediaries.
11. <b>Helping homeworkers</b>	<p><b>Government</b> should work with homeworkers and their employers to support you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to form your own organisations including cooperatives;</li> <li>• to get access to credit, better housing and childcare;</li> <li>• with information on your rights, and what assistance you can get and translate it into your languages so that all workers can understand;</li> <li>• by creating centres and networks for homeworkers where you can get information and services and reduce your isolation.</li> </ul>

You can also use many of these guidelines for example – 4, 5 and 11 - to negotiate to improve the lives of your self-employed home-based worker sisters and brothers.

*For the complete text of R184, refer to Annexure 2.*



A homeworker from the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan who produces felt handicrafts for local and regional markets. Photo credit: HomeNet Eastern Europe & Central Asia.



## 10. Short cases of homeworkers who won rights

The short cases below highlight what organisations of homeworkers have done in India, Thailand and Pakistan to improve homeworkers' lives.

### India- winning rights and recognition for beedi homeworkers



Photo credit: HomeNet South Asia

#### Background

Originally, *beedis* (traditional hand-rolled Indian cigarettes) were made in factories. However, after the Factories Act of 1948 was introduced, employers began outsourcing production to homeworkers, mainly women from lower caste or minority groups, to avoid following the Act's rules.

In 1966, the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act and the Beedi and Cigar Workers Welfare Act were passed. To avoid following these laws, employers created the Sale-Purchase System. In this system, different companies owned by the same family handled various parts of production: workers bought raw materials from one company, sold the finished products to another, labeled them with a third company, and sold them through a fourth. This setup was made to evade formal employer-employee relationships.

#### SEWA's Role

In the 1970s, the city of Ahmedabad was referred to as the "Manchester of India" due to its prominence in garment manufacturing. While men from low-income households worked in factories, women typically managed domestic responsibilities, including caring for children and the elderly, as well as cooking, cleaning, and fetching water. The only viable source of income for these women was rolling *beedis*.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) began to organise *beedi* workers in Gujarat and in Ahmedabad in 1978. Though they were familiar with trade unions through their husbands'

factory work, the women *beedi* rollers struggled to identify themselves as workers and often didn't speak the same language, complicating SEWA's collective efforts.

However, by using different strategies, SEWA effectively organised over 150,000 *beedi* workers in Gujarat, with more than 15,000 specifically in Ahmedabad, demonstrating that despite these challenges, solidarity was possible.

Two critical demands were agreed upon by the *beedi* rollers: the establishment of a minimum wage, as they were earning only 50% of what was legally mandated, and access to a provident fund, which was crucial for their financial security upon retirement.

### Key Strategies

- **Building Evidence:** SEWA documented the socio-economic conditions of *beedi* workers and mapped supply chains to establish the employer-employee relationship.
- **Organising Workers:** SEWA continued to mobilise more *beedi* workers, fostering collective action. The organizing efforts were conducted right at the workers' doorsteps and within their settlements, utilizing a decentralized model that fostered grassroots leadership, while also interacting with other informal economy women workers, such as street vendors; each meeting began with a *sarva-dharma prathana*, emphasizing unity beyond regional, caste, and religious divides.
- **Advocating for Rights:** They lobbied for workers' rights, including demands for identity cards, minimum wages, and provident funds. For 10 years, *beedi* homeworkers took part in strikes, sit-ins, rallies and protests to demand to be paid the same as factory workers making *beedis* and to get the same rights.

### Victories:

- Followed by 15 years of protests and legal battles they won a case at the Industrial Dispute Court, granting workers access to a provident fund.
- Secured representation on tripartite boards. The tripartite board aims to ensure employer contributions to the provident fund, maintain contractor records, and ensure access to social security schemes for *beedi* workers.
- Unity among women *beedi* workers despite regional and socio-cultural differences.
- Recognition of these women as formal workers with access to labour rights.
- Increased transparency in supply chains and clearer employer-employee relationships.
- A reduction of child labour as children of *beedi* rollers gained access to scholarships for education.

## Thailand – Winning rights and social security for all homeworkers



Homeworkers in Ratchaburi Province, Thailand, creating handmade stuffed animals. Photo credit: Eduardo Derrico/HNI

### Background

The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 caused many factories to shut down. Thousands of workers lost their jobs and were forced to work from home to make a living. Most of these workers worked for a contractor from home. They lost all the labour rights they had enjoyed in the factory.

Groups of homeworkers, especially garment workers, under their organisation HomeNet Thailand (HNT), with support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the ILO came together to tackle their problems. They campaigned for more than 10 years to win laws to protect homeworkers using C177 as a reference to guide the contents of these laws.

### Key strategies

1. They brought homeworkers together. They raised awareness amongst homeworkers of the occupational health and safety dangers of their work, their worker rights and their rights to social insurance. They made them see that they were workers, just like those workers still working in the factories.
2. HNT worked closely with civil society organisations (CSOs) and the ILO to sensitise the Ministry of Labour on homeworkers and their issues.
3. They lobbied the government to provide statistics on homework to make homeworkers visible and they surveyed homeworkers to expose the hazardous conditions that homeworkers worked in and the low wages that they earned.
4. They carefully examined existing laws and the constitution that covered ordinary workers. They lobbied to have these laws extended to homeworkers.
5. With support from stakeholders and consultations with HBWs, they drafted a bill to protect, promote and develop home-based workers which was submitted to Ministry of Labour.
6. They campaigned for every informal worker to be covered by social security laws.

## Victories

1. The **Homeworkers Protection Act** passed on 29 September, 2010 and protects homeworkers nationwide. It says:
  - Fair wages must be paid to homeworkers (equal pay for women and men doing the same job).
  - The hirer must give homeworkers a contract, ensure occupational health and safety and adhere to regulations for pregnant women.
  - A committee (finally established in 2015) must be established to provide access to courts in labour disputes and women (homeworkers) must be given a place at the decision-making table.
  - Homeworkers must be paid promptly for their work.

HNT continues to make homeworkers aware of these rights.

2. All informal workers (including home-based workers) are covered by the **government social security scheme**. Government contributes 30 per cent of informal workers' contribution to the social security scheme. If informal workers become sick, disabled, die or are over 60, the Government pays 33 per cent of the monthly contribution to informal workers and their dependents as a benefit.

## Problems that remain

The **Homeworkers Protection Act** is a law. BUT many homeworkers and their hirers don't know that the law covers them and so are not benefiting, despite efforts of one of HNT's programmes aimed at helping homeworkers understand the Act. HNT is urging the government to disseminate information right across the country so that more homeworkers know and can benefit.

An influx of migrant workers who are willing to work for low wages is limiting the bargaining power of homeworkers.

*Adapted from WIEGO briefing: [Impact – Winning legal rights for Thailand's homeworkers](#)<sup>3</sup> and an interview with Poonsap Tulaphan of HomeNet Thailand in July 2024.*

---

<sup>3</sup> WIEGO. 2013. "Winning Legal Rights for Thailand's Homeworkers. WIEGO Impact Story, September. Available at: <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/WIEGO-Winning-legal-rights-Thailands-homeworkers.pdf>

## Pakistan – Winning homeworkers’ rights in four provinces



Home-based workers from Pakistan's Home-based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF) demanding their rights to be recognized and treated as other workers on International Home-based Workers Day. Photo credit: HBWWF.

### Background

Millions of people in Pakistan (mostly women) are homeworkers. They work from home or nearby their homes for contractors and are paid piece rates. They make things like garments, carpets, sacks, incense sticks, footballs, embroidery, bangles, jewellery and shoes. Many of them make for domestic or global supply chains.

Homeworkers are severely exploited, having fought for years to gain recognition and inclusion in labour laws, as well as access to social security. They often earn significantly less than the minimum wage and frequently have to cover their own expenses for materials, equipment, electricity, and transportation.

The law in Pakistan gives provinces powers to pass their own legislation.

### Key strategies

- activists chose to start organising homeworkers in Sindh province from 2001 because trade unions there were relatively strong and supportive of homeworkers.
- door-to-door campaigns, study circles took place and new cooperatives were formed; all these brought homeworkers together and became support groups.
- support groups raised homeworkers’ consciousness to see their struggle as a class struggle. This built their confidence until they felt strong enough to approach labour department officials, the Social Security Institute and the Workers’ Welfare Board to complain about wage payments and having no access to social security.
- these small organisations formed unions in their different regions and worked with formal worker trade unions.
- in 2009, a national Home-based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF) was formed with 4000 members.
- homeworkers in Sindh province took part in multiple actions simultaneously on different fronts: they mobilised workers, engaged politically and formed unions.

## HBWWF gets active

Using the contents of C177, HBWWF

- lobbied political figures, trade unions and labour activists and together drafted clauses for a new law to support homeworkers.
- engaged actively with the Employers' Federation of Pakistan to ensure their concerns were addressed.
- engaged leaders of the Pakistan People's Party to pass a similar law in other provinces.

## Victories

The Sindh Home-Based Workers Act was passed in 2018. It:

- recognises homeworkers as employees, allows them to be registered, recognises their right to social security and to be paid the minimum wage, will give them access to mobile health counters and they will be covered by dispute resolution mechanisms.
- says a welfare fund for homeworkers in Sindh should be established to finance projects for the welfare of homeworkers. This fund is managed by a committee of 4 from the government, 3 HBW members and 3 from the employers' federation.
- In 2021 the social security scheme was opened to all informal workers. Workers need to pay to belong until they are officially registered with the Labour Department.
- The Sindh Home-Based Workers Act further influenced the passing of similar laws in the other provinces: Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.

## Problems that remain

But the struggle is not over. Homeworkers can only access the rights in this Act if they are registered with the Labour Department. By July 2024 only 3300 homeworkers had been included into the Labour Departments software, but none had been officially registered or issued cards. Without this card, they cannot get their rights, such as having access to dispute resolution mechanisms, minimum wages, other employment issues, and social security benefits.

*Adapted from WIEGO Organizing (Law) Brief No 13, December 2022<sup>4</sup> and an interview in July 2024 with Zehra Khan, general secretary of HBWWF.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Khan, Zehra and Krithika A. Dinesh. 2022. "The Journey from "Factories in Homes" to Legal Recognition and Rights for Home-Based Workers in Pakistan". WIEGO Organizing Brief No. 13. Available at: <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/wiego-organizing-brief-no-13.pdf>

## Lessons from these three stories

There is one thread that is common across all these stories above: homeworker organisations worked very hard to mobilise and organise homeworkers to make them see themselves as workers, to make themselves visible, before they started negotiating for laws to protect homeworkers. It wasn't a quick process and often there were setbacks.

None of the three countries mentioned here: India, Thailand and Pakistan have ratified C177. *Beedi* homeworkers in India won recognition before C177 was adopted. In Thailand and Pakistan homeworkers were aware of what was in C177 and used that knowledge to help their campaigns.

Bulgaria is an example of a country that has ratified C177. Below we describe the difficulties that homeworkers have faced despite their country ratifying C177.

### Bulgaria - C177 and the ongoing struggles for homeworkers rights



A Bulgarian home-based worker showcases her products, including embroidery, wool socks, and wood carvings, at a local fair. Photo credit: HomeNet Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Bulgaria ratified C177 in 2009 after being pressured by the Home-Based Workers' Association (HBWA), and its trade union allies. Homeworkers were being exploited by global supply chains and were being paid way below national minimum wage rates.

HBWA celebrated the ratification of C177. Bulgaria's Labour Code, the law that covers labour relations in the country, was amended.

But the Labour Code said that homeworkers and employers need to enter into a contract for homeworkers to be recognised as workers and receive any benefits. Most homeworkers had no contract with their employer. Nothing changed for them. Their excitement turned to frustration. Government refused to meet – it said that only homeworkers with contracts are covered by C177.

In 2014, HBWA formed UNITY (TUSIW-Edinstvo), an organisation for homeworkers and self-employed workers. In 2018 UNITY submitted a complaint form to the ILO. It said that in other countries (e.g. South Africa) if an employer was providing materials to a homeworker and setting the price, then that homeworker was not an independent contractor but an employee and must be covered by the Labour Code and any other legislation just like any factory worker.

The ILO listened to UNITY. It asked the Bulgarian government to provide details of what it was doing to treat homeworkers the same as other workers. But in terms of ILO rules, the government had five years to respond i.e. 2023.

As of 2024, the Bulgarian government has still not submitted any report to ILO. UNITY has followed up with the Ministry of Social Affairs. They responded that they are not mandated to follow the ILO Convention, only their own legislation. They are still saying that homeworkers need contracts with their employers to be covered by C177.

Meanwhile, to protect and support homeworkers, UNITY has focused on providing them with training, upgrading their skills and engaging them in exhibitions and creating postcards to make HBWs' products visible.

*Adapted from a WIEGO report on Bulgarian homeworkers<sup>5</sup> and an interview in July 2024 with Violeta Zlateva, Coordinator of HomeNet Eastern Europe and Central Asia.*

## 11. Conclusion

This booklet provides an overview of the ILO, including C177 and R184, and we hope it has clarified any questions you may have had.

The ILO and C177 give international recognition and legitimacy to homeworkers and their organisations. Whether you decide to advocate for ratification of C177 or not, and even if you are a self-employed home-based worker rather than a homemaker, C177 and R184 can play a crucial role in your negotiations with employers and governments. They can help you articulate your demands clearly and build solidarity across all home-based worker organizations, paving the way for meaningful change in the lives of home-based workers worldwide.

We hope the short cases we shared in this booklet will inspire you to take up struggles in your country. These stories show that winning these rights didn't come easily, however, they are beacons of hope. It took decades of struggle for homeworkers and their organisations to make themselves visible, to unite and to demand their rights as workers. Even when they thought they'd secured their rights, problems remained. But they haven't given up and will continue to fight so that homeworkers are treated on equal terms as other workers.

Let us be inspired by the courage and tenacity of those who came before us. As you embark on your own journey, remember that every effort counts. Together, we can build a future where all home-based workers are recognised, treated as equals and respected.

---

<sup>5</sup> WIEGO. "Home-Based Workers in Bulgaria: Using the ILO Reporting Mechanism to Work." Accessed October 2024: <https://www.wiego.org/impact-stories/home-based-workers-bulgaria-using-ilo-reporting-mechanism-work/>





Edna Simão, from Osasco, Brazil, creates handmade dolls and various crafts in her home, which also serves as her workshop. Photo credit: Eduardo Derrico/HNI

## References

# 12. Annexure 1: ILO C177 the Home Work Convention<sup>6</sup>

## Preamble

The General Conference of the International Labour Organization,

Having been convened at Geneva by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and having met in its Eighty-third Session on 4 June 1996, and

Recalling that many international labour Conventions and Recommendations laying down standards of general application concerning working conditions are applicable to homeworkers, and

Noting that the particular conditions characterizing home work make it desirable to improve the application of those Conventions and Recommendations to homeworkers, and to supplement them by standards which take into account the special characteristics of home work, and

Having decided upon the adoption of certain proposals with regard to home work, which is the fourth item on the agenda of the session, and

Having determined that these proposals shall take the form of an international Convention;

adopts, this twentieth day of June of the year one thousand nine hundred and ninety-six, the following Convention, which may be cited as the Home Work Convention, 1996:

## **Article 1**

For the purposes of this Convention:

- (a) the term **home work** means work carried out by a person, to be referred to as a homemaker,
  - (i) in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer;
  - (ii) for remuneration;
  - (iii) which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used,

unless this person has the degree of autonomy and of economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations or court decisions;

- (b) persons with employee status do not become homeworkers within the meaning of this Convention simply by occasionally performing their work as employees at home, rather than at their usual workplaces;

---

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization. 1996. "C177 - Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177)." Accessed October 2024. [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312322](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312322).

- (c) the term **employer** means a person, natural or legal, who, either directly or through an intermediary, whether or not intermediaries are provided for in national legislation, gives out home work in pursuance of his or her business activity.

## **Article 2**

This Convention applies to all persons carrying out home work within the meaning of Article 1.

## **Article 3**

Each Member which has ratified this Convention shall adopt, implement and periodically review a national policy on home work aimed at improving the situation of homeworkers, in consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers and, where they exist, with organizations concerned with homeworkers and those of employers of homeworkers.

## **Article 4**

1. The national policy on home work shall promote, as far as possible, equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners, taking into account the special characteristics of home work and, where appropriate, conditions applicable to the same or a similar type of work carried out in an enterprise.
2. Equality of treatment shall be promoted, in particular, in relation to:
  - (a) the homeworkers' right to establish or join organizations of their own choosing and to participate in the activities of such organizations;
  - (b) protection against discrimination in employment and occupation;
  - (c) protection in the field of occupational safety and health;
  - (d) remuneration;
  - (e) statutory social security protection;
  - (f) access to training;
  - (g) minimum age for admission to employment or work; and
  - (h) maternity protection.

## **Article 5**

The national policy on home work shall be implemented by means of laws and regulations, collective agreements, arbitration awards or in any other appropriate manner consistent with national practice.

## **Article 6**

Appropriate measures shall be taken so that labour statistics include, to the extent possible, home work.

### **Article 7**

National laws and regulations on safety and health at work shall apply to home work, taking account of its special characteristics, and shall establish conditions under which certain types of work and the use of certain substances may be prohibited in home work for reasons of safety and health.

### **Article 8**

Where the use of intermediaries in home work is permitted, the respective responsibilities of employers and intermediaries shall be determined by laws and regulations or by court decisions, in accordance with national practice.

### **Article 9**

1. A system of inspection consistent with national law and practice shall ensure compliance with the laws and regulations applicable to home work.
2. Adequate remedies, including penalties where appropriate, in case of violation of these laws and regulations shall be provided for and effectively applied.

### **Article 10**

This Convention does not affect more favourable provisions applicable to homeworkers under other international labour Conventions.

### **Article 11**

The formal ratifications of this Convention shall be communicated to the Director-General of the International Labour Office for registration.

### **Article 12**

1. This Convention shall be binding only upon those Members of the International Labour Organization whose ratifications have been registered with the Director-General of the International Labour Office.
2. It shall come into force 12 months after the date on which the ratifications of two Members have been registered with the Director-General.
3. Thereafter, this Convention shall come into force for any Member 12 months after the date on which its ratification has been registered.

### **Article 13**

1. A Member which has ratified this Convention may denounce it after the expiration of ten years from the date on which the Convention first comes into force, by an act communicated to the Director-General of the International Labour Office for registration. Such denunciation shall not take effect until one year after the date on which it is registered.

2. Each Member which has ratified this Convention and which does not, within the year following the expiration of the period of ten years mentioned in the preceding paragraph, exercise the right of denunciation provided for in this Article, will be bound for another period of ten years and, thereafter, may denounce this Convention at the expiration of each period of ten years under the terms provided for in this Article.

### **Article 14**

1. The Director-General of the International Labour Office shall notify all Members of the International Labour Organization of the registration of all ratifications and denunciations communicated by the Members of the Organization.
2. When notifying the Members of the Organization of the registration of the second ratification, the Director-General shall draw the attention of the Members of the Organization to the date upon which the Convention shall come into force.

### **Article 15**

The Director-General of the International Labour Office shall communicate to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for registration in accordance with article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations, full particulars of all ratifications and acts of denunciation registered by the Director-General in accordance with the provisions of the preceding Articles.

### **Article 16**

At such times as it may consider necessary, the Governing Body of the International Labour Office shall present to the General Conference a report on the working of this Convention and shall examine the desirability of placing on the agenda of the Conference the question of its revision in whole or in part.

### **Article 17**

1. Should the Conference adopt a new Convention revising this Convention in whole or in part, then, unless the new Convention otherwise provides -
  - (a) the ratification by a Member of the new revising Convention shall ipso jure involve the immediate denunciation of this Convention, notwithstanding the provisions of Article 13 above, if and when the new revising Convention shall have come into force;
  - (b) as from the date when the new revising Convention comes into force, this Convention shall cease to be open to ratification by the Members.
2. This Convention shall in any case remain in force in its actual form and content for those Members which have ratified it but have not ratified the revising Convention.

### **Article 18**

The English and French versions of the text of this Convention are equally authoritative.

## 13. Annexure 2: ILO Recommendation 184<sup>7</sup>

### Preamble

The General Conference of the International Labour Organization,

Having been convened at Geneva by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and having met in its Eighty-third Session on 4 June 1996, and

Recalling that many international labour Conventions and Recommendations laying down standards of general application concerning working conditions are applicable to homeworkers, and

Noting that the particular conditions characterizing home work make it desirable to improve the application of those Conventions and Recommendations to homeworkers, and to supplement them by standards which take into account the special characteristics of home work, and

Having decided upon the adoption of certain proposals with regard to home work, which is the fourth item on the agenda of the session, and

Having determined that these proposals shall take the form of a Recommendation supplementing the Home Work Convention, 1996;

adopts, this twentieth day of June of the year one thousand nine hundred and ninety-six, the following Recommendation, which may be cited as the Home Work Recommendation, 1996:

### I. DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE OF APPLICATION

1. For the purposes of this Recommendation:

- (a) the term **home work** means work carried out by a person, to be referred to as a homeworker,
  - (i) in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer;
  - (ii) for remuneration;
  - (iii) which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used,

unless this person has the degree of autonomy and of economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations or court decisions;

- (b) persons with employee status do not become homeworkers within the meaning of this Recommendation simply by occasionally performing their work as employees at home, rather than at their usual workplaces;
- (c) the term **employer** means a person, natural or legal, who, either directly or through an intermediary, whether or not intermediaries are provided for in national legislation, gives out home work in pursuance of his or her business activity.

---

<sup>7</sup> International Labour Organization. 1996. "R184 - Home Work Recommendation, 1996 (No. 184)." Accessed October 2024: [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312522:NO](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312522:NO)

2. This Recommendation applies to all persons carrying out home work within the meaning of Paragraph 1.

## **II. GENERAL PROVISIONS**

3.

- (a) Each Member should, according to national law and practice, designate an authority or authorities entrusted with the formulation and implementation of the national policy on home work referred to in Article 3 of the Convention.
- (b) As far as possible, use should be made of tripartite bodies or organizations of employers and workers in the formulation and implementation of this national policy.
- (c) In the absence of organizations concerned with homeworkers or organizations of employers of homeworkers, the authority or authorities referred to in subparagraph (1) should make suitable arrangements to permit these workers and employers to express their opinions on this national policy and on the measures adopted to implement it.

4. Detailed information, including data classified according to sex, on the extent and characteristics of home work should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for the national policy on home work and for the measures adopted to implement it. This information should be published and made publicly available.

5.

- (a) A homeworker should be kept informed of his or her specific conditions of employment in writing or in any other appropriate manner consistent with national law and practice.
- (b) This information should include, in particular:
  - (i) the name and address of the employer and the intermediary, if any;
  - (ii) the scale or rate of remuneration and the methods of calculation; and
  - (iii) the type of work to be performed.

## **III. SUPERVISION OF HOME WORK**

6. The competent authority at the national level and, where appropriate, at the regional, sectoral or local levels, should provide for registration of employers of homeworkers and of any intermediaries used by such employers. For this purpose, such authority should specify the information employers should submit or keep at the authority's disposal.

7.

- (a) Employers should be required to notify the competent authority when they give out home work for the first time.
- (b) Employers should keep a register of all homeworkers, classified according to sex, to whom they give work.
- (c) Employers should also keep a record of work assigned to a homeworker which shows:
  - (i) the time allocated;
  - (ii) the rate of remuneration;
  - (iii) costs incurred, if any, by the homeworker and the amount reimbursed in respect of them;

- (iv) any deductions made in accordance with national laws and regulations; and
  - (v) the gross remuneration due and the net remuneration paid, together with the date of payment.
- (d) A copy of the record referred to in subparagraph (3) should be provided to the homeworker.
- 8. In so far as it is compatible with national law and practice concerning respect for privacy, labour inspectors or other officials entrusted with enforcing provisions applicable to home work should be allowed to enter the parts of the home or other private premises in which the work is carried out.
- 9. In cases of serious or repeated violations of the laws and regulations applicable to home work, appropriate measures should be taken, including the possible prohibition of giving out home work, in accordance with national law and practice.

#### **IV. MINIMUM AGE**

- 10. National laws and regulations concerning minimum age for admission to employment or work should apply to home work.

#### **V. THE RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE AND TO BARGAIN COLLECTIVELY**

- 11. Legislative or administrative restrictions or other obstacles to:
  - (a) the exercise of the right of homeworkers to establish their own organizations or to join the workers' organizations of their choice and to participate in the activities of such organizations; and
  - (b) the exercise of the right of organizations of homeworkers to join trade union federations or confederations,should be identified and eliminated.
- 12. Measures should be taken to encourage collective bargaining as a means of determining the terms and conditions of work of homeworkers.

#### **VI. REMUNERATION**

- 13. Minimum rates of wages should be fixed for home work, in accordance with national law and practice.
- 14.
  - (a) Rates of remuneration of homeworkers should be fixed preferably by collective bargaining, or in its absence, by:
    - (i) decisions of the competent authority, after consulting the most representative organizations of employers and of workers as well as organizations concerned with homeworkers and those of employers of homeworkers, or where the latter organizations do not exist, representatives of homeworkers and of employers of homeworkers; or
    - (ii) other appropriate wage-fixing machinery at the national, sectoral or local levels.



- (b) Where rates of remuneration are not fixed by one of the means in subparagraph (1) above, they should be fixed by agreement between the homeworker and the employer.
15. For specified work paid by the piece, the rate of remuneration of a homeworker should be comparable to that received by a worker in the enterprise of the employer, or if there is no such worker, in another enterprise in the branch of activity and region concerned.
16. Homeworkers should receive compensation for:
- (a) costs incurred in connection with their work, such as those relating to the use of energy and water, communications and maintenance of machinery and equipment; and
  - (b) time spent in maintaining machinery and equipment, changing tools, sorting, unpacking and packing, and other such operations.
- 17.
- (a) National laws and regulations concerning the protection of wages should apply to homeworkers.
  - (b) National laws and regulations should ensure that pre-established criteria are set for deductions and should protect homeworkers against unjustified deductions for defective work or spoilt materials.
  - (c) Homeworkers should be paid either on delivery of each completed work assignment or at regular intervals of not more than one month.
18. Where an intermediary is used, the intermediary and the employer should be made jointly and severally liable for payment of the remuneration due to homeworkers, in accordance with national law and practice.

## **VII. OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH**

19. The competent authority should ensure the dissemination of guidelines concerning the safety and health regulations and precautions that employers and homeworkers are to observe. Where practicable, these guidelines should be translated into languages understood by homeworkers.
20. Employers should be required to:
- (a) inform homeworkers of any hazards that are known or ought to be known to the employer associated with the work given to them and of the precautions to be taken, and provide them, where appropriate, with the necessary training;
  - (b) ensure that machinery, tools or other equipment provided to homeworkers are equipped with appropriate safety devices and take reasonable steps to ensure that they are properly maintained; and
  - (c) provide homeworkers free of charge with any necessary personal protective equipment.
21. Homeworkers should be required to:
- (a) comply with prescribed safety and health measures;
  - (b) take reasonable care for their own safety and health and that of other persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work, including the proper use of materials, machinery, tools and other equipment placed at their disposal.

22.

- (a) A homeworker who refuses to carry out work which he or she has reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and serious danger to his or her safety or health should be protected from undue consequences in a manner consistent with national conditions and practice. The homeworker should report the situation to the employer without delay.
- (b) In the event of an imminent and serious danger to the safety or health of a homeworker, his or her family or the public, as determined by a labour inspector or other public safety official, the continuation of home work should be prohibited until appropriate measures have been taken to remedy the situation.

## **VIII. HOURS OF WORK, REST PERIODS AND LEAVE**

- 23. A deadline to complete a work assignment should not deprive a homeworker of the possibility to have daily and weekly rest comparable to that enjoyed by other workers.
- 24. National laws and regulations should establish the conditions under which homeworkers should be entitled to benefit, as other workers, from paid public holidays, annual holidays with pay and paid sick leave.

## **IX. SOCIAL SECURITY AND MATERNITY PROTECTION**

- 25. Homeworkers should benefit from social security protection. This could be done by:
  - (a) extending existing social security provisions to homeworkers;
  - (b) adapting social security schemes to cover homeworkers; or
  - (c) developing special schemes or funds for homeworkers.
- 26. National laws and regulations in the field of maternity protection should apply to homeworkers.

## **X. PROTECTION IN CASE OF TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT**

- 27. Homeworkers should benefit from the same protection as that provided to other workers with respect to termination of employment.

## **XI. RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES**

- 28. The competent authority should ensure that there are mechanisms for the resolution of disputes between a homeworker and an employer or any intermediary used by the employer.

## **XII. PROGRAMMES RELATED TO HOME WORK**

29.

- (a) Each Member should, in cooperation with organizations of employers and workers, promote and support programmes which:
  - (i) inform homeworkers of their rights and the kinds of assistance available to them;
  - (ii) raise awareness of home-work-related issues among employers' and workers' organizations, non-governmental organizations and the public at large;
  - (iii) facilitate the organization of homeworkers in organizations of their own choosing, including cooperatives;
  - (iv) provide training to improve homeworkers' skills (including non-traditional skills, leadership and negotiating skills), productivity, employment opportunities and income-earning capacity;
  - (v) provide training which is carried out as close as practicable to the workers' homes and does not require unnecessary formal qualifications;
  - (vi) improve homeworkers' safety and health such as by facilitating their access to equipment, tools, raw materials and other essential materials that are safe and of good quality;
  - (vii) facilitate the creation of centres and networks for homeworkers in order to provide them with information and services and reduce their isolation;
  - (viii) facilitate access to credit, improved housing and child care; and
  - (ix) promote recognition of home work as valid work experience.
- (b) Access to these programmes should be ensured to rural homeworkers.
- (c) Specific programmes should be adopted to eliminate child labour in home work.

## **XIII. ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

30. Where practicable, information concerning the rights and protection of homeworkers and the obligations of employers towards homeworkers, as well as the programmes referred to in Paragraph 29, should be provided in languages understood by homeworkers.

#RATIFY  
C177

 **HomeNet**  
INTERNATIONAL

[www.homenetinternational.org](http://www.homenetinternational.org)

 /HomeNetInt  /HomeNetInt