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Homeworkers in Global Supply Chains: A Review of Literature

Jenna Harvey

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About the Author:

Jenna Harvey coordinates WIEGO's Focal Cities initiative, which supports informal worker organizations in five cities to engage with governments to secure more inclusive laws and regulations, improved urban services and a voice in urban planning processes. Her specific interests are participatory planning and inclusive models of urban economic development.

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www.wiego.org

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Abstract

Homeworkers are subcontracted workers who produce or add value to goods or services from their homes or areas around their homes. This review summarizes literature from 2000 to 2017 relating to homeworkers in global supply chains. This review was guided by the following questions: What are the vulnerabilities of homeworkers in global supply chains? What mechanisms exist to provide legal and social protections for homeworkers and to secure their livelihoods? How have homeworkers made gains through organizing and agency, and what challenges do they continue to face in this area? This review is divided into seven main sections: emergence and growth of homework in global supply chains, characteristics and prevalence of homework, working conditions of homeworkers in global supply chains, policy responses, legal and governance frameworks, corporate social responsibility, and homeworkers' organizing and agency. It concludes with a summary of where the literature on homework converges and diverges and proposes new avenues for future research in this area.

Introduction

In many of today's domestic and global supply chains a critical part of production is carried out below the factory floor by an invisible workforce — homeworkers.[1] It is estimated that in India alone, there are 5 million homeworkers contributing to garment and textile supply chains (Chen and Sinha 2016). Homeworkers are workers who are subcontracted to produce or add value to goods or services from their homes or areas around their homes. They are positioned at the end of what have become increasingly complex supply chains that connect factories, contractors, subcontractors, homes and workshops across the globe on highly unequal terms.

Despite the economic contributions of homeworkers to global production, their work and contributions to economic growth are largely unknown to, or undervalued by, the brands for which they produce. The same applies to consumers and governments. By nature of their work, homeworkers are isolated and often lack information about markets or other homeworkers. As a result, homeworkers themselves are often unaware of their numbers and economic contributions and do not view themselves as legitimate economic agents.

Shifts in the organization of global production over, approximately, the past 60 years have increased competition and the mobility of capital, and decreased worker protections and power, Shifts in the organization of global production over, approximately, the past 60 years have increased competition and the mobility of capital, and decreased worker protections and power, setting in motion an "informalization" process (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007). In this process, working conditions and protections for formal workers have deteriorated and the informal workforce has increased in size[2] (Delaney 2004). In 2002, the International Labour Organization (ILO) stated that the "bulk of new employment

[1] Home-based workers are workers who produce goods or provide services from their homes or areas around their homes. The term "homeworker" is used to refer to one category of home-based workers — those who are subcontracted rather than self-employed. Throughout this paper, the term "homeworker" is used except when reference is made to a study that uses the umbrella term home-based workers.

[2] Estimates by Charmes (2012) indicate that informal employment as a share of total non-agricultural employment increased for Northern Africa, Latin America, and South and South-eastern Asia from the 1970s–1980s to 2005–2010. For sub-Saharan Africa, informal employment as a share of total non-agricultural employment increased sharply from 67.3 per cent in 1980–1984 to 86.9 per cent in 1995–1999. It subsequently decreased to 65.9 per cent in 2005–2010.

in recent years, particularly in developing and transition countries, has been in the informal economy" (ILO 2002:1). Rather than disappearing with industrialization,[3] informal work has both expanded and emerged in new forms — for example, accompanying the growth of large manufacturing firms in the Global South has been the emergence of informal enterprises and subcontracted industrial outworkers (homeworkers) (Carr *et al.* 2000; ILO 2002; ILO and WIEGO 2013).

Homework, a form of informal work, is characterized by vulnerability: homeworkers lack social and legal protections, as well as opportunities for economic mobility and collective bargaining — all four pillars of the decent work agenda outlined by the ILO (ILO 2002; Chen and Sinha 2016). Chen and Sinha (2016) outline three major ways in which homeworkers are inserted into global supply chains on unfair terms. First, firms outsource production to them as a way to protect against the risk of fluctuating demand (drawing upon homeworkers' labour when demand is high and ceasing to do so when demand is low). Firms also outsource to homeworkers as a way to download the non-wage costs of production, as homeworkers supply many of these at their own expense, including a workplace, electricity, equipment and transportation. Finally, many firms use homeworkers because they have specialized skills that cannot be mechanized — such as intricate embroidering. In many ways, homeworkers epitomize the unequal landscape of global production — formal firms benefit from the skills and flexibility they provide, while denying them core labour rights.

Homework is highly gendered — although data on homework are scarce, there is a strong consensus in the literature that the majority of homeworkers are women.[4] Existing data from South Asia[5] show that homework accounts for a larger share of employment for women workers outside of agriculture than for men in the region. Many women take on homework because of constraints that relate directly to gender norms — including those that limit women's mobility outside of the home, or that assign disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work to women.

In this sense, reducing the decent work deficits that homeworkers experience is an issue of both economic and gender justice. A key challenge for policymakers and others interested in women's economic empowerment is to find ways to reduce the vulnerabilities that homeworkers face, and at the same time enhance their capabilities, productivity and earnings in ways that protect and promote their livelihoods. Fundamental to this process is collective action and voice — homeworkers are already organizing to demand better working conditions and protections, and any intervention meant to benefit them should be shaped by them. This paper reviews the literature on homeworkers in global supply chains with these challenges in mind.

Specifically, this paper reviews literature on homeworkers in global supply chains from 2000 to 2017. Although scholars started paying increased attention to homework as early as the 1980s, it wasn't until the 2000s that informal work generally, and homework specifically, began to be examined in the context of global supply chains (Meagher 2013). Still, work on homeworkers' conditions within global supply chains remains a very small and limited subset of a large and comprehensive body of literature on formal (particularly factory) workers' conditions in global supply chains. Similarly, within the larger body of literature on the informal economy, homework occupies a relatively small space.

[3] For more on the view that the informal sector would disappear with modern industrial development, see Lewis 1954.

[4] Carr *et al.* 2000; ILO 2002; Freeman 2003; Delaney 2004; Hale and Wills 2005; Chen and Sinha 2016; Nathan *et al.* 2016, others.

[5] Mahmud 2014; Raveendran et al. 2013; Raveendran and Vanek, 2013; Akhtar and Vanek 2013.

As Mehrotra and Biggeri (2005) noted, "Homework is one of the most misunderstood and most neglected areas of research within the topic of the informal economy."

In recent years, however, this disparity has begun to close, with much of the new research on home-workers being commissioned or led by international agencies, activist scholars, civil society organizations or these actors in collaboration with each other. As a result, much of this review highlights applied case studies with associated lessons and recommendations for policy and practice, rather than theoretical debates and trends within the academic literature.

This review was guided by the following questions: What are the vulnerabilities of homeworkers in global supply chains? What mechanisms exist to provide legal and social protections for homeworkers and to secure their livelihoods? How have homeworkers made gains through organizing and agency, and what challenges do they continue to face in this area? This literature review is divided into seven main sections: emergence and growth of homework in global supply chains, characteristics and prevalence of homework, working conditions of homeworkers in global supply chains, policy responses, legal and governance frameworks, corporate social responsibility, and homeworkers' organizing and agency. Overall, 58 resources were located through an online search and reviewed. Search terms included "homeworkers" or "home-based workers," "outworkers," "industrial outworkers" or "subcontracted workers," combined with "global supply chains," "global value chains," "global commodity chains," "legal frameworks," "organizing," "protection" and "agency." A "cascading" approach was used for the review. The first round of identified sources was used to identify additional sources.

There is significant convergence in the literature around the reasons for the emergence and growth of homework. In other areas, however, major gaps in the knowledge base are apparent. First, most studies on homeworkers look at homework under the umbrella category of home-based work — in other words, both self-employed and subcontracted home-based workers are included in samples. Additionally, if few studies look specifically at homework, even fewer look specifically at homework within global supply chains — instead of using samples that contain a mix of homeworkers who produce for global and domestic supply chains.[6] There are multiple reasons for this, including the fact that it can be very difficult to differentiate between groups of home-based workers in practice, which will be described in more detail in subsequent sections of this review (Sinha and Mehrotra 2016). Unfortunately, the lack of differentiated research complicates efforts to clarify specific global value chain dynamics and macroeconomic policies that affect homeworkers, in what ways these affect homeworkers, and how this might change under future trends in macroeconomic policy and corporate practice.

At the same time, many of the mixed studies (looking at self-employed and subcontracted, global and domestic supply chains) reviewed here have drawn out a set of characteristics and vulnerabilities that are broadly shared by homeworkers, topics that are covered in sections I to III of this review. With respect to what should be done to protect and organize homeworkers (sections IV and V) there are a range of responses. There is a clear need for future research in this area, particularly with respect to mechanisms for legal and social protection. The last section of this literature review returns to a discussion of gaps in the literature and areas for future research.

[6] The two exceptions found in this review are IKEA and ILO 2015 and Sinha and Mehrotra 2016, both of which looked explicitly at homeworkers in global supply chains.

Clarification of the term "homeworker"

Homeworkers make up one of two categories of home-based workers — the other being self-employed home-based workers. Self-employed home-based workers produce goods and services from their homes or adjacent workplaces and work independently and on their own account — they purchase their own raw materials and are involved in the sale of their own finished products. In contrast, homeworkers, who also work from home, are typically provided with work orders and raw materials by a firm or business — most often through an intermediary contractor — and deliver orders back to, and receive pay directly from contractors. For the completion of work orders, homeworkers are usually paid a piece rate; they are not involved in the sale of finished products (Chen 2014; Delaney 2004; Carr *et al.* 2000).

Historically, homeworkers have engaged in labour-intensive work related to garments, footwear or crafts – such as stitching, embellishing or weaving. Although they continue to be concentrated in supply chains within the garment, textile and footwear sectors, recent research suggests that homework has increased and taken different forms, including productive activities such as: adding value to auto parts, packing pharmaceuticals or providing information technology related-services (Chen 2014; ETI 2010a).

Homeworkers may produce for either domestic or global supply chains, or both at the same time – which complicates efforts to differentiate between the two groups. As research by Sinha and Mehrotra (2016) indicates, this is made more difficult by the fact that many homeworkers do not know the brands that they are producing for, and thus cannot provide information about whether they are producing for a domestic or global supply chain. The authors also suggest that homeworkers — especially those working for global brands — may be reluctant to participate in studies or reveal information about their work for fear of retribution.

The ILO Convention 177 on Home Work defined homework as "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 economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations or court decisions" (ILO 2000).

The Convention further states that in this case "the term 'employer' means a person, natural or legal, who either directly or through an intermediary, if any, gives out home work in pursuance of his or her business activity" (*ibid.*).

This literature review focuses on homeworkers, as they are the category of home-based workers that is inserted into global supply chains.[7] Many home-based workers take on both types of work, however — thus moving between self-employed and subcontracted home-based work in accordance with changing demand or other market factors (Chen 2014; Zhou 2017. It is difficult to conceptually separate the two groups, who face many of the same challenges, especially with respect to poor working conditions, lack of legal identity, and low or irregular earnings caused by fluctuations in

[7] Although some authors (notably Carr *et al.* 2000) note that many self-employed home-based workers also have links to global supply chains, particularly in the agricultural sector.

prices and demand (Chen 2014). Many of the studies in this literature review covered both types of home-based workers. Whenever possible, attempts have been made to highlight research findings that pertain specifically to homeworkers.

I. Emergence and Growth of Homework in Global Supply Chains

Reorganization of global production and the proliferation of homework

There is broad consensus in the literature that the emergence[8] and growth of homework in global supply chains[9] is a direct result of the globalization of capitalism and its associated processes — namely the liberalization of trade, the reorganization of global production and technological advancement.[10]

As authors such as Carr et al. (2000) and Freeman (2003) note, under globalized industrial capitalism, capital has become increasingly mobile, while labour has remained largely fixed in place — allowing companies to restructure formerly centralized production processes so as to maximize flexibility and profit. For buyers (or lead firms), this has largely involved retaining control over higher-value production processes — principally marketing and distribution — and contracting labour-intensive production processes to suppliers who are primarily located in the global South (Carr *et al.* 2000, Nathan *et al.* 2016). In this highly competitive context, buyers have the ability to seek suppliers that can offer the lowest production costs — putting pressure on both governments and suppliers to create favourable conditions for capital (Carr *et al.* 2000; Freeman 2003). In their efforts to attract capital (in the case of governments to gain "producer country status," and in the case of suppliers to obtain and retain contracts), labour standards and bargaining power for formal workers have eroded, and a reliance on informal labour has grown.[11]

This process was driven in large part by neoliberal policies, such as the structural adjustment programmes pursued by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007; Benería *et al.* 2016). Specifically, during the 1980s and 1990s, many loans provided by these institutions were made conditional upon a loosening of national labour laws.

The "labour market flexibility" that they prescribed involved taking measures such as allowing more "flexible contracts" and curtailing collective bargaining rights (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007). As Mehrotra and Biggeri note, "Governments under pressure from local and foreign investors and from IMF and World Bank loan conditions have too often allowed labour standards to be defined by the demands of supply chain flexibility: easier hiring and firing, more short-term contracts, fewer benefits and longer periods of overtime" (2007:12). Mehrotra and Biggeri (*ibid.*) and Benería (2016) argue

[8] This refers to the emergence of homework specifically in the context of global supply chains. Many scholars note that homework is not a new phenomenon. It is often associated with the transition from household and factory production that occurred in the context of the Industrial Revolution (Freeman 2003).

[9] The literature on global supply chains (and the associated concepts of global value chains, global production networks and global commodity chains) is vast. It is beyond the scope of this review to outline the debates in this literature except as they relate to homeworkers.

[10] Delaney 2004, Carr *et al.* 2000; Freeman 2003; Hale and Wills 2005 MISSING; Nathan *et al.* 2016.

[11] Carr *et al.* 2000; Freeman 2003; Delaney 2004; Hale and Wills 2005; Nathan 2016 MISSING.

that these practices laid the groundwork for the deterioration of formal workers' working conditions, and the increase of subcontracting that followed.

A defining feature of this process of capitalist globalization has been the "feminization" of labour — understood as the increase in female participation in remunerative work (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007; Carr *et al.* 2000; Benería 2016). Benería et al. (2016) argue that feminization has taken different forms depending largely on geographic context, and race, ethnicity and class differences. Particularly for women in the global North, increased access to education, skills training and the "modest success of anti-discrimination policies" have contributed to an increase in women's participation in the labour force (*ibid*.: 112).

Benería *et al.* (2016) argue that particularly in the Global South (although not exclusively), feminization of labour has been characterized by the dual phenomena of increased female participation and the degradation of working conditions. It has been linked to the expansion of export-oriented manufacturing, a sector in which employers have shown a strong preference for women because of their "lower wage rates and greater productivity" relative to men (*ibid*.: 114). The authors argue that export-oriented manufacturing has also increased the demand for casual (contract) and informal (home-based) work as a way to reduce the costs and risks of production. As they explain, "Labor market flexibility promoted by neoliberal policies has resulted in employment and income insecurity, putting an increasing proportion of women into paid employment; export orientation has recruited a large number; and informalization of employment, in the form of casual, contract labor and home-based work, has further facilitated the rising demand for women workers" (*ibid*.: 113).

The reasons for and the outcomes of the proliferation of homework into supply chains differ across regions. As Mehrotra and Biggeri (2007) note, in South-eastern Asia, the growth of subcontracting (and as a result, homework) can be largely attributed to the widespread adoption of a focus on export-orientation and labour-intensive manufacturing in macroeconomic policy. In South Asia, the authors explain that the increase may have more to do with stagnating incomes in the agricultural sector, which have resulted in a shift to other productive activities to meet basic needs. In both cases, the expansion of homework has been accompanied by a transition of women who formerly did not work, or engaged in primarily traditional activities, into the sector. The authors also note that homework in Latin America mostly exists within urban areas, while in Asia, homework can be found in both urban and rural areas. In contrast to Asia, homework in Latin America is characterized more by service than by manufacturing work (*ibid*.).

Nature of insertion in global supply chains

In her 2013 review of the literature on formal-informal linkages in supply chains, Meagher points out that the principal debate in this area has centred on "whether integration is benign or exploitative." Literature on homeworkers in global supply chains, however, despite falling within the umbrella category of "formal-informal linkages," does not engage in this debate; the exploitative nature of homeworkers' insertion into supply chains is by and large a starting point for research on the topic.

Many authors use Gerrefi's 1994 analytical framework of buyer- and producer-driven supply chains to situate homeworkers within the unequal landscape of global production (Carr *et al.* 2000; Zhou 2016). Specifically, according to this framework, top-down, buyer-driven supply chains concentrate

power and profit in the hands of large firms, while in producer-driven chains (as in the automobile industry) large manufacturers play a bigger role in coordination and governance. The authors argue that footwear and garment supply chains, where most homeworkers are situated, are buyer-driven — large retailers in these sectors place orders and dictate the timing and specifications for these to suppliers (Carr *et al*. 2000; Zhou 2016). In this context, retailers shape the conditions (including the share of product value) for actors throughout the supply chain (Barrientos 2012).

Carr *et al.* (2000) and Freeman (2003) draw attention to concrete business practices that serve to "download" these costs and risks. Specifically, the authors argue that by seeking out the lowest costs, firms have adopted flexible procurement processes (facilitated by advances in inventory management technology) that allow them to retain a small stock of goods. The implications for suppliers are that they are often forced to meet tight deadlines and complete or modify orders with short lead times, with ripple effects felt throughout the rest of the supply chain. For example, Freeman (2003) notes that suppliers often mimic the strategies of lead firms — thus retaining the higher-value aspects of production and subcontracting out more labour-intensive work to informal enterprises or homeworkers. In this process, homeworkers are used as a safety valve — absorbing the risks associated with the peaks and troughs of lead firms' demand. When suppliers are under pressure to meet demand, they may rely heavily on homeworkers, and when demand is low, they may cease to use them altogether.

As Freeman explains, "Subcontracting has enabled manufacturers to reduce their costs and to increase their flexibility. Instead of having 'employees' who have to be paid week-in, week-out, whether or not there is any work, they use 'subcontractors,' who have to be paid only when they are working. The manufacturers do not have to pay social security payments or pension contributions for these subcontractors, nor do they need to provide sick pay. In addition, the manufacturers have been able to make yet further savings by passing on many of the overhead costs of production, such as those for light, heat and electricity" (2003:109). The implications of these practices on homeworkers' working lives have been well-documented through field research (explained in more detail in section III of this review).

While recognizing the exploitative nature of homework in the current context, some authors highlight its positive development potential. Namely, Mehrotra and Biggeri (2005) draw attention to the "dual and contradictory character" of homework — that, in addition to being exploitative, homework has the potential to promote human and local economic development. Specifically, the authors argue that targeted public policy could be used to facilitate the formation of microenterprises of homeworkers and promote homework as a growth strategy (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2005, 2007). Their views are summarized in more detail in subsequent sections of this review.

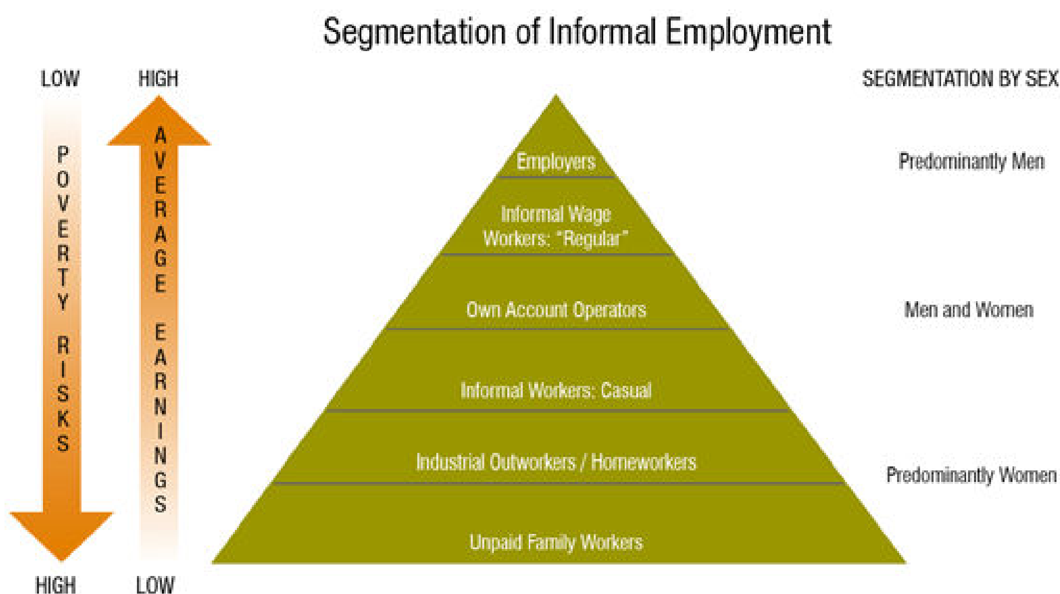
II. Characteristics and Prevalence of Homework

Characteristics of homeworkers and links with gender and poverty

The literature on homeworkers largely converges around a set of defining characteristics that directly relate to the nature of their insertion in global supply chains, including: invisibility, isolation, vulnerability, vague status in employment and precarious socioeconomic status.[12] Additionally, many studies also draw connections among homework, informality, gender and poverty.[13]

Homeworkers are informal workers,[14] that is, workers who lack legal and social protection. The global research-policy-action network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) pioneered a model[15] (figure 1) for understanding segmentation of status in employment within the informal economy, and how different segments are characterized by different levels of risks and earnings (Chen 2012). The model shows that homeworkers are predominantly women, who face high poverty risk and low earnings relative to other segments of the informal workforce.

Figure 1: WIEGO model of informal employment: hierarchy of earnings and poverty risk by employment status and sex



The reasons that women may take on homework are diverse and mediated both by economic need and sociocultural norms and structures (Sudarshan and Sinha 2011). For example, some authors have suggested that most homeworkers are young women who may take on homework in part to be

[12] Carr *et al.* 2000; Freeman 2003; Delaney 2004; Bergan 2009; Burchielli et al. 2009; ETI 2010 2010a; Chen 2014.

[13] Mehrotra and Biggeri 2005; Delaney et al. 2015; Carr et al. 2010; Chen 2014.

[14] The 2003 International Conference on Labour Statistics defined informal employment as employment without legal and social protection both inside and outside the informal sector. For more on definitions of the informal economy, informal sector and informal employment, see Chen 2012.

[15] The WIEGO model was initially developed using two commissioned reviews of the links between informality, poverty and gender. It was subsequently tested and validated in 2004 by commissioned data analysts who looked at national data for six countries — Costa Rica, Egypt, El Salvador, Ghana, India and South Africa.

able to manage both responsibilities within the home (caring for children or other family members), and the need or desire for remunerative work[16] (Freeman 2003; ETI 2010)a. Some homeworkers may have no choice but to work at home because of strict cultural norms that limit their mobility.[17] Alternatively, Freeman (2003) notes that many homeworkers may be former factory workers who may have been laid off or "informalized" after company closures or downsizing.

At the same time, other studies point to some aspects of homework that may lead women to choose it over factory work (or other work). For example, homework may appeal to some women for the flexibility it provides and the ability to work in the home, close to family and local networks (Chen 2014; Hale and Wills 2005). Other studies point out the benefit that homework can provide as a way to diversify household income (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007).

Although motivations for homework may vary, studies on homeworkers describe a set of common vulnerabilities. Some are common to all home-based workers, while others are specific to homeworkers.

For example, most home-based workers (self-employed and subcontracted) are poor and live in underserviced or informal settlements, meaning that their working conditions are typically inadequate or even unsafe (Chen 2014). Further, home-based work can make already precarious living situations more unsafe by reducing the amount of space in the home and by introducing chemicals, fumes or hazardous materials used in the work (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007).

Homeworkers in particular are isolated — often lacking access to or knowledge of other homeworkers, markets and end consumers that would allow them to increase their bargaining power. Homeworkers also typically lack access to information about the brands they are producing for, as well as their rights, the resources available to them, and where these exist. Isolation and lack of information, among other things, contribute to homeworkers' lack of leverage and bargaining power with subcontractors, leaving them vulnerable to exploitative practices (*ibid.*).

Homeworkers typically work long hours for little pay. As a study in three Asian cities revealed,[18] homeworkers earn less on average than self-employed home-based workers (Chen 2014). Homeworkers may earn less as a result of the production costs (utilities, space, transportation etc.) that they assume, and that are not reflected in their piece-rates (Chen and Sinha 2016).

Finally, as Mehrotra and Biggeri's 2007 study highlights, while many women may take on homework to be able to engage in remunerative and care work at the same time (often as a result of social norms that assign a disproportionate burden of care work to women), it also impacts on the quality of care they are able to provide. For example, the authors found that 71 per cent of female homeworkers surveyed in Pakistan reported that they were unable to provide the same quality of care to their children as before they began engaging in homework (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007). The authors argue that this affects both women and their children, and can ultimately become a factor contributing to the inter-generational transfer of poverty within homeworker households. For example, their study shows that female children are often involved in caring for younger children, while their

[16] While some generalizations are possible; the characteristics of homeworkers vary significantly across contexts. For example, anecdotal evidence from homeworkers' organizations in Thailand suggests that most homeworkers there are older women who are unable to secure employment in factories.

[17] Freeman 2003; Delaney 2004; Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007; Chen 2014.

[18] The IEMS study is described in more detail in section III of this review.

mothers engage in homework full-time, limiting the children's ability to get an education and increase their own capabilities (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007).

Prevalence of homework

Studies on homeworkers cite several reasons that reliable measures of the prevalence of homework are difficult to obtain: including the invisible nature of the work and the fact that homeworkers are typically not recognized as part of the workforce and are not captured in national statistics (Chen 2014; Freeman 2003; Delaney 2004). Further, many homeworkers do not self-identify as workers, and many enumerators are not trained to identify their employment status, causing them to be categorized as carrying out unpaid domestic work in labour force surveys (Freeman 2003; Chen 2014). In addition, Chen (2014) notes that many national labour force surveys do not include questions about place of work (complicating efforts to identify not only homeworkers but also other informal workers such as domestic workers and street vendors).

Finally, even when home-based workers are counted, most surveys do not distinguish between self-employed and subcontracted home-based workers, causing the two to be grouped together as self-employed (and indeed, the two categories do closely overlap as explained previously in this review) (WIEGO 2014). Distinguishing between the two groups is difficult not only because many home-based workers take on both own-account and subcontracted work at once, but also because of homeworkers' ambiguous employment status. The two major categories in the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE) are "employee" and "self-employed." As Chen and Sinha note, however, homeworkers "occupy an intermediate status in employment between fully independent self-employed worker and fully dependent employee" (2016:17). Efforts are currently underway to address this issue in the revision of the ICSE[19] (Carré *et al*. 2017).

WIEGO developed guidelines[20] for estimating home-based workers that were used to conduct studies in four South Asian countries spanning the years 2008-2012. The guidelines included two major components:

- Identifying home-based workers through a question on "place of work" (the response "own residence" indicates home-based); and
- Identifying different categories of home-based workers (self-employed or subcontracted, and within subcontracted, piece-rate or time-basis) through the use of questions on employment status, type of contract and mode of payment (WIEGO 2014).

The studies revealed that in South Asia, home-based work (self-employed and subcontracted) constitutes 7.2 per cent of non-agricultural employment for women and men in Bangladesh, 15.2 per cent in India, 30 per cent in Nepal and 5.3 per cent in Pakistan.[21] As Table 1 shows, in every country, home-based work (self-employed and subcontracted) constitutes a more *important* source of

[19] For more about the current revision process, see Carré *et al*. 2017.

[20] These guidelines were developed following the establishment of a statistical definition of home-based workers by the Independent Group on Home-Based Workers in India, which was formed in 2007 by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation of the Government of India. For more information on the definition and the process of establishing an operational guide for implementing the statistical definition, see WIEGO 2014.

[21] Estimates drawn from the most recent data for each country (see table 1).

employment for women than for men. In other words, a higher percentage of women non-agricultural workers are involved in home-based work than men non-agricultural workers.

Table 1: Home-based workers in South Asia as a percentage of all non-agricultural workers by sex

Rural/urban total (by country)	***Women, % (number, millions)***	***Men, % (number, millions)***	***Total, % (number, millions)***
Bangladesh (2009-2010)	12.1 (0.7)	5.9 (1.3)	7.2 (2)
India (2011-2012)	31.7 (16)	11.0 (21.4)	15.2 (37.4)
Nepal (2008)	47.6 (0.5)	21.6 (.4)	30 (0.9)
Pakistan (2008-2009)	40 (1)	1.5 (.4)	5.3 (1.4)

Sources: Bangladesh (Mahmud 2014); India (Raveendran *et al*. 2013); Nepal (Raveendran and Vanek 2013); Pakistan (Akhtar and Vanek 2013).

Despite the importance of home-based work to women non-agricultural workers, women do not make up the majority of home-based workers in every country. In India and Nepal, the share of women in home-based work is approximately half (43 per cent in India in 2011-2012 and 51 per cent in Nepal in 2008). In Bangladesh, most home-based workers are men — approximately 67 per cent in 2009-2010. In Pakistan, the opposite is true; 75 per cent of home-based workers were women in 2008-2009. In reference to this data, Chen and Sinha (2016) suggest that the greater numbers of male home-based workers in some South Asian countries may have to do with the low overall labour force participation rates of women in the region.

Manufacturing was the industry sector with the highest concentration of home-based workers in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, where it accounts for 55 per cent, 55 per cent and 92 per cent of all home-based work, respectively. In Nepal, retail trade was the most significant sector for home-based workers, with one-third of workers concentrated in the sector.

These studies also provided some data on trends in the region. For example, the data showed that home-based work is increasing in Bangladesh and India, and declining in Pakistan. The data for India were available for a 12-year period — during which the absolute numbers of home-based workers increased from 23.3 million in 1999-2000 to 37.4 million in 2011-2012. In Bangladesh, the total number of home-based workers increased significantly — by 41 per cent between 2005 and 2009.

In all four countries, the data could be further disaggregated into self-employed and subcontracted workers. For example, in Pakistan, one-third of home-based workers are homeworkers, 87.44 per cent of whom are women (Akhtar and Vanek 2013). Homework also represents a much more important source of non-agricultural employment for women than for men — 15.6 per cent of all women non-agricultural workers are homeworkers compared to less than 1 per cent for men (ibid.). In Nepal, very few home-based workers were identified as homeworkers (only 1.2 per cent), but the researchers note this was likely due to a survey error (Raveendran and Vanek 2013). In Bangladesh in 2009, 14 per cent of home-based workers were homeworkers, 35.85 per cent of whom were women (Mahmud 2014). In India, estimates on homeworkers were only available for 1999-2000, but these data revealed that homeworkers constituted about 33.4 per cent of all home-based workers. Of women home-based workers, 45 per cent were homeworkers as opposed to 25.3 per cent of male

home-based workers (Raveendran *et al.* 2013). However, Chen and Sinha (2016) note that, while these estimates are helpful, they are likely underestimates as many self-employed home-based workers are also homeworkers.

Recent data provided by national statistical offices and compiled by WIEGO and the ILO give a picture of urban home-based work in regions beyond South Asia. The 2013 joint study found that home-based work "accounts for a significant share of urban employment in some countries" and that women make up the majority of home-based workers (ILO 2013:46). It also found that self-employed home-based workers make up a larger share of home-based workers than homeworkers (subcontracted) in the areas for which there were no data.[22]

Table 2: Indicators on home-based work by geographic area

Geographic area	*Home-based work as a share of urban employment, %*	*Home-based work as a share of urban informal employment, %*	*Share of home-based workers who are women, %*	*Share of home-based workers who are self-employed, %*	*Share of home-based workers who are subcontracted, %*
Country					
India	18	23		62	
Ghana	...	21	88		
South Africa	6	...	62		27
Brazil		...	70		
City					
Lima	...	3	...		
Buenos Aires	3	5	...		
Eight cities in Africa	...	11-25	...		2-12

Source: ILO 2013

III. Working Conditions of Homeworkers in Global Supply Chains

In part because of the highly invisible and isolated nature of homework, relatively few studies take an in-depth look at their experiences and working conditions. In this section, several studies that explore homeworkers' working conditions are described separately so as to highlight not only the research findings, but also the methods used for each, as these may hold important lessons for future research in this area.

[22] Since the 2013 joint study was published, WIEGO has compiled additional city data on home-based workers for an expanded set of cities using available data provided by select national statistical offices. These data are available through the "WIEGO Dashboard," an online data visualization tool. See: www.wiego.org/dashboard.

Transnational studies of homeworkers

Women Working Worldwide transnational research on the garment industry

From 2000 to 2002, the United Kingdom-based non-profit organization Women Working Worldwide coordinated a transnational action research study to examine the experiences of workers in the global garment industry, with a particular focus on the impact of subcontracting, and opportunities and challenges for organizing and resistance. The research was carried out in a unique decentralized fashion — 10 garment workers' organizations (or allied/support organizations) in 10 countries within Asia, Europe and Central America were engaged to conduct research with garment workers in their respective countries. Each organization had the autonomy to define their own research objectives and strategies within the context of the larger project (Hale and Wills 2005).

In every one of the nine locations where supply chain mapping took place, homeworkers were always found in the "bottom tier" of the supply chain. The research revealed that subcontracting arrangements varied — some homeworkers received work orders directly from lead firms, while others interfaced with intermediaries. Through supply chain mapping, the researchers were also able to determine that many of the homeworkers were producing goods for European, American and Japanese brands. They confirmed the well-established argument that homeworkers have almost no individual or collective bargaining power in supply chains and as a result were forced to assume most of the costs and risks of production, including poor and even dangerous working conditions, low piece rates, irregular demand and pay, long hours and hidden deductions (for goods that subcontractors deemed damaged, for example) (*ibid.*).

The research also highlighted challenges to homeworkers organizing — both their isolation from one another and their strong dependence on local networks, which the researchers claimed could be destabilized through organizing activities. They also argued that without proof of employment and a legal contract, homeworkers fear that organizing will cause them to lose their jobs (*ibid.*).

WIEGO Informal Economy Monitoring Study

The Informal Economy Monitory Study (IEMS) was carried out by WIEGO in 2012-2013. The research highlighted the impact of "economic trends, urban policies and practices, value chain dynamics, and other economic and social forces" on home-based workers, street vendors and waste pickers (Chen 2014). Here we focus on the findings for home-based workers and, to the extent possible, for homeworkers within that group.

The IEMS study on home-based workers involved qualitative (15 focus groups per city of five participants each) and quantitative research (survey questionnaire) with 447 home-based workers[23] in Ahmedabad, India; Bangkok, Thailand; and Lahore, Pakistan, in coordination with membership-based organizations of informal workers. Across the three cities, 71 per cent of the workers in the study sample were subcontracted and 29 per cent were self-employed. The study revealed the

[23] The sample was drawn from local membership-based organizations of women informal workers: the Self Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad, HomeNet Thailand in Bangkok, and HomeNet Pakistan in Lahore. The sample comprised women only.

diversity of work that home-based workers engage in — producing products ranging from the traditional to the modern for markets at the local, national and international levels. The study confirmed that home-based workers earn little and on an irregular basis, but that their incomes are crucial to household subsistence — over 75 per cent of the workers surveyed reported that their principle source of household income was from their home-based work, and over 25 per cent of the workers surveyed were the main breadwinners in their families (Chen 2014).

The IEMS results affirmed many of the negative value chain dynamics that have been documented in the literature and that were also revealed through the Women Working Worldwide study, such as delayed and irregular payments, and irregular supplies of raw materials. The unique urban focus of the IEMS, however, revealed additional challenges that home-based workers face, including those caused by local government policies and planning practices. For example, many workers reported the financial hardship caused by the need to pay for public transport to commute to contractors to receive or return orders and/or to receive pay. In addition to insecurity caused by lack of tenure, self-employed and subcontracted home-based workers highlighted poor infrastructure and working conditions (cramped spaces, and lack of natural light and ventilation, for example) as major concerns.

In Ahmedabad, study participants (100 per cent of whom were subcontracted homeworkers) reported the threat of eviction and relocation as being a major negative force. Lack of or irregular electricity was another factor with significant negative impacts on productivity — particularly in Lahore, where load shedding[24] is common (all of the focus groups in Lahore chose lack of electricity as the primary challenge) (*ibid.*).

The study also called attention to the impact of changes in the macroeconomic environment — namely fluctuation of prices and demand — that can have negative impacts on home-based workers' earnings and increase their vulnerability (*ibid.*). For example, approximately half of home-based workers surveyed across all three cities cited the high cost of inputs as having a significant negative impact on their work. In Lahore (in all of the focus groups), Bangkok (in one-third of the focus groups) and Ahmedabad (in approximately a quarter of the focus groups), inflation was named as an important concern.

Competition — an increased number of workers in their sector — was also cited as a significant problem. This phenomenon also relates to economic crisis in that competition often increases when former factory workers are laid off and take up homework. The IEMS claimed that these findings challenge mainstream assumptions about the informal economy as a "cushion to fall back on" for workers during periods of economic crisis. Instead, as the findings showed, rather than being protected from the harsh effects of crisis, home-based workers felt them acutely on their work and earnings (*ibid.*).

The study found that the cumulative effect of all of the costs and risks that homeworkers take on serve to significantly reduce their earnings, often forcing them to cut household expenditures, particularly in the area of nutrition. Borrowing money and taking on additional work were also cited as responses to negative impacts, which the workers explain often leads to stress and frustration (*ibid.*).

[24] Load shedding refers to the interruption of electrical supply, usually to reduce the load on generating plants.

The IEMS was unique in that it focused on organized homeworkers who were already affiliated to membership-based organizations. For these workers, an organizational affiliation represented the only medium for voice, and was mentioned by over half of the focus groups as the institution that was most helpful to them in responding to negative forces that affect their livelihoods (*ibid.*).

HomeNet South Asia study in India and Nepal

In 2016, HomeNet South Asia carried out a study specifically on homeworkers in Kathmandu, Nepal, and the Indian cities of Tiruppur and Delhi. The study identified a sample of 56 homeworkers across the three cities, 100 per cent of whom were women and all of whom produced for global brands (including from Australia, Europe and Japan). None of the homeworkers in the study had written contracts with their employers, and the average earnings of the workers in each city were found to be below the national minimum wage. The study found that earnings were also highly irregular: delayed payments were common, and even when made "on time" the payments were made between long intervals, once a month in Tirapur and Delhi, and once in two months in Kathmandu. The study also found that the homeworkers' households were largely "precarious and vulnerable" with the majority of breadwinners (whether they were the homeworkers themselves or other family members) depending on informal work to support the household (Sinha and Mehrotra 2016).

The study also highlighted how shifting value chain dynamics — such as quickly changing fashion trends and short lead times — can affect homeworkers. As one homeworker in Delhi explained, "The company many times changes the design in between and then we have to do too many alterations for which we are not paid extra" (*ibid.*: 24). Poor quality raw materials often affected their work and earnings, as they would lose work days having to return faulty materials to contractors. The study concluded that homeworkers are largely invisible within global supply chains, as international brands often have limited knowledge of their insertion, and the homeworkers have limited knowledge of the brands. In none of the cities studied could homeworkers map the production chain (*ibid.*).

Five-country survey in South and South-eastern Asia

In 2007, Mehrotra and Biggeri conducted a study of homework in five countries across South and Southeast Asia — India, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. The study involved conducting household surveys, focus groups and case studies with homeworkers in three to four sectors for each country. All of the sectors could be classified as manufacturing activities with the exception of three in agriculture. They included incense stick rolling in India, rattan production in Indonesia and leather craft in Thailand, among others. Some of the sectors had links to domestic supply chains while others had links to global supply chains. Specifically, those with links to buyer-driven global chains included: manufacturing activities (leather goods production in Thailand and carpet production in Pakistan) and agriculture (okra production in the Philippines and hybrid seed production in Thailand). The majority of the workers surveyed in the homeworker households were female (*ibid.*).[25]

The study aimed to analyze the potential of homework at two levels — to foster human development through the expansion of individual capabilities and to foster local economic development. The study

[25] Specifically, women accounted for 47 to 61 per cent of the homeworkers surveyed in India (depending on sector) and 48 to 53 per cent in Indonesia.

was unique in that it examined homework through "local economic systems" analysis rather than value chain analysis. The study also identified policies that would need to be implemented to enhance the positive potential of homework.

The results of the study showed the ways in which homework can provide advantages to workers (by providing a critical source of income diversification, for example) while at the same time trapping workers within exploitative dynamics at multiple levels. Many of the unequal value chain dynamics revealed through the study are well documented in the literature. One finding that is not often discussed, however, relates to the relationship between homeworkers and subcontractors.

Specifically, the research demonstrated that homeworkers' relationships with subcontractors were complex — while they were exploitative in nature, they were also largely stable and long-lasting. The study found that subcontractors who serve as long-term intermediaries with homeworkers by nature limit their contact with other workers and with other actors in the supply chain, and in the worst cases use debt bondage to keep homeworkers from switching to other subcontractors. In many cases, subcontractors were part of the same community or even kin of homeworkers. The authors argued that this shared identity often serves as a form of "negative social capital" in that it may blind homeworkers to the exploitative nature of the relationship (*ibid.*).

In addition to encouraging and supporting the organization of homeworkers, the study outlined additional targeted measures that could be taken by governments to increase homeworkers' capabilities and foster local economic development in their communities (these are discussed in section IV of this paper). The authors emphasized collective and government action as critical to harnessing the potential of homework to expand individual capabilities and local development, and to avoiding intergenerational poverty transfer in homeworker households (*ibid.*).

National studies

The ILO has conducted or commissioned a range of country studies on home-based workers.[26] One of the most recent was carried out in 2017 in coordination with the Home-based Women Workers Federation of Pakistan (Zhou 2017). The study focused primarily on examining the links between formal and informal actors, dynamics within the textile and garment supply chains of Pakistan, and homeworkers' wages. It shed light on complex supply chain structures where both informal workers and informal enterprises interacted with formal suppliers and intermediaries. Through a survey of 406 households, the study found homeworkers to be "chronically and significantly underpaid." The homeworkers surveyed reported working 12.3 hours a day and six days a week at an hourly wage rate of 67.50 Pakistan rupees[27] (39 cents in US dollars). The study also took a close look at homeworkers' ability to negotiate for improved wages — and affirmed the widespread consensus in the literature that homeworkers have extremely limited ability to engage in bargaining. Reasons stated included a lack of access to collective bargaining structures, dependence on a single contractor and a lack of knowledge about national minimum wage rates (*ibid.*).

[26] For more on the ILO's work on home-based workers, see: www.ilo.org/Search5/search.do?sitelang=en&locale=en_EN&consumercode=ILOHQ_STELLENT_PUBLIC&searchWhat=home-based+worker&searchLanguage=en

[27] The authors noted that the income reported could have been understated because of other contributions to household income and the work of helpers.

Another recent study (Pieper and Putri 2016), which formed part of the international "Change Your Shoes" campaign, focused on working conditions in the Indonesian leather and footwear sector, where an estimated 40,000 women and men are employed. Specifically, the study looked at homeworkers producing for the German brand PT Ara Shoes. It found homeworkers having to work overtime for pay that amounted to less than a quarter of the monthly minimum wage for the area. The study also revealed that homeworkers were fined for goods that did not meet the company's requirements, and that their earnings were further reduced by the cost of transport to pick up and drop off raw materials and goods. Homeworkers reported multiple health problems; none had health insurance. Some had unsuccessfully attempted to access the factory infirmary.

IV. Policy Responses

Two substantive policy agendas are outlined in two of the studies above (Chen 2014, and Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007). These are described below.

Fostering enterprise development among homeworkers

Based on their 2007 study, described previously, Mehrotra and Biggeri argue that homework can promote both human and local economic development with targeted policy interventions that serve to maximize workers' production efficiency and minimize their vulnerabilities. Subcontracting is not inherently negative, they argue, and can instead produce positive outcomes for workers, and local and national economies (through generation of employment, enhancement of workers' skills and inter-industry links, for example). To enhance this positive potential, they advocate for targeted policy to foster the formation of small and medium enterprises of homeworkers as a growth strategy (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007).

Specifically, through their research they found that homeworkers often form natural clusters — where those producing similar products are geographically concentrated (which could be the result of local transfer of traditional artisanal skills or the presence of a large firm that consistently contracts out work, for example). They propose that these clusters could form the foundation for local networks of small and medium enterprises (*ibid.*).

However, the authors caution that the positive externalities of clustering are not realized by default or as a function of the market — they require coordination of actors and institutions, particularly collective action on the part of workers coupled with public support. The authors outline an agenda for policy intervention based on three pillars — macropolicies, institutional policies, and direct policies in support of homeworkers' enterprises (*ibid.*).

In terms of macropolicies, the authors argue that cluster and enterprise development should be integrated into a national industrial strategy that may require a shift from an export orientation to the protection of domestic industry. Governments should also reduce barriers for small enterprises by, for example, providing easier access to credit and simplifying procedures. In the ambit of institutional policies, the authors suggest further reducing barriers to registration and formalization for small informal firms through fiscal reforms and tax incentives, and the removal of discriminatory legislation.

They also argue for governments to work to facilitate market access and diversification, and to support technical and management upgrading for small firms (*ibid.*).

A prerequisite for macro- and institutional policies to benefit homeworkers, however, is for homeworkers to be able to successfully form enterprises, for which they need targeted support. In the area of direct policies to promote microenterprises of homeworkers, the authors advocate the government promotion of homeworkers' organizations and producer groups, as well as the provision of services such as education and training to upgrade skills and credit and microfinance (*ibid.*).

The authors suggest that the promotion of clusters should form one part of a larger agenda for the protection of homeworkers, which should also include the development of codes and international standards, national legislation and actions by consumers. Fundamental to achieving this agenda, they argue, is the provision of universal social protection to reduce homeworkers' vulnerabilities (*ibid.*).

Inclusive urban planning and practice

The IEMS, described above, shows that homeworkers are significantly affected by local government policy and practice. As homeworkers' homes are also their workplaces, any policies or actions that affect their homes — evictions, relocations, changes to infrastructure — inevitably affect their work. As a result, the policy agenda outlined in the IEMS advocates the upgrading of informal settlements (to ensure access to water, sanitation, electricity, adequate shelter and transportation) where there are large concentrations of informal workers as key to ensuring access to markets and improving productivity (Chen 2014).

The IEMS also advocates multi-use zoning to provide home-based workers with the security to conduct their commercial activities within the residential areas where they live. As Chen states, "policy interventions around land allocation and housing as well as basic infrastructure and transport services should consider the home as a workplace in addition to a living place, and should be designed around an understanding of how people use their homes as workplaces, the costs that they incur to do so, and the effect that housing conditions and location have on the productivity of home-based work" (*ibid.*: 74).

A separate impact study by WIEGO, HomeNet South Asia and the Harvard South Asia Institute documents the positive impact that upgrading urban settlement can have on home-based workers' livelihoods. Specifically, the study showed that a basic infrastructure improvement project in two informal settlement areas of Bhubaneswar, India, increased income (largely as a result of time-saving installation of individual water connections), decreased health expenditures (due to sanitation interventions) and increased time for childcare (due to water connections) (Chen and Sinha 2016).

V. Legal and Governance Frameworks

This section reviews a range of literature — academic studies, impact assessments, reports and soft law instruments from intergovernmental organizations — to provide a picture of both what has been produced in terms of legal and governance frameworks that could apply to homeworkers in global supply chains (even if they are not currently applied) and what has been written about these.

At the international level, there is a dearth of literature on the one existing legal standard for homeworkers — ILO Convention 177 on Home Work. There is also very little written about the potential of multilateral "soft law" governance instruments, namely the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, to provide protections for homeworkers.

Some of the most substantive literature on protections for homeworkers can be found through case studies of national legislative innovations, particularly in Australia and Thailand. These case studies have primarily focused on mobilization processes leading up to the legislative change, however, rather than the content and application of the legislation itself.

International legal and governance frameworks

ILO Convention 177 on Home Work

Established in 1996 as the first and only global standard specifically for homeworkers, Convention 177 stipulates that homeworkers should receive the same treatment as other wage workers. It calls for homeworkers to be included in national statistics and establishes their right to core labour protections. It states that both contractor and lead firms are responsible for protecting the rights of homeworkers (ILO 2000). A sustained advocacy campaign by homeworkers' organizations — principally the Self Employed Women's Association, which came together with other groups to form a centralized advocacy platform called HomeNet — laid the groundwork for the Convention, the first in the ILO's history to cover a group of workers made up primarily of women informal workers (Chen and Sinha 2016).

The Convention outlines standards meant to guide national policies on homework. It states, "The national policy on homework 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" (ILO 2000).

The Convention defines equality of treatment as relating to:

- "the homeworkers' right to establish or join organizations of their own choosing and to participate in the activities of such organizations;
- protection against discrimination in employment and occupation;
- protection in the field of occupational safety and health;
- remuneration;
- statutory social security protection;
- access to training;
- minimum age for admission to employment or work; and
- maternity protection" (*ibid.*).

As of 2017, the Convention had only 10 ratifications (none of which are in Asia, where homework is most prevalent).[28] Writing in 2004, Delaney drew attention to the lack of documentation about the impact of the Convention in the four countries where it had been ratified at that time. Studies on the Convention's impacts are still essentially non-existent. In the years immediately leading up to the 20th anniversary of adoption, homeworkers began to mobilize across regions to draw attention to the challenges they face and to call for increased ratification (Sinha and Mehrotra 2016).

In February 2015, WIEGO and HomeNet South Asia brought together members of 60 home-based worker groups[29] in New Delhi for a Global Conference of Home-based Workers, which resulted in the "Delhi Declaration" (WIEGO 2016c). The Declaration outlines a set of demands largely in line with Convention 177, and further declares a commitment to building and strengthening a global movement of home-based workers. In addition, HomeNet South Asia together with WIEGO developed a guide on the Convention and why it should be ratified, as well as a document comparing homeworkers' conditions in 1996 and 20 years later (WIEGO 2016a).

Subsequently, HomeNet Eastern Europe released a declaration in June 2016, calling for organizations of home-based workers and supportive NGOS to increase advocacy and awareness around home-based workers' issues; for national governments to recognize the contributions of home-based workers and to support them through national laws, policies, statistics, integration into markets, and recognition of their organizations; and for European institutions to recognize home-based workers' contributions to national economies and to include home-based workers' representative organizations in the formulation of solutions (HomeNet Eastern Europe 2016).

All of this work helped to guide the platform of demands that homeworker representatives and allies developed for the 2016 International Labour Conference General Discussion on Global Supply Chains, which, in addition to outlining a series of demands, provided recommendations for their implementation and enforcement, including:

- "Ratification of C177;
- inclusion of homeworkers in corporate codes of conduct;
- disclosure of suppliers by companies; and
- coordinated approaches by government to ensure enabling rights for homeworkers, access to grievance mechanisms and the preservation of existing livelihoods, among other things" (WIEGO 2016b).

At the conference, the Workers' Group held a special event to commemorate the Convention's anniversary, where homeworker representatives and others reflected on progress made and future relevance (Sinha and Mehrotra 2016).

In summary, although there have been few ratifications of Convention 177, and very little documentation on its impact, it has continued to serve as a critical advocacy tool for homeworkers. They continue to mobilize and shape their demands around its core principles, as described here.

[28] The current list of ratifications of C177 can be found here: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312322

[29] Including networks, associations and trade unions.

ILO decent work agenda

At the 2002 International Labour Conference, the ILO adopted a resolution concerning decent work and the informal economy, highlighting that informal workers experience deficits in every one of the ILO's established areas of decent work: economic opportunity, rights, protection and voice. The resolution established the goal to "promote decent work along the entire continuum from the informal to the formal economy, and in development-oriented, poverty reduction-focused and gender-equitable ways" (ILO 2002:32). Homeworkers are described in the document as "disguised wage employees — who may not even be aware of who their ultimate 'boss' is, but who are clearly dependent on someone for the inputs, equipment, work location and sale of final products — and that someone has certain responsibilities for ensuring decent work for such workers" (*ibid*.: 38).

The resolution states that the critical policy issue is to "enhance the positive" informal-formal links to ensure decent work for informal wage workers. The resolution puts forth a set of recommendations, including enhancing rights and improving social protection in the informal economy, strengthening representation and voice in the informal economy, and meeting the global demand for decent employment (*ibid*.). The decent work agenda has formed the basis for at least one of the ILO's interventions for homeworkers, the MAMPU — Access to Employment and Decent Work for Women Project, which targets homeworkers in Indonesia.[30]

UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

In 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council endorsed the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights ("Guiding Principles"), the first international instrument to distinguish between the duties and responsibilities of states and business with respect to human rights in supply chains. The Guiding Principles outline the protect, respect and remedy framework — namely the state's duty to protect human rights, the corporate responsibility to respect human rights and the need for provision of access to remedy (Ruggie 2011).

The Guiding Principles state that businesses have the responsibility to address human rights impacts in their supply chains — and not only those that they may have directly caused, but also those to which they may have contributed, such as through business relationships. "Business relationship" is defined as "relationships with business partners, entities in its value chain, and any other non-State or State entity directly linked to its business operations, products or services" (Ruggie 2011:15). This definition would cover contractors who subcontract work to homeworkers; in this sense, the Guiding Principles implicitly cover homeworkers.

The Guiding Principles have since been integrated into other existing international instruments, namely the ILO Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, thus effectively extending the coverage of these instruments to include homeworkers as well.

There is a significant gap in the literature with respect to the potential of these instruments to extend protections to homeworkers. Only one study (Delaney *et al*. 2013) was identified that discussed

[30] For more on this project, see: www.ilo.org/jakarta/whatwedo/projects/WCMS_183299/lang--en/index.htm

homework in the context of the Guiding Principles. Specifically, the authors critique the Guiding Principles, which were developed with the objective of addressing governance gaps, for paradoxically failing to provide a provision for "regulating the regulators" by defining a formal role for non-state actors to engage. As they explain, "Governments discharge their duty slowly and under duress…with non-state actors providing the prime motivation for state action" (ibid.: 84). They argue that the Guiding Principles should define a larger role for non-state actors to engage, and hold both states and businesses accountable.

While critiques like this are useful, additional work is needed on how the Guiding Principles, and others that have incorporated them, could be or have been used to keep lead firms accountable for human rights impacts across supply chains — including homeworkers.

OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment and Footwear Sector

In 2017, after a consultative process, the OECD released the Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment and Footwear Sector ("the Guidance"). The Guidance aims to support businesses in developing the due diligence process[31] recommended in the revised OECD Guidelines, and is the first official due diligence resource explicitly including homeworkers. Specifically, the Guidance establishes that homeworkers are "an intrinsic part of the workforce entitled to receive equal treatment" (OECD 2017:182). It outlines recommendations for enterprises, starting by identifying in which production processes and sourcing countries homeworkers might be concentrated, and by building the capacity of suppliers in these areas to ensure responsible sourcing from homeworkers. Specifically, enterprises are meant to ensure that suppliers develop standards and protocols for intermediaries that contract to homeworkers and for the contracting processes themselves, and that these specifically include transparency requirements (*ibid.*).[32]

The Guidance also recommends that enterprises support homeworkers, including by partnering with local organizations who work with homeworkers, and by encouraging local and national governments to promote homeworkers' rights and equal treatment (*ibid.*: 185).

No literature could be identified in the course of this review that explored how the Guidance could be or has been used by homeworkers or allies in advocacy or other efforts.

National legal frameworks

Thailand Homeworkers Protection Act and Social Protection Scheme

Over the course of 10 years, homeworkers in Thailand mobilized to put pressure on the national Government for the development of homeworker-specific protective legislation, which ultimately resulted in the passing of the Homeworkers Protection Act in 2010, and a social protection scheme in 2011.

[31] The due diligence process involves an assessment (on the part of companies) of whether any aspect of the production process is resulting in human rights violations.

[32] Examples of possible transparency requirements include record keeping of all orders distributed, all workers receiving them and payments made.

The mobilization leading to the adoption of the Act has been documented by WIEGO (2012) and Thanachaisethavut *et al*. (2008), as described below.

The campaign for legislation was led by HomeNet Thailand,[33] an affiliate of HomeNet Southeast Asia, with support from its parent organization, the Informal Labour Network, the Foundation for Labour and Employment Protection and supportive allies, including WIEGO and the ILO. Due to the campaign's initial efforts — including lobbying for existing labour rights laws to be applied to homeworkers — a Ministerial Regulation on Protection of Homeworkers was put in place in 2003 (WIEGO 2012). However, it did not provide a comprehensive definition of homeworker (excluding those workers who buy their own raw materials and tools) and did not address key issues relating to wages and social security (Thanachaisethavut *et al*. 2008, WIEGO 2012).

Following the regulation, HomeNet Thailand and allies continued to articulate their demands for a national act to protect homeworkers, grounded in Convention 177, ILO Recommendation No. 184, and existing national labour law, and including (but not limited to) a comprehensive definition of homeworker; promotion and development of homework (through provision of credit, access to information and technology, and support for organizational development, among other things); employer responsibility for occupational health and safety; and the establishment of multistakeholder committees to monitor the implementation of the law (Thanachaisethavut *et al*. 2008).

Around the same time, the Ministry of Labour also put forth a proposal for the act, which was missing many of the provisions outlined by the HomeNet Thailand coalition. Subsequently, a series of policy dialogues took place between the two groups, and finally the Act was passed in 2010 (Thanachaisethavut *et al*. 2008, WIEGO 2012).

In line with Convention 177, the Act aims to provide homeworkers with protections as if they were formal wage workers, and to ensure equal protection between men and women. It includes provisions[34] that aim to protect against exploitation, including by requiring that homeworkers be provided with written contracts, fair wages, timely payments, and occupational health and safety protections. The Act also includes an innovative provision stipulating that the Ministry of Labour must draft secondary laws in coordination with a tripartite committee made up of ministry representatives, homeworker representatives and "hirer" representatives (Country of Thailand 2010). As of 2017, 17 secondary laws had been written.

Another critical outcome of HomeNet Thailand's advocacy was the passage of a 2011 government policy to pay approximately 30 per cent of the contributor's fee for a social security fund for informal workers. Specifically, the government committed to subsidize 30 per cent of a 100 baht monthly payment towards a scheme that would provide sickness, disability and death benefits. It was estimated that the policy could support 24 million informal workers (WIEGO 2012). Prior to the adoption of the policy, HomeNet Thailand was active in the development of the universal health coverage scheme in Thailand, which was passed in 2007.

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[33] For more on HomeNet Thailand, see: www.wiego.org/content/homenet-thailand-foundation-labour-and-employment-promotion

[34] It is beyond the scope of this review to describe all the provisions of the Act. See the full Act here.

HomeNet Thailand continued its advocacy after the passing of the Act, including through "know your rights" training with homeworkers (*ibid.*). Seven years after the Act was adopted, there is seemingly no formal documentation about its implementation or impact on homeworkers, although some studies[35] note that many homeworkers are still unaware of their rights and work in unsafe conditions. Analysis of its impact is a critical area for future research.

Australia homeworker legislation

Australia has the most comprehensive set of regulatory mechanisms for homeworkers in the world, which is well documented by a group of activist scholars there. Burchielli *et al*. (2014) describe the mobilization that shaped the development of this multifaceted regulatory apparatus. They argue that it can be attributed to sustained struggle by unions (in coordination with community groups) to raise public consciousness about homework, which in turn provided the impetus for the Government to act.

The campaign was led by the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia and later supported by Asian Women at Work and the FairWear Campaign (created through the union's efforts). After initial victories in advocating for homeworkers to be legally recognized as employees, the union carried out a widespread information campaign with around 4,000 Australian homeworkers. This raised public awareness about their work conditions, which resulted in public outcry and Senate inquiries on homework, ultimately placing huge pressure on industry leaders. An industry code ("the Code") was negotiated between industries and unions in 1997, establishing a scheme for retailers to be accredited as ethical corporations (Burchielli *et al*. 2014, Delaney *et al*. 2013).

With the subsequent formation of Asian Women at Work[36] and the FairWear Campaign, the movement gained strength and reach — involving other unions, students, community organizations, faith groups and more. Through a series of strategic actions, characterized as social movement strategies, the broad-based campaign for homeworkers' rights in Australia was ultimately successful in winning multiple regulatory mechanisms for protecting homeworkers, including the national Fair Work Act of 2009, the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Award of 2010, and state-specific legislation (Burchielli *et al*. 2014).

As Delaney *et al*. note, "each mechanism features aspects that are interdependent or inclusive of several key components of the other mechanisms" (2013:77). For example, the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Award (previously known as the Federal Clothing Trades Award) extended the rights of formal wage employees to homeworkers, including the right to a minimum wage, paid overtime, workers' compensation and maternity leave. Accordingly, the Code requires proof that companies are complying with these stipulations in exchange for accreditation (Burchielli *et al*. 2014; Burchielli *et al*. 2009; Delaney *et al*. 2013).

In turn, national and state legislation (first developed in New South Wales and subsequently in South Australia and Queensland) allows homeworkers to make claims on "apparent employers" (whomever the homeworker believes to be his/her employer) for unpaid wages, among other things. The laws also facilitate the creation of mandatory codes, which come into effect for companies that do not adhere with the voluntary codes (Burchielli *et al*. 2014).

[35] See Intaratat 2016.

[36] According to the authors, Asian Women at Work has a network of several hundred homeworker members.

Even where a strong regulatory environment exists, challenges remain. For example, the system relies heavily on individual homeworker complaints, which can be difficult for homeworkers to pursue due to the complexity of the process and fear of retaliation from employers or others. The authors (*ibid*.) argue that for homeworker protection to be sustained, in the Australian context or others, legislative gains alone are not enough. Instead, "a combined strategy that encompasses campaigning, legislative reform and social movement strategies that involve the participation of homeworkers are more likely to ensure effective and ongoing homeworker protection" (*ibid*.: 81).

VI. Corporate Social Responsibility

Consumer backlash over reports of human rights abuses within the global supply chains of major brands created pressure on these companies to develop corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies in the 1990s. These varied in content and scope but most often they took the form of codes of corporate conduct, which outlined a set of labour and environmental standards that companies committed to strive to comply with throughout their supply chains. Compliance was monitored by supply chain audits, sometimes carried out by the company itself or by contracted third parties (Lund-Thompsen and Lindgreen 2014). This model — establishing a code of conduct and monitoring compliance through audits — has been variously referred to as the "code-based audit model" or "private social auditing."

Since these efforts were introduced, a comprehensive body of literature has emerged assessing the code-based audit CSR model.[37] It is beyond the scope of this review to fully explore the CSR literature (except as it relates to homeworkers). Two broad debates that have emerged, however, include whether CSR is effective in improving conditions for workers, and where the responsibilities of businesses to protect workers begin and end.

In terms of effectiveness, numerous criticisms of the CSR model have been outlined in empirical research and impact assessments. These generally include top-down implementation of codes without modification of corporate practices (such as providing short lead times for orders), which puts pressure on suppliers and undermines their ability to comply (Barrientos and Smith 2007; Barrientos 2012); lack of transparency and misaligned incentives in the auditing process, which do not produce credible information on working conditions (Barrientos and Smith 2007); and outcome-based improvements (tangible gains such as a healthy and safe working environment), which have often been prioritized over enabling rights such as freedom of association, collective bargaining and freedom from discrimination (Barrientos and Smith 2007; Egels-Zandén and Lindholm 2015; McIntyre 2008).

Very few studies or impact assessments of CSR have focused on lower tiers of the supply chain, and especially not on homeworkers. In addition to the invisibility of homeworkers within supply chains, this may be in part due to the fact that, especially in the initial years of CSR, there was far from a clear consensus about the limits of corporate responsibility in supply chain management (Mares 2010).

Increasing numbers of critical assessments of the code-based model of CSR (also referred to as the compliance model) made clear that most companies were failing to properly address abuses against

[37] For more see: Locke *et al*. 2007 and Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen 2014.

factory workers and that, as a result, lower tiers of the supply chain were almost certainly exempt from any benefit (ibid.). In this context, a more cooperative model of CSR began to take shape through multistakeholder initiatives such as the United Kingdom-based Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), the Dutch-based Fair Wear Foundation, and Social Accountability International, among others (Lund-Thompsen and Lindgreen 2014; Barrientos and Smith 2007).

ETI and Fair Wear are alliances among civil society organizations, unions and businesses that seek to foster cooperation and knowledge-sharing about best practices in an attempt to support companies with code compliance. To become an affiliate, companies must sign on to the respective alliance's code of practice and must demonstrate continual effort to uphold these codes. These initiatives — particularly ETI — have pushed for corporations to extend codes and audits to include homeworkers.

ETI developed a comprehensive set of resources for companies to establish corporate policies on homeworkers and conduct supply chain mapping to better understand homeworkers' insertion into their supply chains (ETI 2010a, 2017). It also maintained a multistakeholder National Homeworker Group in northern India for several years to promote dialogue among suppliers, homeworkers and retailers (ETI 2010b). While no studies were found assessing the impact of ETI's efforts on homeworkers, a 2006 evaluation of ETI members' supply chains found anecdotal evidence that some suppliers may have stopped using homeworkers since codes were introduced (Barrientos and Smith 2007).[38]

Although not explicitly about the impact of CSR on homeworkers, a study by Lund-Thomsen et al. (2012) conducted between 2008 and 2010 also highlights some of the unintended effects of corporate codes on homeworkers. Specifically, the authors found that a corporate mandate from Nike that all stitching must take place in designated "stitching centres" had effectively eliminated all female stitchers from the local industry in Pakistan. Female stitchers were not able to commute to the centres due to cultural norms that limited their mobility (*ibid.*). Delaney *et al.* 2015 discovered a similar phenomenon in Anbur, India, where, after reports of child labour in leather footwear production, work was moved to stitching centres without consulting homeworkers. The authors note that the move eliminated one of homeworkers' only benefits — being able to take on child care while engaging in remunerative work.

The only study identified in the course of this review that took an in-depth look at the explicit impact of corporate codes of practice on homeworkers was a 2015 study carried out in coordination with the ILO on the impact of IKEA's IWAY code of practice (the IKEA Way on Purchasing Home Furnishing Products[39]) in the lower tiers of its rattan supply chain. IKEA is widely considered to be a leader in responsible supply chain management — adopting a more collaborative approach with suppliers to ensure code compliance (Pedersen and Andersen 2006; IKEA and ILO 2015). Nevertheless, the vast majority (90 per cent) of subcontracted workers (both homeworkers and workers in weaving centres) that were interviewed for the study reported not having heard of IKEA's IWAY code. They cited complaints of conditions that would be in violation of the code, including low and delayed payments, unreliable supplies of raw materials, inadequate workspace, and lack of platforms for dialogue and

[38] For more on the independent evaluation of ETI members' supply chains, see: Barrientos and Smith 2006.

[39] The IWAY code of practice is based on the ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Declaration. It outlines standards for practice within the following eight areas: worker health and safety, housing facilities, wages, benefits and working hours, child labour, forced and bonded labour, discrimination, freedom of association and harassment and abuse.

collective bargaining with suppliers. Based on the report findings, IKEA outlined new practices it planned to adopt, including ongoing supply chain mapping and dialogue with homeworkers and suppliers (IKEA and ILO 2015).

VII. Homeworkers, Organizing and Agency

As has been described in other parts of this review, homeworkers are organizing and engaging in advocacy at multiple levels — locally, nationally and internationally. One of the first groups to organize home-based workers was the Self Employed Women's Association of India, which was instrumental in advocating for ILO Convention 177. Since the Convention's adoption, it has remained a principal actor in organizing and advocating for homeworkers. In addition, regional organizations of home-based workers have formed: HomeNet South Asia, HomeNet Southeast Asia and HomeNet Eastern Europe. There are promising examples from the HomeNet organizations, their affiliates and other groups where homeworkers and allies have successfully shaped the regulatory environment. The nature of homework presents significant challenges to future organizing and the sustainability of their organizations, however. The literature in this area describes cases of successful organizing efforts, and points to tools, such as mapping, as strategies for strengthening the movement.

Existing and potential organizing and collective action strategies of homeworkers

Kapoor (2007) describes three ways that "informal labour collectives are coming up:" through formal trade unions — as some of these have expanded to include or at least align themselves with informal workers (like the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union in Australia); in alliance with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (such as Homeworkers Worldwide in the United Kingdom); and through membership-based collectives of informal workers who organize around occupation and geography (as in the case of the regional HomeNet organizations).

Several authors draw attention to the specific challenges inherent in organizing marginalized and isolated workers such as homeworkers, with the aim of providing recommendations for each of the three constituencies (Kapoor 2007; Bergan 2009; Burchielli *et al*. 2008). Specifically, Bergan (2009) discusses the construction of a collective worker identity as a critical first step in mobilizing homeworkers. Through her observations of homeworker organizing strategies in Bulgaria, Bergan describes how home visits and door-to-door surveys were used to slowly strengthen trust, assuage fears and build a basic awareness among homeworkers that they are not alone. Eventually, she describes how, with a heightened understanding of their contributions, homeworkers were able to situate their efforts within the larger economic context, gain confidence and make demands. Several authors suggest that one way to begin the process of constructing a worker identity is through homeworker mapping (Delaney *et al*. 2015; Pearson 2004).

Mapping has emerged as a tool for NGOs, trade unions or existing homeworker organizations to address two of the biggest challenges inherent in organizing homeworkers — invisibility within the supply chain and isolation from other homeworkers. Mapping takes different forms but is usually

applied in two ways: Horizontal mapping is a method of identifying and learning about homeworkers; vertical mapping is used to identify how homeworkers are inserted into larger chains of production (Burchielli *et al*. 2008).

WIEGO has used mapping to learn more about where home-based workers' organizations exist in Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe with the goal of understanding working conditions and supporting the global movement of homeworkers (through the HomeNet organizations) in expanding and gaining strength (WIEGO 2016c). ETI has developed resources on mapping with the aim of encouraging and supporting companies within its network to extend code audits throughout their supply chains, including homeworkers, and thereby increasing transparency (ETI 2010b). Finally, mapping has been used simultaneously as a method of action research and organizing by homeworker organizations themselves, often with the support of an international NGO (as in the case described below).

In an assessment of a large-scale mapping exercise carried out by HomeWorkers Worldwide in 14 countries with the aim of organizing homeworkers, Burchielli *et al*. (2008) draw upon mobilization theory — which posits that the construction of social identity among workers is critical to building consensus about where injustice lies, which, in turn, strengthens collective agency. The mapping in this case was carried out together with homeworkers' organizations, students, and other allies along with training and educational activities. As the authors explain, "in homeworker mapping, research, training and organizing were simultaneous and inter-related processes, rather than parts of a sequence" (*ibid*.: 170).

The authors find that the mapping exercise and associated project activities served not only to identify homeworkers and produce information about them, but also to build their political consciousness and collective identity. As a result of the exercise, over 10,000 homeworkers formed organizations in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. In this sense, the authors deem their findings on organizing homeworkers to be consistent with mobilization theory — the construction of a shared worker identity ultimately strengthened organizing efforts and led to action. The authors suggest their findings have important implications for trade unions, who could use mapping as an organizing tool for identifying and including marginalized workers. They also posit that NGOs with experience in mapping could play a collaborative role with trade unions in this process (*ibid*.).

Sinha and Mehrotra (2016) draw attention to homeworkers' fear, which poses a critical challenge to the mapping and action research process and highlights the need for an appropriate NGO partner in the field to help build trust among workers so they will participate. In their 2016 study of homeworkers in Tirupur and Delhi, India, Sinha and Mehrotra recount the difficulties researchers faced in finding homeworkers willing to participate in their survey. Eight homeworkers who had collaborated in field testing the survey ultimately refused to take it themselves as they were involved in production for an internationally recognized brand and feared losing their jobs.

Delaney *et al*. (2015) echo Sinha and Mehrotra's sentiment about the need for strong local partners. In their study of women footwear homeworkers in India, they find that there is significant potential for homeworkers to exercise more agency in global production networks, particularly when supported by local and international cooperative networks. They posit, however, that whether this potential is realized is highly dependent on the capacity and commitment of local NGO actors and their ability to

support homeworkers in building trust and addressing multiple inequalities — not only those directly related to work.

The Australian case described previously provides perhaps the strongest example in the literature of how homeworkers, trade unions, and NGOs worked together to shape the regulatory environment. In their assessment of the mobilization efforts, Burchielli *et al*. (2014) suggest that a principal lesson from the case is that broad coalitions, and the use of social movement strategies to raise public awareness, can be highly effective in shaping regulatory outcomes. They and other authors caution, however, that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Strategies must be adapted locally in response to the political context and in accordance with homeworkers' knowledge and needs (Burchielli *et al*. 2014, Bergan 2009).

VIII. Conclusions: Consensus, Gaps and Avenues for Future Research

At the 2016 International Labour Conference, Zehra Khan, General Secretary of the Home Based Women Workers Federation from Pakistan, addressed the plenary during the General Discussion on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains. She proclaimed, "Any standard on supply chains must include homeworkers. Failure to recognize the economic contribution of homeworkers as part of global supply chains will simply mean that the bottom of the supply chain remains unregulated. Homeworkers, through their organizations, must be included in tripartite negotiations and policymaking processes, both at global and national levels. And, all employment benefits, including social protection, that factory workers might have, must be extended to homeworkers" (Kahn 2016).[40]

Twenty years after the adoption of Convention 177, homeworkers experience many of the same decent work deficits as they did in 1997. Khan's appeal for protections and rights for homeworkers equal to those enjoyed by formal wage workers echoes the demands of HomeNet in the lead-up to the Convention's adoption. Progress has been made, however, both on the ground and in expanding the knowledge base on homeworkers. For example, homeworkers and their organizations have won policy victories, good practices have been documented and shared, and homeworkers' visibility has increased both through their actions and through research and statistics that shed light on their working conditions and contributions. Still, much remains to be done, through advocacy, action and research.

The literature reviewed here shows strong consensus around the conditions that led to the emergence of homework within global supply chains — namely technological change, and shifts in the organization of global production. Also, there is broad consensus around the general characteristics and vulnerabilities of homeworkers, particularly in South and South-eastern Asia.

Much of the research reviewed here focuses on the broad category of home-based workers, however, and not on homeworkers specifically. While self-employed and subcontracted home-based workers share many of the same vulnerabilities — by nature of their status as informal workers lacking legal and social protection and often as members of poor or marginalized communities — homeworkers face specific vulnerabilities by nature of their insertion into supply chains. Further, where studies

[40] For the full speech, see: www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/WIEGO-Plenary-Presentation-ILC-2016.pdf

have focused specifically on homeworkers, they rarely examine homework in the context of global supply chains. As a result, knowledge about the vulnerabilities of homeworkers in global supply chains remains limited, particularly as these relate to value chain dynamics and current macroeconomic policy and trends.

Two notable contributions have been made in proposing national and local public policy agendas for securing homeworkers' livelihoods — in the areas of urban upgrading and inclusive planning (from the IEMS study) and enterprise support/inclusive growth strategies (from Mehrotra and Biggeri's 2007 study). The literature on homework does not cover the topic of what private action should be taken — what the responsibilities of employers should be in supporting homeworkers and assuring conditions of decent work. As this review has shown, there are existing frameworks (Convention 177, and more recently, the UN Guiding Principles and OECD Guidelines) that provide guidance in this area, but nothing has been written about the potential or application of these frameworks to homeworkers.

While there are several documented cases of home-based workers organizing and mobilizing, there is no literature on mobilization by homeworkers specifically advocating for rights within global supply chains. If the 2016 International Labour Conference is any indication, these efforts may begin to gain strength in coming years and should be documented as they do.

Finally, improved and expanded data and statistics on homeworkers are critical to guide any policy responses meant to benefit them or to support homeworkers in their advocacy efforts.

The following section outlines an agenda for future research on homeworkers along these lines.

Value chain dynamics and macroeconomic trends

As this review has made clear, homeworkers' working lives are intrinsically linked to both value chain dynamics (including corporate procurement practices), and macroeconomic policies and trends. There is a strong consensus in the literature regarding the reasons for the emergence of homework in global supply chains, and the exploitative nature of homeworkers' insertion into these as a result of unfair value chain dynamics (i.e., the downloading of costs and risks to homeworkers).

There are very few studies about homeworkers in global supply chains that identify the specific practices of firms that cause negative impacts. To support advocacy work that pressures lead firms to assume responsibility for the prevention of abuse and exploitation of workers throughout their supply chains, specific evidence is needed on which corporate practices are directly or indirectly causing harm. It is also essential to understand how these practices may affect factory workers and homeworkers differently, and how these impacts may vary by sector. This type of research is particularly important as value chain dynamics shift with rapid changes in technology.

With respect to macroeconomic trends, studies establish a strong link between the proliferation of homework in global supply chains and the "feminization of labour." While many studies concur about the impact of economic globalization and restructuring on homework, there is still a dearth of literature on how homework could be changing under current trends. Benería *et al*. (2016) point to the stagnation or reversal of the feminization phenomena in some regions and sectors, including the manufacturing sector in East Asia and the maquiladoras in Mexico. They suggest this is in part

attributable to a transition to more capital-intensive technology. It is unclear what the impact of mechanization and resulting job destruction in the formal economy could have on homeworkers.

Similarly, it is important for future research on homework to explore how the transition to an increasingly digital economy is affecting homeworkers. In particular, research in this area should highlight how homeworkers' livelihoods might be enhanced in the context of these changing trends and what policy interventions would be needed to facilitate this.

Legal frameworks

The suite of legal protections in Australia offers the best documented case of national legislation designed to cover homeworkers and may represent the clearest case of good practice in this area. A priority area for future research, however, should be studies on the implementation and impact of this legislation and whether it is having its intended results. In addition, research is critically needed on the impact of the Thailand Homeworker Protection Act. For the Act to serve as an example and resource for other countries of the Global South in developing similar legislation, much more work is needed on how homeworkers, employers and the Government are engaging with it and whether it is improving outcomes for homeworkers.

Empirical work on the impact and future potential of Convention 177 is needed to support homeworkers in advocacy and legal strategies going forward. Where the Convention has been adopted, insight is needed on the conditions that led to its adoption and subsequent outcomes. Further, it is not clear to what extent the Convention has guided national legislation overall. Despite having some of the most progressive legislation, Australia and Thailand have not ratified it. In this context, homeworkers and their allies could reflect on the continued relevance of the Convention and possible alternatives. The 2016 International Labour Conference provided an opportunity for homeworker representatives and their allies to start this conversation.

Social protection

Homeworkers' social protection needs in health, child care and pensions are well established in the literature. As the studies reviewed here show, despite the fact that most homeworkers fit the profile of full-time employees — in the sense that they work long hours, often for the same firm over the long-term — they do not enjoy any of the social protection benefits of formal, salaried workers. These needs are particularly acute for homeworkers who often suffer health problems as a direct result of their work — from occupational hazards ranging from sitting hunched over for long periods of time to work with hazardous materials.

There is a dearth of case studies on extending social protection to homeworkers, undoubtedly due to an unfortunate lack of examples to draw from. One promising case that is relatively undocumented is the one in Thailand. In addition to the universal health coverage scheme developed there in the early 2000s with the participation of civil society groups, including HomeNet Thailand, in 2011 the Thai Government adopted a policy specifically to provide health, disability and old age benefits to informal workers. While the IEMS study reveals that some homeworkers in Thailand reported being satisfied with their access to health care, additional research is needed on the implementation of

these schemes. This could look at how homeworkers are (or are not) accessing them and whether benefits are (or are not) accruing.

Despite some documentation on occupational health and safety hazards that homeworkers face, both as a result of housing/working conditions and dangerous materials, this review did not reveal any literature on how homeworkers respond to these threats, or what the responsibilities of lead firms or governments might be in improving health and safety for workers.

Related to this point, the literature on social protection and informal work largely centres on public provision of social protection, as the majority of informal workers are self-employed. However, as the ILO puts it, homeworkers are "disguised employees," and Convention 177 establishes that homeworkers should receive protections equal to those of formal wage workers. In this context, it is imperative to consider the role of lead firms in providing social protection and occupational health and safety protections for workers throughout their supply chains.

Corporate social responsibility

While there is a vast body of literature on CSR, very little of this covers homework, and only one study (IKEA and ILO 2015) was found assessing the impact of CSR on homeworkers' working conditions. The lack of documentation in this area is of course largely because homeworkers have traditionally not been included in these initiatives. As groups like ETI increasingly work with corporations to adopt corporate policies on homework, extend audits to homeworkers, and map supply chains, among other things, research will be needed on the impact of these efforts. Academics and activist researchers alike have done important work in revealing the shortcomings of CSR in improving outcomes for formal workers in supply chains and, as a result, have held corporations accountable in this area. The same should be done for future phases of CSR, which might include homeworkers.

This is of particular importance because of the ways in which CSR can actually hurt homeworkers by, for example, provoking bans on homework or changes without homeworkers' inputs, as in the case of the stitching centres in Pakistan. Researchers can play a critical role in assessing present and future CSR efforts for their ability to improve conditions for homeworkers and prevent harm.

The collaboration between IKEA and ILO (2015) to assess the conditions of homeworkers in the company's rattan supply chain provided critical information about the limitations of corporate codes of practice in improving conditions for homeworkers. It also allowed IKEA to adjust its practices accordingly. This study should serve as a good practice example for other companies in this area.

At the same time, the conversation about corporate responsibility and homework needs to expand beyond CSR efforts as they have traditionally been understood. CSR has historically been taken up by companies as a way to appeal to consumers (which is likely a contributing factor to the failure of many of these efforts to improve outcomes for workers). The adoption of the UN Guiding Principles and their subsequent incorporation into additional international standards and frameworks (such as the OECD Guidelines) have established the responsibility of businesses to respect the human rights of workers throughout the supply chain, including homeworkers. This may have the potential to contribute to a shift in the way that corporations are held accountable for workers' conditions within

their supply chains. Research and theoretical work are needed on the potential of these new governance frameworks to extend protections to homeworkers.

Data and statistics

A critical priority for research and action on homeworkers in global supply chains has been and continues to be in the area of data and statistics. The current lack of data on homeworkers translates to a lack of visibility, which has very concrete implications in their working lives. For example, it obscures their economic contributions, allowing decision makers in the public and private sector to avoid taking action to support them and even to pretend they don't exist. As Chen (2014) points out, the gap also prevents policymakers from assessing how macroeconomic trends impact homeworkers and complicates efforts to take action on negative impacts. Data and statistics can serve as powerful tools in the hands of homeworkers and their representative organizations — which proved to be the case during the advocacy process for Convention 177.

The key intervention in this area will be for national statistical offices to begin to collect data on home-based work — and to improve labour force survey instruments and techniques to allow differentiation between self-employed and subcontracted home-based workers. The revised International Classification for Status in Employment may help in facilitating this process.

Homeworkers' organizing and voice

Finally, as homeworkers continue to make gains and grow their organizations, case studies of advocacy and successful organizing strategies could contribute in a positive way by fostering knowledge exchange. Further, while there are several studies on NGO support to the home-based worker movement, more could be documented about the collaboration between unions and home-based worker organizations and about the specific struggles of homeworkers in global supply chains. This kind of documentation could help develop future strategies within the movement.

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About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO builds alliances with, and draws its membership from, three constituencies: membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy, and professionals from development agencies interested in the informal economy. WIEGO pursues its objectives by helping to build and strengthen networks of informal worker organizations; undertaking policy analysis, statistical research and data analysis on the informal economy; providing policy advice and convening policy dialogues on the informal economy; and documenting and disseminating good practice in support of the informal workforce. For more information visit: www.wiego.org.