



A home-based worker in El Salvador. Photo courtesy of Sindicato de Trabajadoras de Bordado a Domicilio de El Salvador (SITRABORDO)



Workers in Informal Employment in El Salvador: A Statistical Profile, 2019-2021

Mathilde Bouvier and Joann Vanek

This brief examines data on employment in El Salvador for 2019 to 2021 and analyzes the changes in employment brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the associated policy restrictions and recession in 2020 as well as recovery from the crisis in 2021. It also provides key data on seven groups of workers who are mainly informal.

Background and Summary

The El Salvador government reacted quickly to COVID-19, implementing a series of measures early in 2020 – even before the first case was officially declared on April 1, 2020. A nationwide stay-at-home order and closure of all non-essential businesses was put in force on March 21, 2020, and was lifted on June 16, 2020.¹ These measures had a significant impact on the economy. GDP contracted 8.2 per cent in 2020² and 191,446 jobs out of 2.9 million were lost between 2019 and 2020. Informal employment – 69 per cent of employment

in 2019 – lost over 150,000 jobs, around 78 per cent of the jobs lost. Informal employment decreased by 8 per cent in 2020 while formal employment lost around 41,000 jobs and decreased by around 5 per cent. The seven groups of workers – domestic workers, home-based workers, market traders, street vendors, informal construction workers, informal transport workers and waste pickers – considered in this brief together comprise almost 1 million workers and were 34 per cent of total employment in 2019. The seven groups provided a much greater source of employment for women (43 per cent of

¹ [IMF Policy Tracker](#) and OCDE (2023), *Multi-dimensional Review of El Salvador : Strategic Priorities for Robust, Inclusive and Sustainable Development*, OECD Development Pathways, Éditions OCDE, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/2f3d5e1f-en>.

² GDP data from the [International Monetary Fund](#).

all women workers) than for men (27 per cent) in 2019. Employment in several of the groups – home-based workers, street vendors and market traders – increased between 2019 and 2020, thus providing a cushion to the country's labour market.

Between 2019 and 2020, women suffered greater losses in non-agricultural employment than men, while men's losses were greater in agriculture employment – a sector where few women worked. In 2021, men continued to lose jobs in agriculture, while in non-agricultural employment the increases were about the same for both women and men. Thus, women led the recovery with a much greater

increase in total employment than men between 2020 and 2021 (24,000 compared to 6,000 jobs). However, total employment in 2021 was far below its pre-pandemic level.

In 2019, employment was over 2.9 million in El Salvador with the majority (65 per cent) in urban areas, including 29 per cent of employment in the capital San Salvador (**table 1**).³ Agriculture comprised 16 per cent of employment and a larger proportion of employment for men, 25 per cent compared to 3 per cent for women. Between 2019 and 2020, 191,446 workers lost employment nationally, 148,689 in urban areas, and 73,859 in San

Salvador. The employment losses were greater for men than for women in all three geographic areas: 108,329 compared to 83,117, nationally; 79,310 compared to 69,379 in urban areas and 41,512 compared to 32,347 in San Salvador.

Between 2019 and 2020, a large part of the employment loss for men (around 47,500 jobs or 20 per cent of total employment, nationally) occurred in agriculture. Men's employment loss in agriculture – a sector where few women worked – contributed to the gap in employment losses between women (around 83,000) and men (108,000). However, in non-agricultural

Table 1. Total employment; agricultural and non-agricultural by sex in metropolitan San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador, 2019, 2020 and 2021: Numbers and absolute change in number, 2020-2019 and 2021-2020

	2019			2020			2021			Change in numbers 2020-2019			Change in numbers 2021-2020		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
San Salvador MA	381,720	461,139	842,859	349,373	419,627	769,000	344,906	401,139	746,045	-32,347	-41,512	-73,859	-4,467	-18,488	-22,955
Agricultural	2,026*	16,067	18,093	2,866*	11,338	14,204	1,792*	13,961	15,753	840	-4,729	-3,889	-1,074	2,623	1,549
Non-agricultural	379,694	445,072	824,766	346,507	408,289	754,796	343,114	387,178	730,292	-33,187	-36,783	-69,970	-3,393	-21,111	-24,504
Urban El Salvador	865,184	1,036,409	1,901,593	795,805	957,099	1,752,904	824,223	962,826	1,787,048	-69,379	-79,310	-148,689	28,418	5,727	34,144
Agricultural	9,581	90,723	100,304	8,434	77,751	86,185	10,742	82,301	93,043	-1,147	-12,972	-14,119	2,308	4,550	6,858
Non-agricultural	855,603	945,686	1,801,289	787,371	879,348	1,666,719	813,481	880,525	1,694,005	-68,232	-66,338	-134,570	26,110	1,177	27,286
El Salvador	1,205,046	1,703,074	2,908,120	1,121,929	1,594,745	2,716,674	1,145,953	1,600,912	2,746,865	-83,117	-108,329	-191,446	24,024	6,167	30,191
Agricultural	40,856	432,992	473,848	39,732	385,525	425,257	38,462	366,304	404,766	-1,124	-47,467	-48,591	-1,270	-19,221	-20,491
Non-agricultural	1,164,190	1,270,082	2,434,272	1,082,197	1,209,220	2,291,417	1,107,491	1,234,608	2,342,099	-81,993	-60,862	-142,855	25,294	25,388	50,682

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.

³ The statistical information in this brief is based on the Multi-Purpose Household Survey (EHPM – *Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples*), conducted by the General Directorate of Statistics and Census (DIGESTYC – *Dirección General de Estadística y Censos*). In the text, San Salvador refers to the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador (*Área Metropolitana de San Salvador*), instituted in 1993 through a Legislative Decree. It is a single urban unit formed by El Salvador's capital San Salvador and 13 surrounding municipalities. In the tables, the San Salvador Metropolitan Area is abbreviated as "San Salvador MA". In tables 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8, the differences between "Total" and individual categories are due to rounding of estimates as part of survey weights.

employment, women had greater losses than men: nationally around 82,000 for women compared to 61,000 for men, at the urban level 68,000 for women compared to 66,000 for men. By contrast, in the San Salvador area the losses were greater for men in both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, with a total loss of 42,000 for men and 32,000 for women.

By 2021, although employment recovered, it did not reach the pre-pandemic level in absolute numbers. Nationally and in urban areas, the increases in the number of women in employment were greater than that of men, although even women's employment did not return to pre-pandemic levels. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of women in employment increased by 24,000 nationally, compared to around 6,000 for men. However, in absolute numbers the recovery of women and men was almost identical in non-agricultural employment. The gap in men's

net recovery was due to the additional loss of agricultural employment. Agricultural employment dropped by a further 20,000 jobs nationally but increased by 7,000 in urban areas. At the urban level, the number of women in employment increased by 28,000 compared to 6,000 for men. In San Salvador, employment continued to decline, with a decrease in jobs for about 4,500 women and 18,000 men.

The working-age population of women and of men decreased in El Salvador, presumably due to migration out of El Salvador, most notably a decrease of 3 per cent for women and 10 per cent for men in San Salvador between 2020 and 2021.

A unique feature of the labour market in El Salvador is the decrease in the working-age population⁴ – largely through net emigration. Between 2019 and 2020, the working age population decreased

around 5 per cent nationally for women and for men, from 2.7 to 2.6 million for women, and from 2.3 to 2.2 million for men (**table 2**). The working age population also decreased in urban areas (a 6 per cent decline for women and a 5 per cent decline for men) and in San Salvador (a 7 per cent decline for women and a 4 per cent decline for men). Between 2020 and 2021, the working-age population increased among women by around a percentage point in urban El Salvador and nationally, but decreased by 2 per cent in the two geographic areas among men, while in San Salvador there was a decline of 3 per cent for women and 10 per cent for men.

While the working-age population is larger for women than men, women's employment rate is lower: in 2019, 44 per cent for women, compared to 75 per cent for men nationally and around 49 per cent for women and around 72 per cent for

Table 2. Working-age population by sex in metropolitan San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador, 2019, 2020 and 2021: Numbers and share of total population

	2019			2020			2021			Relative change 2020-2019 (%)			Relative change 2021-2020 (%)		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
San Salvador MA	774,394 (80.6)	640,289 (75.5)	1,414,684 (78.2)	720,514 (80.0)	613,743 (76.4)	1,334,257 (78.3)	698,602 (81.4)	555,730 (76.1)	1,254,332 (79.0)	-7.0	-4.1	-5.7	-3.0	-9.5	-6.0
Urban El Salvador	1,748,950 (79.1)	1,419,178 (73.8)	3,168,128 (76.6)	1,646,424 (78.6)	1,354,441 (75.2)	3,000,865 (77.0)	1,677,121 (79.2)	1,322,931 (74.2)	3,000,052 (76.9)	-5.9	-4.6	-5.3	1.9	-2.3	0.0
El Salvador	2,721,404 (76.7)	2,274,341 (72.1)	4,995,745 (74.5)	2,579,995 (76.6)	2,172,512 (73.5)	4,752,507 (75.2)	2,607,451 (77.4)	2,142,672 (72.5)	4,750,123 (75.1)	-5.2	-4.5	-4.9	1.1	-1.4	-0.1

⁴ Following the country's definition, the working-age population refers to the population among ages 16 and older.

men in urban areas and San Salvador (**table 3**). The unemployment rate was around 7 per cent for men at all geographical levels and somewhat lower for women, around 5 per cent at the national and urban levels, and 7 per cent in San Salvador.

Between 2019 and 2020, the drop in the employment rate was somewhat greater in San Salvador: -1.9 percentage points, compared to -1.6 per cent in urban areas and -1.0 per cent nationally. The unemployment rate increased by around 1 percentage point in each geographic area. By 2021, the employment rate had returned to nearly its pre-crisis level, at 58 per cent nationally,

and around 60 per cent in urban areas and San Salvador. The unemployment rate was also near its pre-crisis level.

Between 2019 and 2020, the employment rate for women dropped less than that for men. These declines amounted to about 1 percentage point at all geographical levels for women, while men experienced a decline of around 2 to 4 percentage points, depending on the geographical level. The unemployment rate increased by a percentage point more for women than men nationally, but only slightly more for women than men in the other two geographic areas.

Informal Employment

Informal employment comprised the majority of employment – around 67 to 69 per cent – in El Salvador over the years 2019-2021. Informal employment was hit harder by the pandemic than formal employment, accounting for 78 per cent of the employment loss between 2019 and 2020. While there was recovery by 2021, neither informal nor formal employment reached pre-pandemic levels.

In 2019, informal employment was 69 per cent of employment nationally, or over 2 million workers;

Table 3. Employment* and unemployment rates and percentage point change in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador (by gender and areas) – 2019, 2020 and 2021**

	2019		2020		2021		2020-2019		2021-2020	
	ER	UR	ER	UR	ER	UR	Change ER	Change UR	Change ER	Change UR
Women										
San Salvador MA	49.3	6.5	48.5	7.4	49.4	7.0	-0.8	+0.9	+0.9	-0.5
Urban El Salvador	49.5	5.6	48.3	6.5	49.1	6.2	-1.1	+0.9	+0.8	-0.3
El Salvador	44.3	5.4	43.5	6.6	43.9	6.3	-0.8	+1.2	+0.5	-0.3
Men										
San Salvador MA	72.0	6.6	68.4	7.4	72.2	6.5	-3.6	+0.8	+3.8	-0.9
Urban El Salvador	73.0	6.5	70.7	7.2	72.8	6.3	-2.4	+0.7	+2.1	-0.9
El Salvador	74.9	7.0	73.4	7.1	74.7	6.3	-1.5	+0.1	+1.3	-0.8
Total										
San Salvador MA	59.6	6.5	57.6	7.4	59.5	6.7	-1.9	+0.9	+1.8	-0.7
Urban El Salvador	60.0	6.1	58.4	6.9	59.6	6.3	-1.6	+0.8	+1.2	-0.6
El Salvador	58.2	6.3	57.2	6.9	57.8	6.3	-1.0	+0.6	+0.7	-0.6

* The employment rate (ER) refers to the share of the population employed among ages 16 and older.

** The unemployment rate (UR) refers to the share of the economically active population ages 16 and older who, during the reference period, were without employment but available for work and seeking employment. However, the Statistical Institute relaxed the criterion of seeking employment to include those who have not looked for a job during the reference week for the following reasons: I thought there was no work available in the area; I did not know how to look for a job; I got tired of looking for work; waiting for agricultural cycle of crops; already found a job that will start soon; waiting for responses from employers. The criterion of immediate availability also was relaxed.



A waste picker in El Salvador.

Photo: Ever Manuel Escobar Mártir

62 per cent in urban areas; and 53 per cent in San Salvador (**table 4**). Women are more likely to be in informal employment than men: 72 per cent of employed women compared to 67 per cent of employed men. This gap widens in urban areas, with an informality rate of 67 per cent for women and 57 per cent for men, and in San Salvador it respectively reaches 59 per cent and 49 per cent.

Between 2019 and 2020, the number of workers in informal employment fell in all three geographic areas and continued to fall in the San Salvador area in 2021. In the other geographic areas, informal employment increased somewhat between 2020 and 2021, without reaching the levels of 2019. Informal employment remained a roughly stable proportion of employment throughout the period in all three areas. However, there was a slight increase for women in San Salvador between 2019 and 2020 (from 58.5 to 60 per cent) before a decline in absolute and relative terms in 2021. Among men, informality declined in both absolute numbers and per cent in all three geographic areas between 2019 and 2020, but between 2020 and 2021 it increased at the urban and national levels.

Box 1: Identifying Informal Employment

Informal employment, as identified in these data, includes:

- **Employers** and **own account workers** who work in production units in the informal sector — that is production units that are not legally constituted (excluding quasi-corporations) and are not registered in the national tax system.
- **Employees** without effective formal arrangements such as social insurance, and access to paid annual leave and sick leave.
- **Contributing family workers**, regardless of the formal or informal nature of the production unit where they work.

Table 4. Informal employment in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador, by sex – 2019, 2020 and 2021: Numbers in thousands and per cent of total employment

	2019						2020						2021					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%
San Salvador MA	223	58.5	225	48.9	449	53.2	210	60.2	204	48.5	414	53.8	198	57.3	201	50.2	399	53.5
Urban El Salvador	578	66.8	595	57.4	1,173	61.7	529	66.5	539	56.4	1,069	61.0	538	65.3	560	58.1	1,098	61.4
El Salvador	869	72.1	1,139	66.9	2,008	69.1	806	71.8	1,052	66.0	1,858	68.4	807	70.4	1,076	67.2	1,883	68.5

Between 2019 and 2020, over 191,000 workers lost employment nationally, a reduction of around 7 per cent (**table 5**). The majority (78 per cent) of these jobs were informal: 150,000 workers in informal employment, compared to a decline of 41,000 workers in formal employment. Formal employment was affected by the COVID-19 crisis, but to a lesser degree than informal employment: nationally, a decrease of 8 per cent in informal employment compared to 5 per cent in formal employment; in urban areas, a decrease of 9 per cent in informal employment and 6 per cent in formal employment. In contrast, in the metropolitan area of San Salvador – which had a larger share of formal employment – the net losses were greater in formal than in informal employment: 10 per cent against less than 8 per cent respectively. Generally,

both women and men experienced a greater loss of informal than formal employment in each of the geographic areas. However, among women in San Salvador, the loss in formal employment exceeded the loss in informal employment.

Between 2020 and 2021, total employment began to recover in urban areas and nationally. However, there was a further decrease in San Salvador. For women, formal employment drove the recovery, with a 6 per cent increase in San Salvador and a 7 per cent increase in the other geographical levels. The trend for men was the opposite, with formal employment continuing to contract: -3 per cent at the national and urban levels and -8 per cent in San Salvador. Informal employment in urban areas and nationally increased for women and increased

substantially for men, whereas in San Salvador it decreased for men and decreased about five times as much for women.

Industry Sector of Informal Employment

Trade comprised one-third or more of women's informal employment in all geographic regions throughout the years 2019-2021. Among men, agriculture was the predominant sector nationally, comprising 37 per cent of men's informal employment; in the other geographic areas trade and transport together were around 40 per cent of men's informal employment.

Table 5. Absolute and relative changes (per cent)* in total, formal and informal employment by sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador: 2020-2019 and 2021-2020

	2019-2020						2020-2021					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
	Absolute	Relative	Absolute	Relative	Absolute	Relative	Absolute	Relative	Absolute	Relative	Absolute	Relative
San Salvador MA	-32,347	-8,5	-41,512	-9,0	-73,859	-8,8	-4,467	-1,3	-18,487	-4,4	-22,954	-3,0
Formal	-19,531	-12.3	-19,697	-8.4	-39,228	-10.0	+8,343	+6.0	-16,186	-7.5	-7,843	-2.2
Informal	-12,817	-5.7	-21,814	-9.7	-34,631	-7.7	-12,810	-6.1	-2,301	-1.1	-15,111	-3.7
Urban El Salvador	-69,378	-8,0	-79,311	-7,7	-148,689	-7,8	+28,417	+3,6	+5,727	+0,6	+34,144	+1,9
Formal	-21,026	-7.3	-23,362	-5.3	-44,389	-6.1	+19,533	+7.3	-14,359	-3.4	+5,174	+0.8
Informal	-48,352	-8.4	-55,948	-9.4	-104,300	-8.9	+8,884	+1.7	+20,086	+3.7	+28,970	+2.7
El Salvador	-83,116	-6,9	-108,330	-6,4	-191,446	-6,6	+24,023	+2,1	+6,168	+0,4	+30,191	+1,1
Formal	-19,960	-5.9	-21,433	-3.8	-41,393	-4.6	+22,645	+7.2	-17,113	-3.2	+5,532	+0.6
Informal	-63,156	-7.3	-86,897	-7.6	-150,053	-7.5	+1,378	+0.2	+23,281	+2.2	+24,659	+1.3

* The absolute change refers to the difference in numbers of employed between 2019 and 2020 (and 2020 and 2021). The relative change refers to the change in the number as a per cent of the number from the earlier period as shown in the formula: $Relative\ change = \frac{(value\ of\ the\ indicator\ in\ period\ 2 - value\ of\ the\ indicator\ in\ period\ 1)}{value\ of\ the\ indicator\ in\ period\ 1} * 100$

In 2019, agriculture, accounting for 23 per cent of informal employment, was the largest sector nationally, followed closely by trade (wholesale and retail) comprising 22 per cent of informal employment (**table 6**). In urban areas and in San Salvador, the trade sector with 27-28 per cent of informal workers was the single largest sector of informal employment, while agriculture

accounted for 8 per cent of informal employment in urban areas and 3 per cent in San Salvador. Manufacturing accounted for more than 12 per cent of employment nationally, and around 15 per cent in urban areas and in the San Salvador metropolitan area. Accommodation and food services were 10 per cent nationally and a little higher in the other two geographic areas. Domestic service was

7 per cent of informal employment in all three geographic areas.

In 2019, agriculture was the single largest sector of informal employment for men nationally, accounting for 37 per cent of men's informal employment but only 4 per cent for women. Agriculture also accounted for 14 per cent of

Table 6. Informal employment by industry and sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador – 2019, 2020 and 2021: numbers and per cent distribution

	2019						2020						2021					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
San Salvador MA	223,251		225,367		448,618		210,434		203,553		413,987		197,624		201,252		398,876	
Agriculture; forestry and fishing	1,187*	0.5	13,239	5.9	14,426	3.2	1,700*	0.8	9,705	4.8	11,405	2.8	1,232*	0.6	11,825	5.9	13,058	3.3
Manufacturing	34,612	15.5	34,883	15.5	69,495	15.5	33,096	15.7	42,818	21.0	75,914	18.3	32,588	16.5	28,381	14.1	60,969	15.3
Other industrial activities ¹	2,455*	1.1	30,612	13.6	33,066	7.4	320*	0.2	22,548	11.1	22,868	5.5	1,740*	0.9	30,085	14.9	31,825	8.0
Trade	82,168	36.8	44,396	19.7	126,565	28.2	75,969	36.1	35,881	17.6	111,850	27.0	71,845	36.4	41,145	20.4	112,990	28.3
Transport, storage and related repair	3,874*	1.7	48,749	21.6	52,623	11.7	1,862*	0.9	52,843	26.0	54,705	13.2	3,484*	1.8	46,713	23.2	50,197	12.6
Accommodation and food	42,177	18.9	11,079	4.9	53,256	11.9	40,745	19.4	13,157	6.5	53,902	13.0	40,183	20.3	13,012	6.5	53,195	13.3
Information, financial, etc. ²	10,585	4.7	14,539	6.5	25,124	5.6	8,642	4.1	7,352	3.6	15,994	3.9	10,321	5.2	8,632	4.3	18,953	4.8
Domestic services	27,102	12.1	4,378	1.9	31,480	7.0	25,995	12.4	2,169*	1.1	28,164	6.8	22,594	11.4	4,527	2.2	27,120	6.8
Other services ³	19,091	8.6	23,493	10.4	42,584	9.5	22,104	10.5	17,080	8.4	39,184	9.5	13,637	6.9	16,932	8.4	30,569	7.7
Urban El Salvador	577,614		595,388		1,173,003		529,262		539,440		1,068,703		538,147		559,526		1,097,673	
Agriculture; forestry and fishing	7,755	1.3	83,347	14.0	91,102	7.8	6,770	1.3	71,995	13.3	78,765	7.4	9,475	1.8	75,819	13.6	85,294	7.8
Manufacturing	87,282	15.1	84,314	14.2	171,596	14.6	83,237	15.7	93,770	17.4	177,008	16.6	81,510	15.1	78,822	14.1	160,332	14.6
Other industrial activities ¹	4,424	0.8	102,060	17.1	106,484	9.1	2,635*	0.5	81,262	15.1	83,897	7.9	4,517	0.8	102,738	18.4	107,255	9.8
Trade	207,192	35.9	105,432	17.7	312,624	26.7	188,230	35.6	95,867	17.8	284,097	26.6	200,753	37.3	100,366	17.9	301,118	27.4
Transport, storage and related repair	6,949	1.2	105,684	17.8	112,634	9.6	5,286	1.0	96,829	17.9	102,115	9.6	5,564	1.0	103,783	18.5	109,346	10.0
Accommodation and food	118,591	20.5	27,457	4.6	146,049	12.5	104,072	19.7	27,183	5.0	131,255	12.3	103,341	19.2	27,668	4.9	131,009	11.9
Information, financial, etc. ²	21,888	3.8	26,442	4.4	48,331	4.1	19,428	3.7	17,580	3.3	37,008	3.5	23,665	4.4	21,595	3.9	45,261	4.1
Domestic services	74,717	12.9	9,809	1.6	84,526	7.2	75,095	14.2	8,562	1.6	83,657	7.8	73,226	13.6	10,974	2.0	84,200	7.7
Other services ³	48,815	8.5	50,843	8.5	99,658	8.5	44,508	8.4	46,392	8.6	90,901	8.5	36,096	6.7	37,762	6.7	73,857	6.7

Table 6 (cont.). Informal employment by industry and sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador – 2019, 2020 and 2021: numbers and per cent distribution

	2019						2020						2021					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
El Salvador	868,724		1,139,336		2,008,060		805,568		1,052,439		1,858,007		806,946		1,075,720		1,882,666	
Agriculture; forestry and fishing	38,527	4.4	417,679	36.7	456,206	22.7	37,222	4.6	373,916	35.5	411,139	22.1	36,675	4.5	354,531	33.0	391,206	20.8
Manufacturing	131,338	15.1	117,849	10.3	249,187	12.4	132,995	16.5	131,752	12.5	264,746	14.2	122,635	15.2	114,482	10.6	237,117	12.6
Other industrial activities ¹	5,603	0.6	167,754	14.7	173,357	8.6	3,475	0.4	147,469	14.0	150,944	8.1	6,867	0.9	189,300	17.6	196,167	10.4
Trade	289,595	33.3	141,538	12.4	431,132	21.5	272,546	33.8	133,453	12.7	405,998	21.9	280,345	34.7	139,130	12.9	419,475	22.3
Transport, storage and related repair	7,961	0.9	141,651	12.4	149,612	7.5	7,271	0.9	132,031	12.5	139,302	7.5	7,379	0.9	139,672	13.0	147,051	7.8
Accommodation and food	161,557	18.6	37,836	3.3	199,393	9.9	143,952	17.9	34,493	3.3	178,444	9.6	147,675	18.3	37,961	3.5	185,636	9.9
Information, financial, etc. ²	27,237	3.1	30,864	2.7	58,100	2.9	24,955	3.1	20,307	1.9	45,261	2.4	28,906	3.6	28,772	2.7	57,678	3.1
Domestic services	135,058	15.5	14,138	1.2	149,196	7.4	123,607	15.3	13,021	1.2	136,628	7.4	124,512	15.4	15,707	1.5	140,220	7.4
Other services ³	71,848	8.3	70,029	6.1	141,876	7.1	59,546	7.4	65,997	6.3	125,543	6.8	51,952	6.4	56,165	5.2	108,117	5.7

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.

¹ Includes construction; mining and quarrying; electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities.

² Includes information and communication; financial and insurance; real estate; professional; education, health and social services.

³ Includes public administration and defence, compulsory social security; art, entertainment and recreation; other services activities; activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies.

men's informal employment in urban areas and 6 per cent in San Salvador. Trade is the single largest sector of informal employment for women, with 33 per cent nationally and around 37 per cent in urban areas and in San Salvador, compared to 13 per cent nationally for men, 18 per cent in urban areas and 20 per cent in San Salvador. The manufacturing sector is relatively more important for women (15 per cent) than for men (10 per cent) nationally. In urban areas and in San Salvador, the share is around 15 per cent for both women and men. Other industrial activities (13 to 17 per cent) and transport and related activities (12 to 22 per cent) are important sectors for men's informal employment but account for only around 1 per cent

for women. The accommodation and food sector was an important source of jobs for women, with around 19-20 per cent of their informal employment depending on the geographical location compared to 3 to 5 per cent for men. Domestic service accounted for 16 per cent of women's informal employment nationally, 13 per cent in urban areas and 12 per cent in San Salvador and no more than 2 per cent of men's informal employment.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, there were large losses between 2019 and 2021 in men's informal employment in agriculture. The share fell from 37 per cent in 2019 to 33 per cent in 2021 nationally for men. In numbers of workers, informal employment in the trade sector decreased between

2019 and 2020, but the sector's relative share of informal employment was fairly constant and higher for women than men. The numbers in trade increased between 2020 and 2021 but did not reach the 2019 levels. In San Salvador, women's informal employment in trade decreased, while the numbers for men increased. In the other two geographic areas, the increases were similar for women and men. Informal employment in the manufacturing sector increased in absolute and relative terms between 2019 and 2020, reaching 14 per cent of informal employment at the national level – before retracting in 2021 to below the pre-pandemic level. In urban areas and nationally, the accommodation and food sector lost informal

employment. Although employment in the sector increased between 2020 and 2021, it did not return to its pre-pandemic level. In San Salvador, informal employment among women in accommodation and food decreased between 2019 and 2020 but increased for men, then stagnated between 2020 and 2021 for both women and men. For men, both the other industrial activities and transport sectors lost employment in 2020, but returned to pre-pandemic levels in San Salvador and urban areas and vastly surpassed the earlier levels nationally. Information and communication, financial and insurance activities, education, health and social services sectors and other services decreased between 2019 and 2020 in all three geographic areas, and between 2020 and 2021 increased in urban areas and nationally but did not return to the 2019 levels. Other services continued to decrease between 2020 and 2021.

Groups of Workers

Together, the seven groups of workers accounted nationally for 33 per cent of total employment in 2019 – 43 per cent for women and 27 per cent for men – or almost 1 million workers. With the pandemic, the number of workers in several of the groups (not only home-based workers but also street vendors and market traders) increased so that together in 2020 the groups comprised a larger share (38 per cent) of total employment.

This brief looks at seven groups of workers: domestic workers, waste pickers, informal construction workers, informal transport workers, market traders,



Home-based workers in El Salvador. Photo courtesy of Sindicato de Trabajadoras de Bordado a Domicilio de El Salvador (SITRABORDO)

street vendors and home-based workers (**table 7**). Home-based workers represented 9 per cent of employment in 2019 at all geographical levels, or almost 260,000 workers nationwide, with a higher proportion of employment for women (17 per cent) compared to men (4 per cent).

(However, as explained in the Annex, this is an underestimate of home-based workers). Street vending accounted for 7 per cent of employment nationwide, 8 per cent in urban areas and 7 per cent in San Salvador. Street vending accounted for 11 per cent of women's employment nationally,

compared to 4 per cent for men. Most street vendors sell goods other than food and drink (nationally 72 per cent), a substantial proportion sell food and drink and a few offer services. Market traders accounted for more than 2 per cent of employment nationally, or 67,000 people, nearly 3 per cent in

Table 7. Groups of workers by sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador and El Salvador, 2019, 2020 and 2021: numbers and per cent of total employment

	2019						2020						2021					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
San Salvador MA	139,536	36.6	126,535	27.4	266,071	31.6	153,202	43.9	141,462	33.7	294,664	38.3	146,726	42.5	130,297	32.5	277,024	37.1
Domestic workers	31,079	8.1	7,699	1.7	38,778	4.6	26,699	7.6	7,237	1.7	33,935	4.4	23,951	6.9	5,645	1.4	29,595	4.0
Home-based workers	55,487	14.5	17,666	3.8	73,153	8.7	62,892	18.0	22,235	5.3	85,127	11.1	65,048	18.9	26,575	6.6	91,623	12.3
Market traders	15,079	4.0	5,791	1.3	20,870	2.5	17,527	5.0	5,752	1.4	23,279	3.0	12,433	3.6	5,077	1.3	17,510	2.3
Food and beverages	4,655	1.2	641*	0.1	5,296	0.6	3,964*	1.1	1,254*	0.3	5,218*	0.7	2,562*	0.7	760*	0.2	3,322	0.4
Goods other than food and beverages	10,424	2.7	5,151	1.1	15,574	1.8	13,489	3.9	4,424*	1.1	17,913	2.3	9,871	2.9	4,059	1.0	13,930	1.9
Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	74*	0.0	74*	0.0	148*	0.0	-	0.0	258*	0.1	258*	0.0
Street vendors	35,660	9.3	23,632	5.1	59,292	7.0	43,800	12.5	24,119	5.7	67,919	8.8	43,029	12.5	22,653	5.6	65,681	8.8
Food and beverages	7,041	1.8	2,447	0.5	9,488	1.1	6,812	1.9	3,784*	0.9	10,596	1.4	10,830	3.1	4,092	1.0	14,923	2.0
Goods other than food and beverages	26,724	7.0	21,058	4.6	47,781	5.7	36,561	10.5	20,335	4.8	56,897	7.4	32,199	9.3	18,382	4.6	50,581	6.8
Services	1,896	0.5	127	0.0	2,023	0.2	427*	0.1	-	0.0	427*	0.1	-	0.0	178*	0.0	178*	0.0
Informal construction workers	-	0.0	36,199	7.8	36,199	4.3	68*	0.0	37,523	8.9	37,591	4.9	375*	0.1	31,273	7.8	31,648	4.2
Informal transport workers	1,697*	0.4	34,404	7.5	36,101	4.3	2,097*	0.6	41,952	10.0	44,048	5.7	1,504*	0.4	36,328	9.1	37,832	5.1
Waste pickers	534*	0.1	1,144*	0.2	1,678*	0.2	120*	0.0	2,644*	0.6	2,764*	0.4	388*	0.1	2,746*	0.7	3,134*	0.4
Urban El Salvador	352,595	40.8	313,549	30.3	666,144	35.0	379,589	47.7	329,150	34.4	708,739	40.4	381,688	46.3	325,045	33.8	706,733	39.5
Domestic workers	80,061	9.3	14,133	1.4	94,195	5.0	76,430	9.6	15,164	1.6	91,594	5.2	75,661	9.2	13,911	1.4	89,571	5.0
Home-based workers	136,333	15.8	43,238	4.2	179,570	9.4	152,633	19.2	59,689	6.2	212,322	12.1	162,444	19.7	60,406	6.3	222,849	12.5
Market traders	36,028	4.2	15,799	1.5	51,826	2.7	44,886	5.6	17,528	1.8	62,415	3.6	34,421	4.2	13,275	1.4	47,696	2.7
Food and beverages	9,001	1.0	2,736	0.3	11,737	0.6	8,838	1.1	3,846	0.4	12,683	0.7	6,416	0.8	2,837	0.3	9,254	0.5
Goods other than food and beverages	26,959	3.1	12,997	1.3	39,956	2.1	35,809	4.5	13,570	1.4	49,379	2.8	27,963	3.4	10,118	1.1	38,081	2.1
Services	68*	0.0	65*	0.0	133*	0.0	240*	0.0	112*	0.0	352*	0.0	42*	0.0	320*	0.0	362*	0.0

Table 7 (cont.). Groups of workers by sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador and El Salvador, 2019, 2020 and 2021: numbers and per cent of total employment

	2019						2020						2021					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
Street vendors	94,068	10.9	51,414	5.0	145,482	7.7	99,769	12.5	55,023	5.7	154,792	8.8	104,616	12.7	53,427	5.5	158,043	8.8
Food and beverages	23,840	2.8	6,749	0.7	30,589	1.6	21,732	2.7	7,640	0.8	29,373	1.7	24,521	3.0	9,708	1.0	34,229	1.9
Goods other than food and beverages	67,811	7.8	43,958	4.2	111,769	5.9	76,262	9.6	45,906	4.8	122,167	7.0	80,095	9.7	43,295	4.5	123,390	6.9
Services	2,417*	0.3	707*	0.1	3,124	0.2	1,775*	0.2	1,477*	0.2	3,252*	0.2	-	0.0	423*	0.0	423*	0.0
Informal construction workers	828*	0.1	109,898	10.6	110,726	5.8	1,550*	0.2	101,034	10.6	102,584	5.9	1,212*	0.1	97,768	10.2	98,980	5.5
Informal transport workers	4,117	0.5	75,943	7.3	80,060	4.2	3,301*	0.4	77,306	8.1	80,607	4.6	2,369	0.3	81,270	8.4	83,639	4.7
Waste pickers	1,161*	0.1	3,125	0.3	4,285	0.2	1,020*	0.1	3,405*	0.4	4,425*	0.3	966*	0.1	4,988	0.5	5,954	0.3
El Salvador	519,872	43.1	453,100	26.6	972,973	33.5	561,686	50.1	476,449	29.9	1,038,134	38.2	553,321	48.3	472,688	29.5	1,026,010	37.4
Domestic workers	140,701	11.7	19,350	1.1	160,052	5.5	125,391	11.2	20,728	1.3	146,119	5.4	127,585	11.1	20,292	1.3	147,877	5.4
Home-based workers	199,310	16.5	59,580	3.5	258,890	8.9	234,862	20.9	78,539	4.9	313,402	11.5	226,202	19.7	77,525	4.8	303,727	11.1
Market traders	45,646	3.8	20,924	1.2	66,570	2.3	56,441	5.0	23,244	1.5	79,685	2.9	44,935	3.9	17,846	1.1	62,781	2.3
Food and beverages	10,370	0.9	4,726	0.3	15,096	0.5	10,893	1.0	6,092	0.4	16,985	0.6	8,698	0.8	4,507	0.3	13,204	0.5
Goods other than food and beverages	35,209	2.9	16,093	0.9	51,301	1.8	45,244	4.0	17,040	1.1	62,284	2.3	36,195	3.2	12,975	0.8	49,170	1.8
Services	68*	0.0	105*	0.0	173*	0.0	304	0.0	112*	0.0	416*	0.0	43*	0.0	365*	0.0	407*	0.0
Street vendors	127,135	10.6	66,585	3.9	193,720	6.7	137,388	12.2	73,468	4.6	210,856	7.8	147,565	12.9	71,575	4.5	219,140	8.0
Food and beverages	33,339	2.8	8,485	0.5	41,825	1.4	31,906	2.8	11,814	0.7	43,720	1.6	35,714	3.1	12,711	0.8	48,426	1.8
Goods other than food and beverages	90,933	7.5	56,962	3.3	147,895	5.1	103,682	9.2	60,177	3.8	163,859	6.0	111,774	9.8	58,187	3.6	169,961	6.2
Services	2,863	0.2	1,138*	0.1	4,001	0.1	1,801	0.2	1,477*	0.1	3,278*	0.1	77*	0.0	677*	0.0	753*	0.0
Informal construction workers	1,047*	0.1	176,846	10.4	177,893	6.1	2,715	0.2	169,796	10.6	172,511	6.4	2,219	0.2	167,905	10.5	170,123	6.2
Informal transport workers	4,623	0.4	106,129	6.2	110,752	3.8	3,754	0.3	107,011	6.7	110,766	4.1	3,424	0.3	111,332	7.0	114,756	4.2
Waste pickers	1,410*	0.1	3,686	0.2	5,096	0.2	1,133	0.1	3,663*	0.2	4,797	0.2	1,391*	0.1	6,214	0.4	7,605	0.3

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.

urban areas and San Salvador. Domestic work accounted for around 5 per cent of employment in all three geographic areas. It is a major source of employment for women, accounting for 12 per cent of women's employment nationally – compared to 1 per cent for men. Waste pickers represented a

small proportion of the working population, with less than 1 per cent for each geographical level, and are predominantly men. They are not well measured in a labour force survey, so the number is likely to be an underestimate. Informal transport accounted for 4 per cent of employment in all

three geographic areas, and informal construction was 4 per cent in San Salvador and 6 per cent in urban areas and nationally. Informal construction and informal transport were mainly a source of employment for men (informal construction at 10 per cent of men's employment and informal



Domestic workers in El Salvador. Photo courtesy of *Sindicato de Mujeres Trabajadoras del Hogar Remuneradas Salvadoreñas (SIMUTHRES)*

transport at 6 per cent) and less than 1 per cent of women's employment, nationally.

Between 2019 and 2021, the groups taken together increased from 34 to 38 per cent of national employment with a substantially larger increase for women (from 43 per cent of women's total employment in 2019 to 48 per cent in 2021 and from 27 per cent to 30 per cent for men). The greatest increase was in the number of home-based workers – by 54,000 additional workers. The number of home-based workers fell slightly in 2021

but remains around 11 per cent of employment. The absolute number of market traders and street vendors also increased – especially street vendors. In 2021, the number of women street vendors continued to increase, reaching almost 13 per cent of employment. These categories acted as a cushion for many people who needed to continue working during the pandemic. However, again, the number of home-based workers has probably increased much more, especially in the professional services categories (such as banking), but only the self-employed could be identified in the survey.

Other occupations suffered significant losses during the pandemic. Domestic work, for example, lost 14,000 jobs – mainly among women. By 2021, the pre-pandemic level was still far off. Among men, the informal construction sector suffered substantial net losses, from 2019 to 2021. Waste pickers decreased slightly between 2019 and 2020. Although the number of waste pickers was small, there was an increase in their numbers between 2020 and 2021, from 5,000 workers nationally in 2019 to 7,000 in 2021.

Industry of Home-Based Workers

Trade and manufacturing together comprised from 60 to 72 per cent of the employment of home-based workers across all geographic areas through the years 2019-2021.

In 2019, trade was the largest sector of employment for home-based workers – 37 per cent nationally

and 36 per cent in urban areas and in San Salvador (**table 8**).⁵ This sector is closely followed by manufacturing, with 35 per cent nationally, 34 per cent in urban areas and 33 per cent in San Salvador. The accommodation and food sector is also important, with 16 per cent of home-based workers nationally and in urban areas and 13 per cent in San Salvador. The "other services" category, which includes administrative and support service activities, and art, entertainment and recreation, accounted for 7 per cent of home-based worker employment, 8 per cent in urban areas and 10 per cent in San Salvador. Information, financial, real estate, professional services, education, health and social services activities account for 3 per cent nationally, 4 per cent in urban areas and 5.5 per cent in San Salvador.

The largest sector for women home-based workers in 2019 was trade: 40 per cent nationally and in urban areas, and 42 per cent in San Salvador, compared to 25 per cent nationally for men, around 24 in urban areas and 20 per cent in San Salvador. Women were much more likely than men to work in accommodation and food (19 per cent nationally and in urban areas, compared to 5-6 per cent for men). The gap narrowed in the San Salvador metropolitan area, with 15 per cent for women and 8 per cent for men.

The largest sector for men home-based workers in 2019 was manufacturing: 42 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women nationally. The gap between women and men's concentration in

⁵ Given the problem with the questionnaire, only home-based workers who are independent (self-employed) could be identified. Had dependent home-based workers been included, the distribution across the industry sectors may have been different.

Table 8. Industry of home-based workers by sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador and El Salvador – 2019, 2020 and 2021: Numbers and per cent distribution

	2019						2020						2021					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
San Salvador MA	55,487		17,666		73,153		62,892		22,235		85,127		65,048		26,575		91,623	
Manufacturing	17,439	31.4	6,523	36.9	23,962	32.8	17,694	28.1	9,002*	40.5	26,696	31.4	19,801	30.4	7,192	27.1	26,993	29.5
Trade	23,136	41.7	3,509*	19.9	26,645	36.4	19,243	30.6	4,514*	20.3	23,756	27.9	22,997	35.4	4,697	17.7	27,694	30.2
Repair motor vehicles	-	0.0	1,725*	9.8	1,725	2.4	330*	0.5	688*	3.1	1,018*	1.2	390*	0.6	1,968*	7.4	2,358*	2.6
Accommodation and food	8,236	14.8	1,485*	8.4	9,720	13.3	14,894	23.7	2,716*	12.2	17,611	20.7	11,1766	17.2	1,901*	7.2	13,067	14.3
Information, financial, etc. ¹	1,733*	3.1	2,304*	13.0	4,036	5.5	4,925*	7.8	4,193*	18.9	9,117	10.7	4,882	7.5	5,014	18.9	9,897	10.8
Other services ²	4,944	8.9	2,121*	12.0	7,065	9.7	5,806*	9.2	1,123*	5.0	6,928	8.1	5,812	8.9	5,803	21.8	11,615	12.7
Urban El Salvador	136,332		43,238		179,570		152,633		59,689		212,322		162,444		60,406		222,849	
Manufacturing	43,573	32.0	17,065	39.5	60,638	33.8	49,739	32.6	23,469	39.3	73,208	34.5	50,043	30.8	20,965	34.7	71,008	31.9
Trade	53,457	39.2	10,563	24.4	64,020	35.7	49,573	32.5	14,419	24.2	63,993	30.1	63,078	38.8	13,831	22.9	76,909	34.5
Repair motor vehicles	225*	0.2	3,931	9.1	4,155	2.3	636*	0.4	2,396*	4.0	3,032	1.4	715*	0.4	4,455	7.4	5,170	2.3
Accommodation and food	26,218	19.2	2,525	5.8	28,743	16.0	34,792	22.8	4,890	8.2	39,683	18.7	30,008	18.5	4,203	7.0	34,211	15.4
Information, financial, etc. ¹	3,303	2.4	3,810	8.8	7,113	4.0	7,349	4.8	8,532	14.3	15,881	7.5	8,198	5.0	8,359	13.8	16,557	7.4
Other services ²	9,556	7.0	5,344	12.4	14,901	8.3	10,543	6.9	5,983	10.0	16,525	7.8	10,401	6.4	8,592	14.2	18,994	8.5
El Salvador	199,310		59,580		258,890		234,862		78,539		313,402		226,202		77,525		303,727	
Manufacturing	65,091	32.7	25,203	42.3	90,294	34.9	80,845	34.4	33,016	42.0	113,862	36.3	72,861	32.2	28,936	37.3	101,796	33.5
Trade	80,548	40.4	14,841	24.9	95,390	36.8	82,672	35.2	18,216	23.2	100,888	32.2	87,448	38.7	18,047	23.3	105,495	34.7
Repair motor vehicles	225*	0.1	5,305	8.9	5,530	2.1	636*	0.3	3,343	4.3	3,979	1.3	776*	0.3	6,189	8.0	6,965	2.3
Accommodation and food	37,592	18.9	2,935	4.9	40,527	15.7	49,159	20.9	6,743	8.6	55,902	17.8	44,174	19.5	4,582	5.9	48,756	16.1
Information, financial, etc. ¹	3,728	1.9	4,517	7.6	8,245	3.2	8,056	3.4	8,749	11.1	16,805	5.4	9,098	4.0	8,891	11.5	17,989	5.9
Other services ²	12,125	6.1	6,779	11.4	18,905	7.3	13,493	5.7	8,472	10.8	21,965	7.0	11,846	5.2	10,879	14.0	22,726	7.5

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.

¹ Information and communication, financial and insurance, real estate, professional services, education, health and social services.

² Administrative and support service activities; art, entertainment and recreation; other services activities.

the sector narrowed in urban areas and in San Salvador, with men's decrease to 37-39 per cent while the percentage remained the same for women. In addition, 9-10 per cent of men – and

virtually no women — work in the motor vehicle repair sector. A greater share of men than women home-based workers work in the "financial, real estate, professional services, education, health and

social services activities" category, with just under 8 per cent of men working in this sector at the national level, compared to 2 per cent of women. At the urban level, the gap widens, particularly in

San Salvador, where the sector accounts for over 13 per cent of men's home-based work, compared to 3 per cent for women. A greater proportion of men home-based workers are also in the "other services" category, with over 11-12 per cent depending on the geographical location, compared to 6-9 per cent for women.

With the transfer of work from office to home during the pandemic, the number of home-based workers grew from 258,890 to 313,402 between 2019 and 2020 nationally but fell back in 2021 to 303,727 – still above the pre-pandemic level. In urban areas and



A market vendor in El Salvador. Photo: Stanley Díaz of StreetNet affiliate Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Independientes Vendedores de El Salvador (FESTIVES)

San Salvador, the numbers of home-based workers continued to rise. While there was an increase in the absolute number in most sectors between 2019 and 2020, the greatest increase occurred in manufacturing (nationally up from 90,000 to 113,000),⁶ accommodation and food (up from 40,000 to 56,000), and the "financial, real estate, professional services, education, health and social services activities" category, with a doubling of the number of workers. In San Salvador, 19 per cent of men and 8 per cent of women home-based workers worked in this sector in 2020, compared to 13 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively, before the pandemic. In all three geographic areas, the numbers of home-based workers in this sector continued to increase between 2020 and 2021.

Informality of the Groups of Workers

Informality among these groups of workers was over 90 per cent, a rate much higher than the rate of informality (69 per cent) in total employment. Throughout the period, the rates of informality were substantially higher for women than for men in the three geographic areas.

Table 9 includes only five groups, as informality was a criterion for identifying informal transport and informal construction workers. Taken together, 95 per cent of workers in the five groups in 2019 were informal at the national level, 94 per cent in urban areas and 91 per cent in San Salvador. The informality rate was highest among market traders (97 per cent) and street vendors (96 per cent) followed by home-based workers (95 per cent),

93 per cent among domestic workers and 91 per cent among waste pickers.

The rate of informality was higher for women than for men in most of the groups. Nationally, 97 per cent of women in the five groups were informal, compared to 90 per cent of men. There is a marked difference among domestic workers, where the rate is 96 per cent for women (87 per cent in San Salvador) and 73 per cent for men (57 per cent in San Salvador).

Nationally, the rate of informality for women in the groups taken together decreased from 97 per cent in 2019 to 95 per cent in 2020; in urban areas, from 95 to 94 per cent and in San Salvador remained around 93 per cent. Between 2020 and 2021, there was little change. For men, the rate fell from 90 to 85 per cent in 2020 nationally and remained at that rate in 2021. This difference is mainly driven by the drop in the prevalence of informality among home-based workers, which fell nationally from 95 per cent in 2019 to 90 per cent in 2021. In San Salvador, the fall was even greater, from 93 per cent in 2019 to 81 per cent in 2021. The decrease was greater for men than women in home-based work. The largest decrease for men occurred in San Salvador, where informality among men in home-based work dropped 23 points from 2019 to 2021 (85 to 62 per cent) in contrast to the decline of 6 points for women home-based workers (95 to 89 per cent).

⁶ The two most important categories of manufacturing were the production of bakery goods (65 per cent) and apparel (23 per cent).

Table 9. Groups of workers by whether informally employed by sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador and El Salvador, 2019, 2020 and 2021: per cent share and numbers

	2019						2020						2021					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
San Salvador MA (all employed)	223,251	58.5	225,367	48.9	448,618	53.2	210,434	60.2	203,553	48.5	413,987	53.8	197,624	57.3	201,252	50.2	398,876	53.5
WIEGO groups	128,564	93.3	48,523	86.8	177,088	91.4	139,685	92.5	47,353	76.4	187,038	87.8	131,368	90.7	48,324	77.1	179,692	86.6
Domestic workers	27,102	87.2	4,378	56.9	31,480	81.2	25,995	97.4	2,169*	30.0	28,164	83.0	22,594	94.3	4,527	80.2	27,120	91.6
Home-based workers	52,948	95.4	14,998	84.9	67,946	92.9	56,444	89.8	14,475	65.1	70,919	83.3	57,791	88.8	16,409	61.7	74,200	81.0
Market traders	14,640	97.1	5,464	94.4	20,104	96.3	16,725	95.4	5,149*	89.5	21,875	94.0	10,665	85.8	4,483	88.3	15,149	86.5
Street vendors	33,341	93.5	22,539	95.4	55,879	94.2	40,401	92.2	23,042	95.5	63,443	93.4	39,930	92.8	20,305	89.6	60,235	91.7
Waste pickers	534*	100.0	1,144*	100.0	1,678*	100.0	120*	100.0	2,518*	95.2	2,638	95.4	388*	100.0	2,601*	94.7	2,988*	95.4
Urban El Salvador (all employed)	577,614	66.8	595,388	57.5	1,173,003	61.7	529,262	66.5	539,440	56.4	1,068,703	61.0	538,147	65.3	559,526	58.1	1,097,673	61.4
WIEGO groups	330,723	95.1	113,867	89.2	444,591	93.5	352,595	94.1	124,348	82.5	476,944	90.8	354,526	93.8	120,958	82.8	475,484	90.7
Domestic workers	74,717	93.2	9,809	69.4	84,526	89.7	75,095	98.3	8,562	56.5	83,657	91.3	73,226	96.8	10,974	78.9	84,200	94.0
Home-based workers	130,323	95.6	37,639	87.1	167,962	93.5	140,741	92.2	45,927	76.9	186,667	87.9	150,356	92.6	43,869	72.6	194,225	87.2
Market traders	35,210	96.5	14,960	94.7	50,170	96.8	41,736	93.0	16,072	91.7	57,808	92.6	30,386	88.3	12,204	91.9	42,590	89.3
Street vendors	89,340	95.0	48,771	94.9	138,112	94.9	94,004	94.2	50,764	92.3	144,768	93.5	99,593	95.2	49,069	91.8	148,662	94.1
Waste pickers	1,133*	97.6	2,688	86.0	3,821	89.2	1,020*	100.0	3,023*	88.8	4,043	91.4	966*	100.0	4,842	97.1	5,808	97.6
El Salvador (all employed)	868,724	72.1	1,139,336	66.9	2,008,060	69.1	805,568	71.8	1,052,439	66.0	1,858,007	68.4	806,946	70.4	1,075,720	67.2	1,882,666	68.5
WIEGO groups	495,964	96.5	153,773	90.4	649,737	95.0	529,558	95.4	168,759	84.5	698,317	92.5	521,500	95.2	163,557	84.6	685,057	92.4
Domestic workers	135,058	96.0	14,138	73.1	149,196	93.2	123,607	98.6	13,021	62.8	136,628	93.5	124,512	97.6	15,707	77.4	140,220	94.8
Home-based workers	192,890	96.8	53,418	89.7	246,307	95.1	221,757	94.4	63,186	80.5	284,943	90.9	213,836	94.5	59,995	77.4	273,831	90.2
Market traders	44,639	97.8	19,583	93.6	64,222	96.5	52,424	92.9	21,435	92.2	73,859	92.7	40,490	90.1	16,298	91.3	56,788	90.5
Street vendors	121,995	96.0	63,386	95.2	185,381	95.7	130,637	95.1	67,835	92.3	198,472	94.1	141,271	95.7	65,537	91.6	206,808	94.4
Waste pickers	1,382*	98.0	3,249	88.2	4,631	90.9	1,133*	100.0	3,282*	89.6	4,415	92.0	1,391*	100.0	6,020	96.9	7,411	97.5

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.

Status in Employment

Data on status in employment are limited because the questionnaire asked a respondent's place of work only of self-employed workers. Since place of work is key to identifying home-based workers and also provides more precise data on market traders and street vendors, the number of employees in these groups is an underestimate. Thus the difference in the status categories between the WIEGO groups and other employed persons is large: 52 to 56 per cent across the geographic areas in the seven groups taken together are own-account workers in contrast to only 17 per cent among other employed workers, while the share of employees is 35 to 40 per cent across the geographic areas compared to 71 to 82 per cent for other employed persons.

The majority of workers in all seven groups are own-account self-employed (52 per cent nationally and around 56 per cent in urban areas and San Salvador) (**table 10**). This contrasts sharply with

Box 2. Note on tables 10-15

Since the population of San Salvador Metropolitan Area is relatively small, the data for each specific worker group is too small to be reliable in cross tabulations. Tables 10-15 will have data for only the total workers in the seven groups in San Salvador. The total for the seven groups taken together in each geographic area will be compared to the total for the employed population minus the seven worker groups.

the distribution of status in employment for other employed workers, with only 17 per cent as own-account workers. The share of employees in the seven worker groups is 35 to 40 per cent across the geographic areas but much larger among other employed workers (71 per cent nationally, 78 per cent in urban areas and 82 per cent in San Salvador). The proportion of contributing family workers is lower than among other employed: around 2 per cent at all geographical levels for the seven groups, compared to 5 to 8 per cent in total employment.

A much larger share of women than men are own-account workers: 64 to 68 per cent of women in the seven groups taken together across the three geographic areas nationally compared to 39 to 45 per cent of men. By contrast, a far larger share of men than women are employees: from 48 to 54 per cent of men in the seven worker groups across the geographic areas compared to 24 to 28 per cent of women.

The contrast with the remaining employed population is significant: at the national level, within the seven groups, 28 per cent of women are employees while this number reaches 71 per cent among others employed. This gap widens at the urban level, and even more so in San Salvador, where the share of employed women in the seven groups is around 24 per cent versus 74-79 per cent for the other workers. Women in the seven groups have higher rates of self-employment: 69 per cent are own-account workers or employers at the national level, compared to 18 per cent for other employed women. Women in the other employed group are relatively more likely to be contributing family

workers (nationally 11 per cent versus 2 per cent in the seven groups). Additional tabulations indicate that these women (contributing family workers in the other employed group) work mainly in agriculture, small retail outlets or restaurants.

The contrasts follow the same pattern for men, with more minor differences: 54 per cent of men in the seven groups are employees, compared to 72 per cent for the other workers, nationally; 45 per cent of in the seven groups are self-employed, compared to 23 per cent for the rest. The incidence of family work is also higher among men in the seven groups: 2 per cent versus 6 per cent among other workers. Further calculations suggest that men contributing family workers in the other employed group work mainly in agriculture at the national level. Contributing family workers outside the WIEGO groups remain significant in agriculture at the urban level, but are more likely to work in restaurants or small retail outlets in San Salvador.

Domestic workers are overwhelmingly employees, 89 per cent nationally. Somewhat fewer are employees (86 per cent) in urban areas. Among men domestic workers, the prevalence of own-account self-employment reaches almost 20 per cent, both at the national and urban level.

The analysis of status in employment for **home-based workers, market traders and street vendors** is limited because the question on place of work was asked only of the self-employed. Since this question is essential to identifying home-based workers, only the self-employed (employers and own-account workers) are identified. Although this problem also applies to market traders and street

Table 10. Groups of workers and other employed workers by status in employment and by sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador, 2019 (per cent distribution)

	Women				Men				Total			
	Employer	Own-account	Employee	Family	Employer	Own-account	Employee	Family	Employer	Own-account	Employee	Family
San Salvador MA (total employment minus specific groups)	2.4	11.3	79.1	7.2	3.3	10.7	83.2	2.7	2.9	11.0	81.5	4.6
WIEGO groups	5.7	68.1	23.5	2.7	5.8	45.0	48.1	1.1	5.8	57.1	35.2	1.9
Urban El Salvador (total employment minus specific groups)	3.4	12.9	73.9	9.8	4.2	12.3	80.0	3.6	3.9	12.5	77.5	6.1
WIEGO groups	6.0	67.3	24.0	2.8	6.6	42.3	49.3	1.8	6.3	55.5	35.9	2.3
Domestic workers	0.1*	12.5	87.4	0.0*	3.7*	19.6	76.4	0.4*	0.6*	13.6	85.7	0.1*
Home-based workers	9.5	90.5	0.0	0.0	15.8	84.2	0.0	0.0	11.0	89.0	0.0	0.0
Market traders	8.0	54.7	21.2	16.1	3.4*	30.3	50.8	15.5	6.6	47.3	30.2	15.9
Street vendors	4.7	86.0	5.6	3.7	4.3	81.6	10.9	3.2*	4.6	84.4	7.5	3.5
Informal construction workers	0.0*	4.4*	84.0*	11.5*	7.2	14.5	77.9	0.5*	7.1	14.4	77.9	0.5*
Informal transport workers	8.5*	63.4*	22.0*	6.1*	3.1	39.0	56.6	1.2*	3.4	40.3	54.8	1.5*
Waste pickers	20.2*	59.2*	12.6*	7.9*	11.4*	33.9*	54.8*	0.0*	13.7*	40.7*	43.4*	2.2*
El Salvador (total employment minus specific groups)	3.1	15.0	70.9	11.0	4.5	18.3	71.6	5.7	4.0	17.1	71.3	7.5
WIEGO groups	5.0	64.4	28.3	2.4	6.4	38.5	53.5	1.6	5.6	52.3	40.0	2.0
Domestic workers	0.1*	9.7	90.2*	0.0*	3.4*	19.6	76.6	0.5*	0.5*	10.9	88.6	0.1*
Home-based workers	8.0	92.0	0.0	0.0	16.3	83.7	0.0	0.0	9.9	90.1	0.0	0.0
Market traders	7.1	51.9	24.4	16.6	3.1*	27.3	55.6	14.0	5.8	44.2	34.2	15.8
Street vendors	4.6	86.9	5.1	3.4	4.5	80.9	11.5	3.0	4.6	84.8	7.3	3.3
Informal construction workers	0.0*	3.5*	87.4*	9.1*	6.3	12.2	81.1	0.4*	6.2	12.1	81.1	0.5*
Informal transport workers	8.7*	57.6*	26.9*	6.8*	3.1	36.1	59.2	1.6*	3.3	37.0	57.8	1.8*
Waste pickers	23.5*	51.8*	18.1*	6.5*	9.6*	30.7*	58.7*	0.9*	13.5*	36.6*	47.5	2.4*

* Less than 20 observations in the survey. The low figures reflect several different factors. Waste pickers are kept through the analysis but represent few observations (44 nationally). Due to the questionnaire design, only home-based workers who are self-employed were identified. And few women are employed as waste pickers and as informal transport and informal construction workers.

vendors, supplementary tabulations were made – as described in the Appendix – to identify these two groups. However, the resulting tabulations probably underestimate dependent employees in the two groups.

Among **market traders**, 44 per cent are own-account workers, 34 per cent employees, 16 per cent contributing family workers and 6 per cent employers. Market traders have the highest percentage of contributing family workers among the worker groups. Slightly more workers are own-account status workers in urban areas than nationally (47 per cent compared to 44 per cent). The majority of women are own-account workers: nationally 52 per cent compared to 27 per cent for men. Women also have a higher per cent than men as employers nationally (7 per cent of cases compared to 3 per cent). For men, the predominant status is employee, 56 per cent compared to 24 per cent.

The vast majority of **street vendors** are own-account workers (85 per cent nationally and in urban areas). Seven per cent are employees, 5 per cent employers and 3 per cent family workers. Own-account employment is higher among women than men (87 per cent compared to 81 per cent), and the proportion of employers and contributing family workers is similar for both women and men (5 per cent and 3 per cent), while the proportion of employees is higher among men than women (12 per cent compared to 5 per cent).

The numbers of **waste pickers** are too small to produce reliable percentages. The predominant status for both women and men was own-account

worker (52 per cent of women and 59 per cent of men). However, the percentages for employers seem quite high.

The majority of those working in the **informal construction** sector are employees, 81 per cent. The remainder are own-account workers (12 per cent) and employers (6 per cent). Since there are few women working in this category, the distribution is driven by the composition of men. At the urban level again, the percentage of employees is lower (78 per cent), and a slightly higher per cent are own-account workers (14 per cent) and employers (7 per cent).

Among **informal transport** workers, the dominant status is also employee (58 per cent), followed by own-account workers (37 per cent), employers (3 per cent) and a few family workers (around 2 per cent). Here, too, only a few women are in this worker group and do not allow for a reliable analysis. For men, the percentage distribution is quite similar at the urban and national levels, with a slightly higher per cent of own-account workers and a lower percent of employees in urban areas than nationally.

Hours of Work

The average hours worked per week is higher for the seven groups of workers than the hours for the other employed workers, and more workers in the seven groups worked less than 15 hours a week compared to other employed workers.

Nationally, nearly half of the workers (48 per cent) in the specific groups worked more than 48 hours a

week compared to 36 per cent of other employed workers (**table 11**). Nationally, 21 per cent of workers in the seven groups worked between 40 and 48 hours a week, and 23 per cent worked between 15 and 39 hours. Few workers in the specific groups worked less than 15 hours a week – only 6 to 7 per cent across the geographic areas. Among other employed workers, a slightly lower percentage worked this short work week than among the seven groups.

Women in the seven groups worked fewer hours than men. For example, a higher percentage of women than men worked less than 15 hours a week (nationally 10 per cent of women compared to 4 per cent of men). Nevertheless, while a lower percentage of women than men had a long work week, the majority of women (63 per cent) worked 40 or more hours a week compared to 77 per cent of men.

Of all the groups, market traders have the longest work week. Among market traders, there was little difference between the hours of women and men across the three geographic areas. Over 60 per cent of both women and men worked more than 48 hours a week in urban areas and nationally, and an additional 15 per cent of women and men worked between 40 and 48 hours. Few market traders – either men or women – worked less than 15 hours a week. Among informal transport workers (mainly men), around 60 per cent also worked more than 48 hours a week and another 14 per cent worked between 40 and 48 hours. Around 75 per cent of women domestic workers and 70 per cent of men worked 40 or more hours a week, and only 5 per cent of women and men worked less than

Table 11. Groups of workers and other employed workers by weekly hours of work and by sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador and El Salvador, 2019 (per cent distribution)

	Women				Men				Total			
	< 15	15 to 39	40 to 48	> 48	< 15	15 to 39	40 to 48	> 48	< 15	15 to 39	40 to 48	> 48
San Salvador MA (total employment minus specific groups)	4.4	20.3	43.3	31.9	2.1	12.1	43.3	42.5	3.1	15.5	43.3	38.1
WIEGO groups	8.2	27.6	22.1	42.2	3.2	15.8	27.0	54.1	5.8	22.0	24.4	47.8
Urban El Salvador (total employment minus specific groups)	4.9	22.0	38.3	34.7	2.6	15.5	39.6	42.3	3.5	18.2	39.1	39.2
WIEGO groups	8.2	27.3	18.1	46.4	3.8	17.7	26.3	52.1	6.1	22.8	22.0	49.1
Domestic workers	5.2	21.5	20.3	53.0	4.0*	24.1	37.7	34.1	5.0	21.9	23.0	50.1
Home-based workers	9.4	28.4	16.1	46.1	6.6	19.4	15.8	58.2	8.7	26.2	16.0	49.0
Market traders	2.6*	20.8	15.4	61.2	2.2*	19.4	15.1*	63.4	2.5*	20.4	15.3	61.9
Street vendors	10.9	32.2	20.2	36.7	4.6	19.7	18.6	57.0	8.7	27.8	19.6	43.9
Informal construction workers	0.0*	48.5*	43.8*	7.6*	2.5	14.6	43.1	39.8	2.5	14.8	43.1	39.6
Informal transport workers	18.1*	45.1*	16.9*	19.8*	3.5	18.0	14.0	64.5	4.3	19.3	14.1	62.3
Waste pickers	10.3*	26.5*	8.9*	54.3*	8.2*	31.9*	10.4*	49.4*	8.7*	30.5*	10.0*	50.8*
El Salvador (total employment minus specific groups)	6.4	24.0	35.8	33.8	3.5	23.8	34.9	37.8	4.5	23.9	35.2	36.4
WIEGO groups	10.0	26.7	16.3	46.9	4.1	19.1	26.8	50.0	7.2	23.2	21.2	48.4
Domestic workers	5.1	19.0	17.0	58.9	4.2*	26.2	35.3	34.4	5.0	19.9	19.2	55.9
Home-based workers	12.4	28.2	14.9	44.5	7.0	19.2	16.0	57.8	11.1	26.1	15.2	47.6
Market traders	4.2	20.8	15.5	59.5	2.4*	19.6	14.3	63.8	3.6	20.4	15.1	60.8
Street vendors	13.7	34.4	18.1	33.7	4.6	22.7	20.0	52.7	10.6	30.4	18.8	40.3
Informal construction workers	0.0*	41.7*	38.0*	20.3*	2.6	16.3	41.8	39.3	2.6	16.4	41.8	39.2
Informal transport workers	16.1*	44.4*	15.0*	24.5*	4.7	20.0	13.5	61.9	5.2	21.0	13.5	60.3
Waste pickers	11.5*	24.4*	9.8*	54.3*	7.6*	30.9*	12.6*	49.0*	8.7*	29.0*	11.8*	50.5

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.



A market vendor in El Salvador. Photo: Stanley Díaz of StreetNet affiliate Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Independientes Vendedores de El Salvador (FESTIVES)

15 hours a week. Among home-based workers and street vendors, there were differences in hours of work between women and men. More women than men worked less than 15 hours a week, for example, nationally around 12 to 14 per cent of women in comparison to 5 to 7 per cent of men. More men worked 40 or more hours a week than women: among street vendors 73 per cent of men in comparison to 52 per cent of women, and among home-based workers 74 per cent of men in comparison to 59 per cent of women.

Earnings

In the seven groups taken together in 2019, the average monthly earnings were much lower nationally than among other employed persons — USD 292 compared to USD 411. The earnings of women in the seven groups were lower than men's – USD 253 compared to USD 337.

The average monthly earnings for workers in the seven groups in El Salvador were low, around USD 292 per month (**table 12**). This is lower than for other employed workers, who earned an average of USD 411 a month, nationally. The differences were more marked in urban areas; for example, the average earnings were USD 338 a month for the seven groups in San Salvador and USD 311 in urban areas, compared to USD 505 for other employed workers in San Salvador and USD 465 in urban areas.

In 2019, among the worker groups nationally, domestic workers and waste pickers earned the least – around USD 250 a month. Street vendors and construction workers were at about the same

level as the average for the seven groups, at USD 282 and USD 288 a month, respectively. Home-based workers were above the average at USD 303, as were informal transport workers and market traders at USD 330.

Women earned less than men in the three geographic areas across all three years. For example, in 2019 women earned an average of USD 253 a month compared to USD 337 for men. However, the gender earnings gap in the seven groups was much less than the earnings gap between these women and women in other jobs. For example, in 2021, nationally, the gap between women in the seven groups and other women workers was USD 160, while the gender gap in the seven groups was USD 97. In the comparable statistics in urban areas, the earnings gap with other employed women was greater (USD 173 compared to USD 100) and in San Salvador (USD 180 compared to USD 109). The earnings gap between men in the seven groups and other employed men was less significant than for women: in 2021, it reached USD 56 nationally, USD 103 in urban areas and USD 111 in San Salvador.

The earnings gap was greatest among home-based workers: men earned an average of USD 471 nationally compared to USD 253 for women, and USD 525 for men in urban areas compared to USD 278 for women. Similarly, among domestic workers, men earned USD 339 nationally and women USD 243, as well as among street vendors, with USD 347 for men nationally and USD 247 for women. The differences were somewhat smaller for market traders in 2019.

Table 12. Groups of workers and other employed workers by average monthly earnings (USD) and earnings differences by sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador, 2019, 2020 and 2021

	2019				2020				2021			
	Women	Men	Total	Diff. (sex)	Women	Men	Total	Diff. (sex)	Women	Men	Total	Diff. (sex)
San Salvador MA (total employment minus specific groups)	471	530	505	59	511	538	527	27	478	518	501	40
WIEGO groups	285	397	338	112	281	397	337	116	298	407	351	109
<i>Diff. (7 groups vs. other workers)</i>	<i>186</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>167</i>	<i>.</i>	<i>230</i>	<i>141</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>.</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>.</i>
Urban El Salvador (total employment minus specific groups)	438	483	465	45	474	497	488	23	451	481	469	30
WIEGO groups	270	358	311	88	276	384	327	108	278	378	325	100
<i>Diff. (7 groups vs. other workers)</i>	<i>168</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>.</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>161</i>	<i>.</i>	<i>173</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>144</i>	<i>.</i>
Domestic workers	246	363	263	117	246	430	276	184	245	364	263	119
Home-based workers	278	525	337	247	290	517	352	227	282	461	331	179
Market traders	314	395	339	81	338	707	428	369	400	375	393	-25
Street vendors	268	358	299	90	259	376	301	117	261	370	298	109
Informal construction workers	244*	297	297	53	164*	296	294	132	219*	344	343	125
Informal transport workers	210	347	341	137	249*	358	354	109	267*	378	375	111
Waste pickers	176*	261	239	85	125*	425*	365*	300	397*	272	287	-125
El Salvador (total employment minus specific groups)	399	419	411	20	434	427	430	-7	423	416	419	-7
WIEGO groups	253	337	292	84	257	362	306	105	263	360	309	97
<i>Diff. (7 groups vs. other workers)</i>	<i>146</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>119</i>	<i>.</i>	<i>177</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>124</i>	<i>.</i>	<i>160</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>.</i>
Domestic workers	243	339	254	96	245	390	265	145	247	352	261	105
Home-based workers	253	471	303	218	252	482	308	230	259	428	302	169
Market traders	307	377	330	70	355	607	420	252	395	359	385	-36
Street vendors	247	347	282	100	243	383	292	140	250	359	286	109
Informal construction workers	258*	288	288	30	181*	291	290	110	217*	333	331	116
Informal transport workers	214	334	329	120	268*	344	342	76	242	366	363	124
Waste pickers	237*	249	246	12	122*	415*	357*	293	319*	274	281	-45

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.

Note: Salary for employees and earned income for the self-employed. Values are nominal earnings (not deflated).



A domestic worker in El Salvador. Photo courtesy of Sindicato de Mujeres Trabajadoras del Hogar Remuneradas Salvadoreñas (SIMUTHRES)

Between 2019 and 2020 across the three geographic areas, monthly earnings increased slightly for women and for men among other employed persons and then declined between 2020 and 2021. Among the seven groups taken together across the geographic areas, monthly earnings increased for women between 2019 and 2020 but more so for men; however, between 2020 and 2021 there was a slight increase for women but a decrease for men. The earnings gap between women and men narrowed for other employed persons, but generally increased for the seven groups between 2019 and 2020. During these years, the increase was greatest among market traders nationally: among women

from USD 307 in 2019 to USD 355 in 2020, and among men from USD 377 to USD 607. By 2021, earnings for women market traders increased to USD 395, but among men earnings dropped to USD 359.

Household Poverty

The proportion of workers in the seven groups living below the poverty line increased nationally from 20 per cent in 2019 to 23 per cent in 2020 and fell back to 20 per cent in 2021. The households of these workers had slightly lower poverty rates in San Salvador than in the other geographic areas.

In 2019, 20 per cent of workers in the seven groups lived in a household under the poverty threshold – compared to 17 per cent of other employed workers (**table 13**). The prevalence of household poverty among the seven groups was higher in urban areas, at 22 per cent, and 17 per cent in San Salvador, while this rate was consistently lower for other workers.

The groups with the highest incidence of poverty in 2019 were street vendors, at 23.5 per cent (26 per cent of women and 19 per cent of men). Among waste pickers, around 23 per cent lived in households classified as in poverty, followed by 22 per cent of informal construction workers, around 20 per cent of market traders and domestic workers, 18 per cent of home-based workers and 17 per cent of informal transport workers.

Nationally, the incidence of poverty increased slightly in the households of the worker groups to 21 per cent in 2020, as well as among other employed workers to 19 per cent. However, for men in home-based work there was a substantial decrease in poverty levels. As some higher-earning workers transferred from office to home and became home-based workers, household poverty for men in home-based work declined from 20 per cent in 2019 to 14 per cent in 2020 nationally, and the reduction was even larger in urban areas. The proportion of workers in the seven groups living below the poverty line rose between 2019 and 2020 to 23 per cent in urban areas and 19 per cent in San Salvador. By 2021, household poverty among these groups decreased slightly in all three geographic areas.

Table 13. Household poverty by groups of workers and other employed workers by sex in urban El Salvador and El Salvador, 2019, 2020 and 2021

	2019			2020			2021		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
San Salvador MA (total employment minus specific groups)	8.0	9.5	8.9	10.4	11.4	11.0	7.2	10.8	9.2
WIEGO groups	18.6	15.2	17.0	21.1	17.2	19.3	16.9	15.8	16.3
Urban El Salvador (total employment minus specific groups)	12.0	15.9	14.3	12.8	17.0	15.3	11.8	16.7	14.7
WIEGO groups	21.9	21.7	21.8	23.8	22.4	23.1	22.1	20.3	21.3
Domestic workers	24.8	15.3	23.4	26.4	17.3*	24.9	24.6	26.0	24.9
Home-based workers	17.0	21.3	18.0	21.9	13.7	19.6	21.3	18.0	20.4
Market traders	24.1	17.9	22.2	23.3	15.9	21.2	16.0	15.4	15.8
Street vendors	26.6	18.7	23.8	24.3	31.6	26.9	24.0	23.2	23.7
Informal construction workers	6.2*	26.4	26.3*	31.4	25.4	25.5	14.6*	21.3	21.2
Informal transport workers	10.6*	18.8	18.3*	38.2	18.9	19.7	7.1*	17.5	17.2
Waste pickers	10.8*	23.9*	20.4*	17.0*	71.6*	59.0*	28.9*	39.5*	37.8*
El Salvador (total employment minus specific groups)	12.8	19.9	17.3	13.2	21.9	19.0	12.4	20.4	17.6
WIEGO groups	20.2	20.0	20.1	21.7	20.2	21.0	21.3	18.5	20.0
Domestic workers	19.6	15.1	19.1	21.1	17.5*	20.6	18.6	20.4	18.8
Home-based workers	17.0	19.9	17.7	21.5	14.2	19.7	22.4	18.3	21.3
Market traders	22.1	16.8	20.5	20.8	16.4	19.5	17.8	14.7	16.9
Street vendors	25.8	19.1	23.5	22.8	27.6	24.5	23.2	21.6	22.7
Informal construction workers	4.9*	22.5	22.4	21.9	21.3	21.3	8.0*	18.5	18.3
Informal transport workers	9.4*	17.6	17.3	33.6	17.6	18.1	20.7*	16.1	16.3
Waste pickers	8.9*	28.6*	23.2*	25.3*	67.8*	57.8*	24.1*	31.7*	30.3*

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.

Note: The INS constructs this variable by comparing household income (from all sources) with the cost of the basic basket (*Canasta Básica Alimentaria – CBA*) and the extended basket (*Canasta Ampliada – CA*, twice the price of the basic basket). The calculation of this prevalence considers both absolute poverty (households whose income is lower than the cost of the basic basket) and relative poverty (households whose income is higher than the cost of the CBA but lower than the cost of the CA).

Education

Education levels are lower for workers in the seven groups than for other employed workers, especially among women.

In 2019, three-quarters of workers in the seven groups nationally had a primary level education or less compared to half of other employed persons (**table 14**). Furthermore, a large share (36 per cent) of workers in the groups nationally had either no education or had not completed primary school. However, the percentage with no or incomplete primary education was lower in urban areas (31 per cent) and in San Salvador (22 per cent).

A much larger share of women than men in the seven groups nationally did not complete primary education, 41 per cent compared to 29 per cent. This is also a much larger share than the 18 per cent of women among other employed persons. Men in the seven groups were more likely to have completed secondary education (24 per cent compared with 19 per cent of women). Nationally, around 4 per cent of both women and men in the seven groups have tertiary education. In San Salvador, the proportion of women was slightly higher than men (7 per cent compared to 6 per cent). This is well below the 28 per cent for women and 17 per cent of men among other employed persons.

Nearly 87 per cent of waste pickers had a primary school education or less. Domestic workers and street vendors had relatively similar educational characteristics: nationally around 40 per cent have less than primary education, 36 to 38 per cent have primary education, 20 per cent have secondary



Home-based workers in El Salvador. Photo courtesy of Sindicato de Trabajadoras de Bordado a Domicilio de El Salvador (SITRABORDO)

Table 14. Groups of workers and other employed persons by highest level of education completed and sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador, 2019 (per cent distribution)

	Women				Men				Total			
	None & Primary incomplete	Complete primary	Secondary	At least some tertiary	None & Primary incomplete	Complete primary	Secondary	At least some tertiary	None & Primary incomplete	Complete primary	Secondary	At least some tertiary
San Salvador MA (total employment minus worker groups)	7.0	19.9	34.3	38.8	7.3	23.7	36.9	32.2	7.1	22.1	35.8	35.0
WIEGO groups	27.3	42.3	23.4	7.0	16.8	45.0	32.1	6.1	22.3	43.6	27.6	6.6
Urban El Salvador (total employment minus worker groups)	11.8	22.2	32.6	33.4	14.4	26.0	34.2	25.4	13.3	24.5	33.5	28.7
WIEGO groups	36.0	36.1	22.5	5.4	25.1	42.5	26.6	5.8	30.9	39.1	24.4	5.6
Domestic workers	36.6	39.3	21.1*	3.0	13.2	32.6	42.7*	11.4	33.1	38.3	24.4*	4.3
Home-based workers	36.0	34.9	22.4	6.7	18.8	34.2	29.3	17.7	31.9	34.7	24.0	9.4
Market traders	31.4	33.8	29.9	4.9	20.5	45.1	29.8	4.7*	28.1	37.2	29.9	4.8
Street vendors	38.0	35.4	21.0	5.6	29.0	40.3	25.7	5.0	34.8	37.1	22.7	5.4
Informal construction workers	7.6*	41.4*	51.0*	0.0*	29.4	47.5	21.9	1.1*	29.3	47.5	22.1	1.1*
Informal transport workers	22.7*	43.7*	23.5*	10.1*	22.3	42.7	29.7	5.2	22.4	42.8	29.4	5.5
Waste pickers	45.7*	54.3*	0.0*	0.0*	43.1*	41.9*	4.6*	10.4*	43.8*	45.2*	3.4*	7.6*
El Salvador (total employment minus worker groups)	17.6	24.2	30.6	27.6	26.5	29.7	27.2	16.5	23.3	27.8	28.4	20.5
WIEGO groups	41.4	35.5	19.1	4.0	29.4	42.3	23.8	4.4	35.8	38.7	21.3	4.2
Domestic workers	41.1	38.9	17.9	2.1	19.4	32.5	39.6	8.5*	38.4	38.2	20.5	2.9
Home-based workers	43.0	33.8	18.3	4.9	24.0	35.6	27.0	13.4	38.6	34.2	20.3	6.8
Market traders	34.6	33.4	27.8	4.1	22.9	47.7	25.5	3.9*	30.9	37.9	27.1	4.0
Street vendors	42.3	34.8	18.3	4.6	33.9	39.0	22.7	4.4	39.4	36.2	19.8	4.5
Informal construction workers	9.3*	40.4*	50.2*	0.0*	33.1	46.7	19.2	1.0	33.0	46.6	19.3	1.0
Informal transport workers	26.9*	42.1*	22.1*	9.0*	26.1	41.7	27.9	4.3	26.1	41.7	27.7	4.5
Waste pickers	43.1*	47.3*	2.7*	6.9*	39.4*	46.1*	5.6*	8.9*	40.5	46.5*	4.8*	8.3*

Note: Individuals with "complete primary" have completed the second stage of primary education (completion of the 6th grade). Individuals with "complete secondary" have completed the three years of the 3rd stage of primary education plus two additional years of secondary education – after which schoolchildren receive a general high school diploma. It is possible to complete secondary education with a third year of specialization, also counted as secondary.

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.



A domestic worker in El Salvador. Photo courtesy of Sindicato de Mujeres Trabajadoras del Hogar Remuneradas Salvadoreñas (SIMUTHRES)

education, and between 3 and 4 per cent have higher education. Most men in domestic work had completed secondary education. Transport workers and market traders were more likely than other groups to have completed secondary education, with around 27 per cent nationally and about 30 per cent in urban areas. Women market traders were more likely than men to have incomplete primary education or less: 35 versus 23 per cent, respectively. Among home-based workers, a large proportion had incomplete primary education: 39 per cent nationally (43 per cent for women compared to 24 per cent for men). However home-based workers also had the highest proportion of workers with tertiary education, particularly among urban men, at 18 per cent.

Age

The workforce in the seven groups taken together was older than that of other employed persons, as indicated by a higher proportion in ages 60 and older and a lower proportion in the youngest age group, 16 to 29.

Taken together, the seven groups of workers were older than other employed workers, especially in urban areas (**table 15**). In San Salvador, for example, 19 per cent of workers in the seven groups were 60 years old and older compared to 8 per cent of

other employed workers. Among women in San Salvador, 21 per cent in these groups were age 60 or older compared to 4 per cent among other employed workers. Among men, 16 per cent in these groups compared to 11 per cent of other employed workers were 60 or older. Further, nationally, there were fewer young workers in the seven groups (22 per cent were ages 16-29) as compared to 34 per cent of other employed persons.

Domestic workers, construction workers and transport workers were younger than the general employed population, while waste pickers, street vendors and especially home-based workers were older.

Table 15. Groups of workers and other employed persons by age and sex in San Salvador, urban El Salvador, and El Salvador, 2019 (per cent distribution)

	Women					Men					Total				
	16-29	30-44	45-59	60-64	> 65	16-29	30-44	45-59	60-64	> 65	16-29	30-44	45-59	60-64	> 65
San Salvador MA (total employment minus worker groups)	31.8	37.5	26.6	2.8	1.3	30.3	34.6	24.7	5.6	4.8	30.9	35.8	25.5	4.4	3.3
WIEGO groups	11.5	31.3	35.8	9.5	12.0	23.4	30.7	29.6	7.8	8.5	17.2	31.0	32.8	8.7	10.4
Urban El Salvador (total employment minus worker groups)	32.3	38.6	24.2	2.8	2.0	32.0	33.7	23.6	5.0	5.6	32.1	35.8	23.9	4.1	4.1
WIEGO groups	13.9	34.3	32.3	8.2	11.3	24.9	31.8	28.5	6.1	8.6	19.1	33.1	30.5	7.2	10.0
Domestic workers	20.4	38.9	28.9	7.4	4.5	20.8*	38.9	29.6	6.5*	4.2*	20.4	38.9	29.0	7.2	4.4
Home-based workers	6.4	28.8	38.1	9.7	17.1	10.7	32.8	31.3	9.3	15.9	7.4	29.8	36.4	9.6	16.8
Market traders	20.5	31.9	29.7	8.3	9.5	33.9	35.1	23.2	0.9	6.9	24.6	32.9	27.8	6.1	8.7
Street vendors	15.9	39.3	28.6	6.7	9.5	21.5	28.1	30.9	6.3	13.2	17.9	35.3	29.4	6.6	10.8
Informal construction workers	40.6*	26.5*	32.9*	0.0*	0.0*	30.0	29.7	28.3	5.6	6.4	30.1	29.7	28.3	5.5	6.4
Informal transport workers	33.5*	42.9*	13.9*	0.0*	9.7*	27.1	35.3	26.1	6.2	5.2	27.4	35.7	25.5	5.9	5.4
Waste pickers	0.0*	6.4*	41.4*	41.9*	10.3*	21.4*	18.6*	37.4*	0.0*	22.5*	15.6*	15.3*	38.5*	11.4*	19.2*
El Salvador (total employment minus worker groups)	34.1	38.7	22.4	2.7	2.1	34.2	32.0	22.0	4.9	6.9	34.2	34.3	22.1	4.1	5.2
WIEGO groups	17.1	35.6	30.9	6.9	9.6	27.9	32.7	26.7	5.4	7.3	22.1	34.2	28.9	6.2	8.5
Domestic workers	27.2	38.2	26.2	5.1	3.2	21.8	39.0	27.5	7.2	4.6	26.5	38.3	26.4	5.4	3.4
Home-based workers	9.0	31.1	37.1	8.3	14.6	12.0	32.4	32.8	8.1	14.6	9.7	31.4	36.1	8.2	14.6
Market traders	22.6	33.9	28.1	7.0	8.4	37.2	34.7	20.7	1.5*	5.9*	27.1	34.2	25.8	5.3	7.6
Street vendors	15.9	40.4	27.7	6.7	9.2	21.4	29.2	31.2	6.6	11.6	17.8	36.6	28.9	6.7	10.1
Informal construction workers	45.3*	28.6*	26.0*	0.0*	0.0*	33.4	32.4	24.8	4.3	5.1	33.5	32.4	24.8	4.3	5.1
Informal transport workers	34.3*	39.6*	14.6*	0.0*	11.5*	31.0	34.4	24.4	5.5	4.6	31.2	34.6	24.0	5.3	4.9
Waste pickers	12.1*	8.4*	34.1*	34.5*	10.9*	26.8*	18.4*	34.6*	0.0*	20.2*	22.7*	15.6*	34.5*	9.5*	17.7*

* Less than 20 observations in the survey.

Appendix: The identification of groups of workers

The main purpose of the *Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples* (EHPM) is the collection of data to monitor the living conditions of the population and the trends in indicators of important national relevance (population characteristics, education, housing, labour market, health, family remittances, household spending, etc.). This broad objective brings advantages, such as the availability of data on the poverty condition of households; but also, there are limitations on the questions included on employment, for example, the place of work question is asked only to independent workers (employers and own-account workers). This presents a challenge for the identification of groups of workers of interest to WIEGO. Without a question on place of work applying to all employed, home-based workers especially but also market traders and street vendors are underestimated, and a complex process is required to identify street vendors and market traders.

The variables used in the operational definition of each group of workers are indicated below:

- Domestic workers: “industry”.
- Home-based workers: “status in employment”, “place of work” and “industry”.
- Market traders: “occupation”, “status in employment”, “place of work” and “industry”.
- Street vendors: “occupation”, “status in employment”, “place of work” and “industry”.
- Informal construction workers: “occupation”.
- Informal transport workers: “occupation”.
- Waste pickers: “occupation” and “industry”.

The industry classification in the surveys follows the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC, Rev.4). Similarly, the occupation nomenclature follows the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08).

Constructing the worker groups follows a multiple-step process in which each new group is tabulated conditionally on not having been previously identified. This avoids, for example, identification of a private driver twice (as

a domestic worker and a transport worker). The conceptual and operational definitions of groups of workers (aged 16 or older) are presented below in the order in which they were constructed.

Domestic workers: provide services in the homes of others and are identified by means of code 9700 (activities of households as employers of domestic personnel) of the “industry” variable.

Market traders: sell goods and offer services in public markets or built spaces. They are identified in three stages. First, **dependent** workers (wage workers, apprentices, family workers) with occupation code 5211 (Stall and Market Salespersons) are included. Second, **independent** market traders are identified through the place of work: those who reported working “in a fixed market stall” are added (this applies only to the self-employed, as the workplace for dependent workers is not asked). A final step excludes respondents of the major occupation groups who would not be considered street vendors: 1 (Managers), 2 (Professionals) and 3 (Technicians and Associate Professionals), and ensures that respondents in relevant categories in the industry classification are included: 01-03 (Agriculture; forestry and fishing), 10-33 (Manufacturing), 45-47 (Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles), 56 (Food and beverage service activities), 90-93 (Arts, entertainment and recreation), 94-96 (Other service activities). This last step leads only to very marginal changes, which means that the first two steps have already led to a consistent identification.

Street vendors: sell products or offer services in public spaces as streets, alleys, avenues or parks. Street vendors are also identified through several steps. First, all workers (dependent as well as independent) with the following occupation categories are included: 5212 (Street Food Salespersons), 9510 (Street and Related Services Workers), 9520 (Street vendor – excluding food) and 5243 (Door-to-door salespersons). Independent workers with occupation code 5211 (Stall and Market Salespersons) not previously identified (i.e., those who reported other places of work than “in a fixed market stall”) are added. Second, **independent** workers who reported as places of work the following categories: “on the street as an ambulant,” “in a fixed stall on the public highway”. The category “in a means of transportation” is also added if the worker reported the following industry categories: 45-47 (Wholesale

and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles), 56 (Food and beverage service activities), 90 (Creative, arts and entertainment activities), 95 (Repair of computers and personal and household goods) and 96 (Other personal service activities).⁷ Third, workers who are simultaneously identified in industry code 478 (Retail sale via stalls and markets) and in occupation codes 5 (Service and Sales Workers), 7 (Craft and Related Trades Workers) or 9 (Elementary Occupations) not identified so far are added. Again, a final step excludes respondents in occupational groups that would not be street vendors: 1 (Managers), 2 (Professionals) and 3 (Technicians and Associate Professionals), and includes only respondents in the following services codes in the industry classification: 01-03 (Agriculture; forestry and fishing), 10-33 (Manufacturing), 3830 (materials recovery), 45-47 (Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles), 56 (Food and beverage service activities), 90-93 (Arts, entertainment and recreation), 94-96 (Other service activities). This last step leads only to very marginal changes, which means that the first three steps have already led to a consistent identification.

Home-based workers: produce goods or provide services from in or around their own homes, including a structure attached to their home. Only the independent workers could be identified in this group, based on the place of work question and, therefore, this group of workers is underestimated. Some respondents could potentially be in two different worker groups. For respondents who answered “in their home” but also were coded as street vendors, priority was given to street vendor, since many street vendors set up in front of their house; or prepare the goods at home and sell them in the streets in the remaining workday. Further, only respondents who work in one of the following industries were included: 10-33 (Manufacturing), 45-47 (Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles), 55-56 (Accommodation and food service activities), 58-63 (Information and communication), 64-66 (Financial and insurance activities), 68 (Real estate activities), 69-75 (Professional, scientific and technical activities), 77-82 (Administrative and support service activities), 85 (Education), 86-88 (Human health and social work activities), 90-93 (Arts, entertainment and recreation), 94-96 (Other service activities).

Informal construction workers: employed in construction who meet the criteria for informal employment (**see box 1**) and are identified through “occupation” variable, codes: 3123 (Construction Supervisors), 7111 (House Builders), 7112 (Bricklayers and Related Workers), 7113 (Stonemasons, Stone Cutters, Splitters and Carvers), 7114 (Concrete Placers, Concrete Finishers and Related Workers), 7115 (Carpenters and Joiners), 7119 (Building Frame and Related Trades Workers Not Elsewhere Classified), 7121 (Roofers), 7122 (Floor Layers and Tile Setters), 7123 (Plasterers), 7124 (Insulation Workers), 7125 (Glaziers), 7126 (Plumbers and Pipe Fitters), 7127 (Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Mechanics), 7131 (Painters and Related Workers), 7132 (Spray Painters and Varnishers), 7133 (Building Structure Cleaners), 8342 (Earthmoving and Related Plant Operators), 9312 (Civil Engineering Labourers) and 9313 (Building Construction Labourers).

Informal transport workers: employed in transport who meet the criteria for informal employment (**see box 1**) and are identified through “occupation” variable, codes: 4323 (Transport Clerks), 8311 (Locomotive Engine Drivers), 8312 (Railway Brake, Signal and Switch Operators), 8321 (Motorcycle Drivers), 8322 (Car, Taxi and Van Drivers), 8331 (Bus and Tram Drivers), 8332 (Heavy Truck and Lorry Drivers), 8350 (Ships’ Deck Crews and Related Workers), 9331 (Hand and Pedal Vehicle Drivers), 9332 (Drivers of Animal-drawn Vehicles and Machinery), 9333 (Freight Handlers), 9621 (Messengers, Package Deliverers and Luggage Porters), 5112 (Transport Conductors).

Waste pickers: collect, sort and sell recyclable materials, such as paper, cardboard, glass, plastic and other reusable materials. They are identified in two stages in the “occupation” variable:

- All workers who in “occupation” variable indicate code 9612 (refuse sorters).
- Informal workers who in the “occupation” variable indicate code 9611 (garbage and recycling collectors).

⁷ And has not been previously identified as a transport worker.



This brief was produced with the generous support of HomeNet International.

Authors

Mathilde Bouvier recently earned a Master's degree in Development Economics from the Paris-Dauphine University-PSL.

Joann Vanek is Senior Adviser of the WIEGO Statistics Programme.

About WIEGO

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, protection and voice. WIEGO promotes change by improving statistics and expanding knowledge on the informal economy, building networks and capacity among informal worker organizations and, jointly with the networks and organizations, influencing local, national and international policies. Visit www.wiego.org

See www.wiego.org/wiego-publication-series.

Statistical Briefs

WIEGO Statistical Briefs are part of the WIEGO Publication Series. They 1) provide statistics on the informal economy and categories of informal workers in accessible formats at the regional, country and city levels; and/or 2) describe and assess the methods for the collection, tabulation and/or analysis of statistics on informal workers.