



Women in Informal Employment:  
Globalizing and Organizing

# Statistical Insights on Home-Based Workers in the World



## Distribution of home-based workers by country income groups and geographic regions

### Developing and Emerging Regions

Eastern, Southern Europe and Central Asia | 2%  
Southern Asia | 26%  
East and South-Eastern Asia | 36%  
Southern Africa | <1%  
Rest of sub-Saharan Africa | 14%  
Latin America and the Caribbean | 6%  
Middle East and North Africa | 1%

### Developed Regions

Europe | 6%  
Asia and the Pacific | 3%  
Americas | 5%.

- Globally, 260 million women and men produce goods or provide services from in or around their homes: 86% (more than 224 million workers) in developing and emerging countries and 14% (more than 35 million workers) in developed countries.<sup>1</sup>
- Of the world's 260 million home-based workers, 147 million (57%) are women, who must juggle their income-earning activities alongside childcare and domestic responsibilities.
- Almost two-thirds (65%) of the world's home-based workers are in Asia & the Pacific.
- Around 56% of the world's home-based workers live and work in rural areas and 44% in urban areas, but the vast majority of home-based workers are engaged in non-agricultural work.
- Most home-based workers in lower-income countries—as many as 98% in some places—are informally employed: that is, they lack social protection or paid annual and sick leave.
- Home-based workers are employed across all industries and sectors, but the majority work in either Services & Sales or Craft & Trades, especially in developing and emerging countries. Globally, services is the main branch of home-based employment for both men and women.
- Among home-based workers, self-employed professionals, teleworkers and digital platform workers are more common in developed and emerging countries; traditional self-employed, industrial outworkers and contributing family workers are more common in developing countries.
- The data in the Brief, collected before the COVID-19 crisis, show that more than 60% of women home-based workers globally worked more than 35 hours/week to earn income. Those in developing and emerging countries had a longer workweek than those in developed countries.
- In developing and emerging countries, nearly one third of women home-based workers and one quarter of men have no education.

<sup>1</sup> Data in this flyer, with the exception of the separate section on page 2, were drawn from the ILOSTAT Database of 118 countries that have a place of work question in their survey. The data are from the years 2000 to 2019. For more data and discussion, see **Home-Based Workers in the World: A Statistical Profile** by Florence Bonnet, Françoise Carré, Martha A. Chen and Joann Vanek (2022). [WIEGO Statistical Brief No.27](https://www.wiego.org/publications/home-based-workers-world-statistical-profile). Available at: <https://www.wiego.org/publications/home-based-workers-world-statistical-profile>

## The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Home-Based Workers

Traditionally, home-based workers engaged in manufacturing and provided repairs and other, largely non-professional, services from their homes. However with the development and increased use of digital technology, workers in offices, schools and other institutions have been able to work in their homes.

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly increased the number of professionals, educators and office workers who began working from home in many urban areas. These new home-based workers brought changes to the characteristics of workers in the sector.

The shift in the sector's composition is reflected, for example, in data on São Paulo, Brazil. The increase in the number of professionals, educators and office workers who began working from home in 2020 led to changes in the informality rate and the level of earnings in São Paulo:<sup>2</sup>

### The rate of informality for home-based workers dropped:

- 2019: 73% of women and 68% of men were informal.
- 2020: 55% of women and 48% of men were informal.

### The percentage of those earning three times the minimum wage increased:

- 26% in 2019
- 31% in 2020

<sup>2</sup> Source: *Informal Workers in Brazil: A Statistical Profile* by Mathilde Bouvier, Joann Vanek and François Roubaud. 2022. [WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 33](https://www.wiego.org/wiego-briefs#Statistical%20Briefs). Available at: <https://www.wiego.org/wiego-briefs#Statistical%20Briefs>



**Photos above, top to bottom:**  
A home-based hairdresser in Pleven, Bulgaria. Photo by Svetlin Ivanov.  
A home-based garment worker in Tiruppur, India. Photo courtesy of HNSA.  
A home-based caterer in Brazil. Photo courtesy of ATEMDO

**Front page photos, left to right:**  
A home-based weaver in Laos. Photo by Marty Chen.  
A home-based tailor in Cape Town, South Africa. Photo by Sofia Trevino.