

# Child Care in Markets

A story of how workers in the informal economy in South Africa, Ghana and Rwanda are informing, developing and implementing child-care policy and running early-childhood-development centres in market places. These centres reduce the burden on women who both work and care for children, and those who work as carers without pay.

a WIEGO network project



Women in Informal Employment:  
Globalizing and Organizing

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A street vendor with her child at Warwick Junction, Durban, South Africa.

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Early learning at Makola Market's child-care centre in Accra.  
Photo: Kweku Kyere

# Introduction



Outside Makola Market's child-care centre in Accra.  
Photo: Kweku Kyere

## WHO IS A WORKER IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY?

**Workers in the informal economy are workers who do not have access to labour or social protections through their work.** In Africa, these workers dominate economic activity, making up over 80 per cent of employment.<sup>2</sup> Almost half of workers in the informal economy are self-employed own-account workers, such as market and street vendors, waste pickers and home-based workers. This means they do not have any kind of formal employment relationship through which they can access protections, and are vulnerable to poverty. This book focuses mainly on the needs of street and market vendors.

Before there were child-care centres in the central city markets of Durban's Warwick Junction, Samekilisiwe, a 34-year-old mother and street vendor at the Brook Street Market, would get up long before dawn each day to get her children ready for school. She could not afford child care for her baby, so she used to leave him with a neighbour.

Like Samekilisiwe and many South Africans who live on the outskirts of the city, Siyabonga, a 37-year-old trader at the Early Morning Market (EMM) in the port city of Durban, on South Africa's east coast, also has a long commute into work in the city centre. With no child-care options close to the market, his earnings were affected. Siyabonga said:

"I stay in eNanda and had to commute twice every day to take my son to creche and then proceed to the EMM for work. This meant that I had to spend more money yet open my stall for shorter hours."

Market traders and street vendors face similar challenges in Ghana and Rwanda. While there are some home-based child-care centres, vendors find few affordable, easily accessible centres near their workplaces. Sometimes children are left alone at home, or with neighbours or grandparents, or are taken by their parents to work. None of these solutions are ideal. In many cases, children are at risk of neglect or not meeting their developmental milestones due to being in unenriching environments. Mothers – for this burden falls mostly on women – are exhausted and their earnings are affected.

"When you sell food with a child who is just some months old and you breastfeed and change diapers alongside, people don't buy from you because of the unpleasant scene these things create; they see it as disgusting and so is the food."<sup>1</sup> (Ghanaian street vendor)

WIEGO's Child Care in Markets project sought ways to remedy this. Across three countries in Africa – South Africa, Ghana and Rwanda – with the help of workers' organizations and partners, workers in the informal economy are now writing and influencing policies that guide child care to ensure their voices are heard and their needs addressed. They are also helping to implement these policies – collaborating with governments, municipalities, trade unions and early childhood development (ECD) specialists. Workers in the informal economy are setting up and running informal child-care centres, conveniently close to where they work.

<sup>1</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy.](#)

<sup>2</sup> ILO. 2023. [Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical update.](#)

Now, between tables piled high with fresh fruit and vegetables in Durban's EMM is a centre, adorned with *shweshwe* bunting and filled with the cheerful sounds of children singing and playing, where Siyabonga's three-year-old can spend the day, entertained and cared for.

Siyabonga can check on his son whenever he wants to, and still work a full day. He said:

“THE EMM child-care centre has been a huge blessing to me as a trader. I implore the municipality to emulate such initiatives as they are pivotal in the informal sector.”

Behind a wooden picket fence, between stalls of colourful fabrics and pinafores, Samekilisiwe's son is also being cared for, along with five other toddlers. Samekilisiwe herself has trained as a child-care worker.

“I am based at the child-care centre in Brook Street. This facility has served a dual purpose for me. My life was difficult as a working mother of three. I would wake up in the wee hours of the morning to make preparations for my children attending school. I used to ask a neighbour to look after my infant child due to the exorbitant prices of child-care centres in our neighbourhood. Now I earn as a carer and my child is attending EMM creche at lower prices.”

This book tells the story of how WIEGO's Child Care in Markets project is unfolding in Ghana, South Africa and Rwanda, outlines its challenges and successes, and links it to similar projects around the world.

<sup>3</sup> ILO. 2023. *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical update.*



### WHAT DO WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY WANT FROM A CHILD-CARE CENTRE?<sup>3</sup>

**While they generate an income, workers in the informal economy need access to care for their children that meets the needs of both mother and child.** Some parents say it is more suitable to have a child-care centre or group care near their homes and many workers in the informal economy work from home. Across the world, WIEGO facilitates networks of support for home-based carers. Domestic workers may find it easier to access child care near their employer's home. Other parents find that it is most convenient to have a safe place to drop off their children near their work. Parents say that, above all, they need to trust that their children are receiving loving care in a stimulating environment.

#### **Workers in the informal economy are looking for child-care centres that:**

- are conveniently located
- provide nutritious food
- provide an educational component, so therefore have carers who are well-trained in basic preschool education
- have opening hours that can accommodate long and irregular hours and no holidays. This might mean that carers work in shifts
- allow parents to have a say in the way the child-care centre is run
- facilitate good communication between parents and child-care workers, with regular meetings scheduled at times that take cognizance of working hours
- are affordable. This means that the child care is either free or heavily subsidized. In the case of fee-paying child-care centres, paying in instalments should be an option
- include a health service, such as a nurse, or someone who could take a sick child to a clinic
- have high-quality infrastructure, including sufficient space for children to play, clean toilets and safety measures
- have enough staff so that no child is neglected

# Partners



## Asiye eTafuleni (AeT)

<https://aet.org.za/>

AeT was founded in 2008, to address the widening gap between the city government's urban agenda and the realities faced by Durban's inner-city informal workers – a large and historic downtown community. AeT's work and initiatives aim to achieve spatial justice and equitable access to sustainable livelihoods for workers in the informal economy in urban public spaces.



## WIEGO Focal Cities

<https://www.wiego.org/focal-cities>

WIEGO's Focal Cities initiative supports organizations of workers in informal employment to secure more inclusive laws and regulations, improved urban services and a voice in urban planning and policy-making processes. Through this initiative, WIEGO works to strengthen the organizational and individual capacities of workers in priority areas identified together with worker organizations based on their needs.



## SYTRIECI (Syndicat des Travailleurs Domestiques et Independants de l'Economie Informelle)

<https://sytrieci.org.rw/>

SYTRIECI is a trade union for self-employed workers in the informal economy, including traders, garment workers, waste pickers and domestic workers. It was founded in 2014 and has approximately 6,900 members, of which 5,500 are women. Both StreetNet International and SYTRIECI have governance structures that uphold gender equity in leadership and representation.



## StreetNet International

<https://streetnet.org.za/>

StreetNet International is a global organization of informal traders. It forms alliances with street vendors and market traders in over 50 countries. StreetNet International's goal is to unite street and market vendors in the struggle for their socio-economic rights and justice. Courses on negotiation skills, strategic communication, crowdfunding, rights and cross-border trade are all offered to build the capacity of organizations based on the experiences of workers in the informal economy.

### Funders

The Child Care in Markets project was made possible through the support of the **Echidna Giving Foundation**. Echidna Giving is a private funder focused on the best ways to educate girls, working in lower-income countries to create a positive ripple effect in their families, communities and nations.



The project has also received funding from the **Hewlett Foundation** and the **Open Society Foundation**.



# CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND





# The parenting conundrum

## Constantly trying to find a way to both earn and care for children

Across the globe, working parents find themselves relentlessly juggling the need to earn an income and care for children at the same time. It is women who feel the weight of this – worldwide figures show that, on average, women do three times more unpaid care work than men per day.<sup>4</sup> In order to nurture children, women often lose earning opportunities and forfeit careers, and women who work come home to more work: unpaid child care and domestic chores.

To mitigate inequality and tackle the child-care issues that working mothers face, governments – to varying degrees – have set out policies to support women. Human rights frameworks have set out guidelines for eliminating discrimination and protecting human rights and labour standards.<sup>5</sup> Human rights conventions and covenants recognize that with access to good quality affordable child-care services, women are better able to contribute to the labour market safe in the knowledge that the needs of their children are being adequately met.

Policies on child care also guide governments in their duties to look after children. Studies show that, in their first five years, children are developing vital physical, emotional and cognitive skills faster than at any other time of their lives. They also learn communication and thinking skills, which set them up for formal schooling. Children need to be safe and stimulated and to receive support, love, attention and good food to develop optimally.<sup>6</sup> Policies and laws are there to assist parents raise healthy, happy children and ensure that their developmental needs are met.

So, although workers in the formal economy, for example, factory workers, office workers and shop attendants, often lack access to affordable child care – particularly those who do not earn high wages – many are protected by legislated paid maternity leave. This allows mothers to attend to the demands of their newborn babies without the risk of losing their income.

Some working mothers employed by large corporates are given support that extends beyond paid leave. Companies including Facebook, Apple, Proctor & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson offer employees hundreds of hours of subsidized child care. Amazon provides child care on site. Google provides

<sup>4</sup> WIEGO, UNICEF and ILO Policy Brief. July 2021. [Family-Friendly Policies for Workers in the Informal Economy](#).

<sup>5</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers](#).

<sup>6</sup> Susan Sabaa and Dela Quarshie-Twum. 2021. Guidelines and standards for day-care centres in and around markets in Ghana.

<sup>7</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy](#).



At Warwick Junction in Durban.  
Photo: Jonathan Torgovnik

### STATISTICS



On average, men dedicate one hour and 23 minutes per day to unpaid care work in comparison to women's four hours and 25 minutes. In other words, **women spend three times as much time on unpaid care work.**

Data on 31 low- and middle-income countries show that child care is mainly provided by unpaid carers in the absence of available and affordable child care.<sup>7</sup>



rooms where breastfeeding mothers can nurse their infants in private. The International Finance Corporation boosts employer-supported child care in low-income countries, for example in Karachi, Pakistan, where it helped a company employing 19,000 people in factories and mills to open on-site child-care facilities for factory workers.<sup>8</sup>

Worldwide, two billion workers are in informal employment. Most are women – and for these women, the picture is very different.

<sup>8</sup> IFC. 2020. [Tackling Childcare](#).

<sup>9</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers](#).

<sup>10</sup> Kate Heartfield. 2022. [WIEGO's Child Care Initiative: An Impact Story](#).

<sup>11</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy](#).

<sup>12</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers](#).

<sup>13</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers](#).

<sup>14</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers](#).

<sup>15</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers](#).

<sup>16</sup> WIEGO, UNICEF and ILO Policy Brief. July 2021. [Family-Friendly Policies for Workers in the Informal Economy](#).

## HUMAN RIGHTS CONVENTIONS AND STANDARDS

**The ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3) was adopted during the first International Labour Conference.** This set the foundation for human rights and labour rights regarding maternity protection, social security and child-care services for all workers. The **Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)** and its accompanying Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 (No. 191) is now the most comprehensive maternity convention. Other relevant conventions and recommendations are: the Maternity Protection (Agriculture) Recommendation, 1921 (No. 12), Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103) and its accompanying Maternity Protection Recommendation, 1952 (No. 95).<sup>9</sup>

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** continues to set out International labour standards, including the ILO Convention 102 on Social Security; the ILO Convention 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities; the ILO Convention 183 on Maternity Protection, and the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (no. 202).<sup>10</sup>

The ILO's Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204) focuses on the need to address gender inequalities in the labour market and create decent work opportunities through the provision of good quality child care. Recommendation No. 204 states, "Members should encourage the provision of and access to affordable quality child care and other care services in order to promote gender equality in entrepreneurship and employment opportunities and to enable the transition to the formal economy. (Paragraph 21)".<sup>11</sup> The application of these standards by governments is a core part of delivering on their human rights obligations.



Article 25 of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family" and motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.<sup>12</sup>

The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (1966) also establishes the right to social security and goes on to include the right of working mothers to social security benefits. This is considered to include paid maternity leave for all women, including those involved in atypical work, for a reasonable period before and after childbirth.<sup>13</sup>

The **Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (1979) states that child care and maternity protection are essential rights.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989) establishes specific civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. It highlights the family as a fundamental cornerstone of society which needs protection and assistance. The Convention explicitly states, "parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible" (Article 18.3).<sup>14</sup> This obligation includes, "the creation of employment conditions that assist working parents and caregivers to fulfil their responsibilities, including through family-friendly workplace policies, parental leave, support and facilitation for breastfeeding, access to quality child care services, wages fit for an adequate standard of living, and security, safety and protection from discrimination and violence in the workplace."<sup>15</sup> Special measures should be taken to promote workplace support for mothers regarding pregnancy and breastfeeding and feasible and affordable child-care services.<sup>16</sup>

## Inappropriate support from legal frameworks and lack of implementation

In most countries, policy makers have neglected to consult or engage workers in the informal economy and the resulting policy therefore fails to take full cognizance of their needs. Workers in the informal economy are often paid poorly and work long and irregular hours and find that they fall through gaps in the legal frameworks when it comes to social protection.

## No work benefits

These **workers, in the informal economy**, for whom there is no formal employer-employee relationship, lack access to work benefits, grants or maternity benefits,<sup>17</sup> are often excluded from social insurance schemes and cannot afford to take time off work, despite recommendations from the **ILO's Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)**. This contributes to higher mortality rates for both mothers and their babies.<sup>18</sup> Where legal frameworks do protect workers in the informal economy, there is often a lack of funding and poor implementation of proposed projects.

## An absence of accessible child-care services

Despite the increasing migration of workers to urban centres in South Africa, Ghana and Rwanda, and the complexity that rapid urbanization brings, cities have failed to plan and build child-care centres in low-income neighbourhoods or in densely populated trading spaces,<sup>19</sup> and municipal bylaws provide little protection.

Where preprimary education is available it often does not fit the hours of working women, particularly those in informal employment. In Ghana's capital, Accra, for example, the best time for trading on the streets is early in the morning and in the evening when people are commuting to and from work. As one Ghanaian trader said, "these are the times when your child needs you the most," yet schools do not open early enough to accommodate traders' hours. Traders say they sometimes simply cannot get their children to school and themselves to work on time.

"... sometimes, I make him [her son] miss school for the day so I can go to work. I need my flour to be mixed in the machine room so that I have enough time to fry and sell." (Ghanaian fried dough ball baker and seller)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> According to the ILO "in 2015, close to 60 per cent of women with newborns worldwide did not receive a contributory or non-contributory benefit variations" (ILO, 2017). [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers, ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2.](#)

<sup>18</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers.](#)

<sup>19</sup> Echidna Giving and Imaginable Futures. 2022-2023. WIEGO Grant Proposal. Child Care for Workers in the Informal Economy.

<sup>20</sup> WIEGO Child Care Initiative: "Our children do not get the attention they deserve": [A synthesis of research findings on women informal workers and child care from six membership-based organizations.](#)

<sup>21</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy.](#)

<sup>22</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting child care for all workers.](#)

<sup>23</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 1. Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy, citing UN Women, 2018, and ILO, 2018a.

### STATISTICS



There are **two billion** people in informal employment, representing **61.2%** of global employment. The majority of workers in the informal economy are self-employed, own-account workers (**45%**), contributing family workers (**16.1%**), and employers (**2.7%**).<sup>21</sup> **One billion** women are employed in the informal economy, with little or no access to maternity protection.

The International Labour Organization estimates that only **41%** of mothers with newborns receive a maternity benefit.<sup>22</sup>

Child Care responsibilities lead to an accumulated loss of income for women workers across their life cycle. Women in prime reproductive years (aged 25–34) are **22%** more likely to live in extreme poverty than men.

Globally, gross enrolment rates in early childhood education services for children under three years was only **18.3%** in 2015 and reached barely **57.0%** for the enrolment of children aged 3–6 in pre-primary education.<sup>23</sup>





WIEGO's research showed that only seven of Accra's 42 markets had child-care centres.  
Photo: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage

“By the time I get to the market, the school is not opened. So I'll definitely have to put the baby on my back and wait. Then the school closes at two, and the market closes around six. And I need to pick up my child before the school closes. And so between two and six, when I leave the market, I would have to keep my child. ...So the question was, is there a way we can resolve this?” (Accra market vendor)<sup>24</sup>

**Private child-care services are beyond the financial reach of most workers in the informal economy.**

Where there are no adequate public child-care services, private child-care services cannot fill the gap. Private child-care centres are beyond the financial reach of most workers in the informal economy, so some rely on unregistered centres, many of which may fail to meet high-quality standards, and are run by women who themselves work long hours for little pay in the informal economy. Only registered centres can benefit from government support and subsidies.

According to a study by UNESCO, “User fees are prohibitive for many workers in the informal economy due to their low and irregular earnings – even in informal and unregulated centres. The 2017/18 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report found that during 2010–15, across 52 low- and middle-income countries, children aged 3–4 in the richest households were five times as likely to attend organized learning as those from the poorest.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Kate Heartfield. 2022. WIEGO's Child Care Initiative: An Impact Story.

<sup>25</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers, citing UN Women, 2018, UNESCO 2017.

## Dangerous work spaces

In Ghana, South Africa and Rwanda, where affordable high-quality child-care services for workers in the informal economy are largely absent, particularly in urban areas, many street traders, market traders and waste pickers take their children to work with them.

“We collect recyclable materials by climbing onto moving trucks as they drive by to the landfill. One needs to act very quickly to catch up with the truck, there are a lot of us even the men. We push each other whilst we trying to get into the back of the truck. Sometimes I don’t know what to do because I cannot leave my child on the ground... I usually carry my child on my back and hope that I do not get squeezed when there is a rush to get to the truck. We work with dangerous materials like metals, there is danger everywhere. Most times I don’t go to the trucks when there are a lot of people, fearing that my child will be harmed.”<sup>26</sup> (South African waste picker)

“I am a street trader operating in Warwick and a mother to a beautiful daughter. Public spaces are not a safe haven, particularly for raising toddlers. I vividly remember an incident where one of our fellow traders’ child got injured while playing next to her mother’s trading stall. I was skeptical of bringing my child to work.” (Nokukhanya Ndlovu, South African street trader)

Mothers who are simultaneously trying to work and care for young children have to be continually vigilant in the markets. Amid the noise and bustle of stalls and streets, curious children can easily wander off and get lost. Market traders also find that caring for small children in public spaces interrupts their work and affects their income.

So, as an alternative to having children in the workplace, some vendors leave their children at home with relatives. In the absence of willing caregivers, they sometimes leave their children unsupervised at home, at risk of harm or the consequences of neglect. Either way, women feel they are sacrificing their income or the needs of their children.

“... there is actually no time for children. Our children do not get the attention that they deserve from us.” (South African market trader)<sup>27</sup>

“Their education is affected because attention required for monitoring their progress or otherwise is limited since you have to work to put food on the table.” (Ghanaian trader)<sup>28</sup>



Photo: Courtesy of AeT

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**Mothers who are simultaneously trying to work and care for young children have to be continually vigilant in the markets. Amid the noise and bustle of stalls and streets, curious children can easily wander off and get lost.**

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<sup>26</sup> Kate Heartfield. 2022. WIEGO’s Child Care Initiative: An Impact Story.

<sup>27</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy.](#)

<sup>28</sup> WIEGO Child Care Initiative: “Our children do not get the attention they deserve”: [A synthesis of research findings on women informal workers and child care from six membership-based organizations.](#)



Maternal stress levels rocket among working mothers<sup>29</sup> and working mothers may have to stop breastfeeding during their babies' first six months, even though they know that breastfeeding for longer is better for their infants' health (recommended by the World Health Organization).<sup>30</sup>

“Sometimes you can think a lot about the children when they are away from you; you see how other children are cared for and know that you are not doing much for yours. This can make you lose concentration on the market such that you simply cannot sell well.” (Ghanaian trader)<sup>31</sup>

At both policy level and on the street, children are not getting the care they need to develop optimally, and women are not getting the care they need to enable them to ensure their children are safe and happy while they exert their right to access income-earning opportunities and contribute to the economy.

The holes in child-care service provision are being plugged by women, either employed or unemployed, often caring for children without pay on top of working themselves, or offering informal services as child-care workers. Women are over-represented in jobs in the child-care field and those who work as child carers are employed in a sector characterized by low wages and poor working conditions, whether formal or informal.<sup>32</sup> In low-income areas, to try to meet the huge demand for child care, unregistered providers offer child care in their homes, and these informal carers are often overstretched and vulnerable to poverty.

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<sup>29</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy.](#)

<sup>30</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting child care for all workers.](#)

<sup>31</sup> WIEGO Child Care Initiative: “Our children do not get the attention they deserve”: [A synthesis of research findings on women informal workers and child care from six membership-based organizations.](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Support Programs for Home-Based Child Care: A Global Study.](#)

# The solution



Makola Market's child-care centre is conveniently next to the market.  
Photo: Dean Saffron

## Good quality, affordable, accessible child care near workers' homes and workplaces

In the face of a global child-care crisis for workers in the informal economy, WIEGO recognized that gender-sensitive high-quality standards for child-care services in markets needed attention. The Child Care in Markets project's focus on Ghana and South Africa began in 2015, and in Rwanda in 2022.

With access to good quality, affordable child-care options mothers in informal employment can maintain their livelihoods, while also ensuring the development and safety of their children. Those in the field of developmental psychology argue that the primary need of young children is to experience the emotional and physical warmth of a primary care-giver “and therefore the focus of child care policy should be on measures which strengthen the relationship between primary caregivers and children.”<sup>33</sup>

Workers in the informal economy need to be able to take their infants to work and have child-care facilities nearby, much in the same way that corporates offer their employees on-site infant child care, and factory workers in the formal economy benefit from the implementation of family-friendly policies.<sup>34</sup> To make this a reality, the provision of child care in markets needs to be addressed both at a policy level and at the level of implementation, to include the public spaces within which workers in the informal economy earn a living. This is what the Child Care in Markets project aimed to do.

<sup>33</sup> [WIEGO Child Care Initiative Literature Review.](#)

<sup>34</sup> [IFC Tackling Childcare Program.](#)



## Informed policy: Including workers in the informal economy

The project advocated for good quality child care to serve the dual purpose of protecting children's rights as well as the labour rights of their mothers, particularly those working in the informal economy.

“There is scope for member-based workers' organisations to influence child care policies through existing national and regional ECDE networks that are demanding greater investments in child care and quality care jobs, as well as collaboration with governments on the design of child care programmes and training of child care providers. Workers' organizations should have a strong voice in these policy spaces as the child care sector can generate employment opportunities, though this work remains undervalued and continues to be done by women.”<sup>35</sup>

As workers in informal employment have historically not been consulted on matters of policy and urban design, the Child Care in Markets project wanted to amplify their voices. It aimed to enable workers – through training and practice – to express their needs and successfully engage with municipalities and officials. Workers in informal employment say they want to be recognized as workers, to have their voices heard, and to engage with the authorities at all levels of government to implement changes.<sup>36</sup>

Workers in informal employment want to be able to participate fully in the design and implementation of the policies affecting them, to participate in the discussions in local assemblies as they draft regulations, and to have the power to influence service delivery.

## Partnering with AeT, Focal Cities Accra and SYTRIECI

WIEGO's Focal Cities Accra team and Durban non-profit organization Asiye eTafuleni joined the Child Care in Markets project in 2015. Having operated in markets and other public spaces for many years, they were well positioned to raise the voices of informal workers. In Rwanda, Syndicat des travailleurs domestiques et independants de l'economie informelle (SYTRIECI), a trade union for workers in informal employment, began work on the project in 2022.

In Ghana, the focus is on developing guidelines for child-care services in markets at a policy level, and to give a voice to street vendors and market traders in that process. In South Africa, a pop-up

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In Ghana, the focus is on developing guidelines for child-care services in markets at a policy level, and to give a voice to street vendors and market traders in that process. In South Africa, a pop-up child-care facility to address urban infrastructure challenges is being piloted. And in Rwanda, where child-care policies are in place, the aim is to ensure that these policies are implemented, and that child-care issues receive attention.

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<sup>35</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers](#), citing ILO, 2018b; Staab and Gerhard, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> [WIEGO Child Care Initiative Literature Review](#).

child-care facility to address urban infrastructure challenges is being piloted. And in Rwanda, where child-care policies are in place, the aim is to ensure that these policies are implemented, and that child-care issues receive attention.

In all three countries, partners are drawing attention to the difficult working conditions and other challenges faced by workers in the informal economy in order to acknowledge inequalities and to recognize the multiple roles that women have. The goal is to shift perspectives and establish informal workplaces as legitimate places for child-care services in urban spaces. Establishing the safety of women and their children as a priority is important, as is shifting the conversation so that good quality child care is seen as core support for early childhood development.

Another project strategy is to build alliances among workers in the informal economy, early childhood development policymakers, and urban planners to negotiate with local and national governments for good quality and affordable child-care services in or near markets.<sup>37</sup>

Optimally, child-care centres need to be free or heavily subsidized, with opening hours that accommodate all workers' daily routines. Child-care staff need appropriate training, with their skills and qualifications recognized, and to work within appropriate infrastructure with links to health services. The centres should have an educational component and provide nutritious food. **Workers should also have a voice in the governance of the child-care centres.**<sup>38</sup> In these three countries, progress is being made, step by step.

<sup>37</sup> Evaluation Report: ECD guidelines for child care in and around markets in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>38</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy](#).

<sup>39</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy](#), citing UNESCO, 2006; Nores and Barnett, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> WIEGO, UNICEF and ILO Policy Brief. July 2021. [Family-Friendly Policies for Workers in the Informal Economy](#).

<sup>41</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy](#), citing ILO, 2018a.

## STATISTICS



### WHO HAS ACCESS TO CHILD CARE?

**According to a World Bank analysis, over 40% of all children below primary-school age – nearly 350 million children – lack access to child care.** Research on early childhood education and care has demonstrated that lifelong developmental benefits are linked to quality care in the first 1,000 days of a child's life, contributing to better nutrition, education and health outcomes. This is particularly the case for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>39</sup> An estimated 250 million children under five years old are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential.<sup>40</sup>

**“In 2015, 0.8 billion children under six years old and 1.1 billion children aged 7–15 years required care.** By 2030, an additional 0.1 billion children aged 6–14 years will require care alongside a growing population of older persons. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity for labour markets today and in the future. The current lack of affordable high-quality care services, combined with the prevalence of low-paid and informal care jobs, increases the burden and pressure on women and girls from low-income households and further reinforces inequalities, especially gender inequality.”<sup>41</sup>



# CHAPTER 2

## GHANA





# Developing inclusive policy to protect mothers in informal employment

Accra's markets provide employment to over 40 per cent of women workers.<sup>42</sup> Its largest market – Makola Market – does not rest. Traders set up shop seven days a week, from early in the morning and until after dark, and the market – a labyrinth of narrow, busy alleyways, is packed to the brim with food, jewellery, medicine, souvenirs, household goods, clothes and electrical gadgets.

## No place for children

The women who trade in the markets work long hours. For those who are also mothers, staying at home to look after babies or young children is not a feasible option – not working means no pay. There is only one government-supported child-care centre and that is in Makola Market. Other formal child-care centres are neither affordable nor accessible. Many only open at 8am, long after the vendors have begun to trade, and close at 2pm, long before they will finish. Some traders make use of informal facilities for children, but these are often far from traders' stalls and not all meet the standards of registered, more formal ECD centres.

So, when Dorcas Ansah, Accra's Focal City coordinator, joined WIEGO in 2009, the need for child care in the markets emerged as a priority. She noted:

“I took it to WIEGO as a key area that we needed to look at. When we looked at the work of the street vendors and the market traders, we realized there were lots of kids in the market... I saw a lot of the head porters carrying their load on their heads, and carrying their kids on their backs.”<sup>43</sup>

For the traders who bring their children with them to work, ensuring they are safe is a constant concern. The risk of children disappearing into the throngs of customers is ever present, and the market infrastructure provides little protection from the elements. If it is too hot or raining, vendors cannot bring their children to work, and so miss out on wages.

Prior to the project, Ghana had committed to early childhood development through numerous policies and legal frameworks that align with global goals (such as the World Health Organization's Nurturing

<sup>42</sup> ECDAN. Partner Blog: [Childcare Services in Urban Informal Workplaces](#).

<sup>43</sup> Kate Heartfield. 2022. WIEGO's Child Care Initiative: An Impact Story.

<sup>44</sup> WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 21. [Informal Workers in Ghana: A Statistical Snapshot](#).

## STATISTICS



- In Greater Accra and nationally, women represent **54%** of all workers.
- Informal employment represents **89%** of employment nationally and **83%** in urban areas.
- Nationally, **92%** of employed women are in informal employment, compared to **86%** of men.
- In Greater Accra, **87%** of women's employment is informal, while **79%** of men's employment is informal.
- Market trade represents nearly **40%** of women's employment in Greater Accra and urban Ghana and nearly **30%** nationally.
- Market trade and home-based work together comprise three-quarters of women's employment in Greater Accra and around two-thirds in urban Ghana.<sup>44</sup>



Care for Early Childhood Development Framework and the Millenium Development Goals). These are designed to protect human rights and development, but many are generic and do not recognize the needs of workers in the informal economy.<sup>45</sup> Even where policies did exist, they were not always implemented or supported with funding.

The 2004 ECCD Policy Framework, for example, did not recognize the extra work women with jobs do, in comparison to men; nor did it address the difficulties households with limited means face in accessing services.<sup>46</sup> The framework made no provisions for children younger than three years old and policies were implemented across sectors, whether formal or informal. So the policy did not reflect the realities of working families, particularly workers in the informal economy and the hours of child care they need, or the fact that families often have simultaneous child-care needs for infants, toddlers, preschool and school-age children.

An evaluation of the 2004 Policy Framework showed that the policy formation process lacked “the necessary needs assessment, robust enough to capture the fundamental needs of early care in the Ghanaian setting and especially the equity issues generated by economic and gender concerns,” wrote Susan Sabaa and Dela Quarshie-Twum in a **report** for WIEGO.<sup>47</sup>

At a government level, many child-care issues affecting market and street traders tended to fall through bureaucratic cracks, mostly as a result of being mandated to various ministries – health, education, labour, social security, women and child affairs – making decision-making difficult and grinding service delivery to a halt.<sup>48</sup>

Most importantly, until the Child Care in Markets project, workers in informal employment had never been consulted by law-makers or municipalities as to their specific needs, so these had not featured in the guiding frameworks. Dorcas found the existing documents and policy were “quiet and blind” to the needs of informal-worker caregivers and the specific issues of practice.<sup>49</sup> She also found that, on the ground, national and local authorities were out of touch with the **issues that market and street vendors grapple with** and how practical requirements for child-care centres differ from what is offered by the traditional education system.<sup>50</sup>

The project aimed, therefore, to review the existing child-care policies in consultation with the market vendors to ensure that the needs of workers in informal employment were truly represented and the voices of market vendors heard.

<sup>45</sup> ECDAN. Partner Blog: [Childcare Services in Urban Informal Workplaces](#).

<sup>46</sup> Susan Sabaa and Dela Quarshie-Twum. 2021. [Guidelines and Standards for Day-Care Centres in and around Markets in Ghana](#).

<sup>47</sup> Susan Sabaa and Dela Quarshie-Twum. 2021. [Guidelines and Standards for Day-Care Centres in and around Markets in Ghana](#).

<sup>48</sup> [Child Care Services and Women's Work](#), Webinar, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Dorcas Ansah, interview, 26.10.2021. Plumbley, R. 2021. Evaluation Report on the project: [ECD guidelines for child care in and around markets in Sub-Saharan Africa](#).

<sup>50</sup> Dorcas Ansah, interview, 26.10.2021. Plumbley, R. 2021. Evaluation Report on the project: [ECD guidelines for child care in and around markets in Sub-Saharan Africa](#).

## GHANA'S POLICIES PRIOR TO THE PROJECT



- **Article 28 of the 1992 Constitution** protects the developmental rights of the child.
- Ghana's **2004 Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy Framework** laid a foundation for significant advances in ECCD, by providing:
  - policy and strategies for improving the health of children under 5 years old
  - early learning standards and indicators for children 4–5 years old
  - early childhood care and development standards (0–3 years)
- Ghana introduced two years of pre-primary education in 2007 as part of its commitment to Free and Compulsory Basic Education, as well as birth registration and specified targets related to child and maternal health and nutrition.

## Addressing the crisis: research, unity and policy

WIEGO's research revealed that only seven of Accra's 42 markets had child-care centres and the only market where a centre was built by the government was the Makola Market. The Makola Market Child-Care Centre has served market traders in Accra since the 1980s.

Dorcas and her team went into the Makola Market and began a series of engagements and consultations with traders, mapping the market as they went. They conducted workshops with workers in informal employment to get their input on what policy measures they would like to see regarding child care.

But then COVID-19 hit and the world grappled with a pandemic with the potential to both end lives and destroy livelihoods. Life became very difficult for traders. One trader said at the time:

"I wished I could stay at home to care for him to such a time that I can leave him in some other's care, but I could not because of the need to make income. At this time with this pandemic the best way was to stay at home to care for him to prevent the virus, but I could not and had to bring him along to the market."<sup>51</sup>

The pressure the pandemic placed on health and safety concerns in informal trading spaces

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The pressure the pandemic placed on health and safety concerns in informal trading spaces and the attention this got in the international media did, however, enable the WIEGO team to build urgency for child-care guidelines.

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Mothers who trade at Makola Market had no choice but to bring their children with them to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: Benjamin Forson

<sup>51</sup> WIEGO, UNICEF and ILO Policy Brief. July 2021. [Family-Friendly Policies for Workers in the Informal Economy](#).

and the attention this got in the international media did, however, enable the WIEGO team to build urgency for child-care guidelines.<sup>52</sup>

But the team faced other challenges.

The Makola Market itself was a volatile political space with longstanding friction between local officials and market leaders.<sup>53</sup> Market and street traders felt that the officials had a very limited understanding of their issues and had failed in service provision. Traders had therefore taken it upon themselves to address problems in the market. At first, no one was interested in cooperation or collaboration. As Dorcas said:

“We were stepping into an area where there were age-old conflicts between market leaders and municipal officials, yet we needed everyone around the table. Market leaders were happy we were doing the project, but not so happy to be sitting around with the municipal assembly, so there was a tussle.”<sup>54</sup>

Traders were worried that once the municipality was involved, the leaders would again lose their voice and no longer have a say. Through determined consultation, negotiation and mediation between the two groups, the WIEGO team managed to form a group, referred to as the reference group, where everyone was represented.<sup>55</sup> The team built a strong relationship with the mayor, who showed a high level of receptiveness and connected the team with Accra’s social welfare director, who he instructed to “let this project succeed”.<sup>56</sup>

The reference group comprised parents of children in market-based day-care centres at Makola and Ga East (in the western part of greater Accra), representatives of informal trade organizations, child-care workers, Department of Social Welfare officials from the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and Ga East Assembly, representatives from the Department of Children under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), an urban planning specialist and an ECCD expert.<sup>57</sup> Dorcas explained:

“A big thing for us was to institute the reference group, the highest decision-making body, where all the stakeholders were at the table, and we facilitated those meetings. It really helped in building the relationships and the issues were dispassionately discussed. It helped people to forget about their

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Dorcas Ansah, Focal Cities Accra coordinator, said the team worked hard to ensure the approach was inclusive. Photo: Julian Luckham

<sup>52</sup> Echidna Giving and Imaginable Futures. 2022-2023. WIEGO Grant Proposal. Child Care for Workers in the Informal Economy.

<sup>53</sup> Kate Heartfield. 2022. WIEGO’s Child Care Initiative: An Impact Story.

<sup>54</sup> [Child Care Services and Women’s Work](#), Webinar, 2021.

<sup>55</sup> Evaluation Report on the project: ECD guidelines for child care in and around markets in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>56</sup> Evaluation Report on the project: ECD guidelines for child care in and around markets in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>57</sup> Susan Sabaa and Dela Quarshie-Twum. 2021. Guidelines and Standards for Day-Care Centres in and around Markets in Ghana



own empires and interests. We took them out of their comfort zone and said: 'Look, this is about the future. This is about Ghana.' I think that the use of the reference group as the highest decision-level-maker was really helpful with everybody around. All stakeholders needed to be there."<sup>58</sup>

The reference group quickly gained credibility and was invited to participate in a national ECD policy review and provide recommendations for its revision. WIEGO's Focal Cities Programme in Accra consulted with the MoGCSP and the Department of Children. It reviewed draft ECD policies and provided input on the MoGCSP's Health and Nutrition domain policy. The team's input was accepted by the Ministry and included in the final policy document.

Dorcas said that, during the policy review, another challenge was equipping workers in informal employment with enough knowledge to engage effectively at a policy level. This was necessary to ensure that the process did not become top-down:

"We needed to prepare the workers so they had the capacity to review national policies, to analyze them and to understand them. We worked hard to ensure the approach was inclusive of everyone."<sup>59</sup>

There is now a complete set of guidelines for child-care centres including standards, best practices and governance structures.



### GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS FOR DAY CARE CENTRES IN AND AROUND MARKETS IN GHANA

#### The guidelines include:

- values and principles for ECCD services
- standards and best practices for high quality, inclusive and gender-sensitive ECCD services in and around markets
- indicators for monitoring responsive caregiving
- governance structures for day-care centres
- recommendations for collaborative partnerships with parents, families and communities
- cost and financing considerations
- siting and building considerations
- registration requirements for service providers

<sup>58</sup> Kate Heartfield. 2022. WIEGO's Child Care Initiative: An Impact Story

<sup>59</sup> [Child Care Services and Women's Work](#), Webinar, 2021.

## What's next for Accra's market and street vendors?

Market and street vendors need support for implementing the guidelines and standards for child-care centres across Accra's 29 sub-metropolitan municipalities. Working with the women street vendors, child-care workers, market leaders and local-level governments, the implementation involves capacity building and training of the stakeholders on the processes laid down in the guidelines. Ultimately, the goal is for the child-care guidelines and standards to be adopted and recognized by the Department of Children in Ghana, and global networks.

Market and street vendors work to ensure that child-care is affordable. Some centres are run with school fees paid by parents and food donated by stall holders.

Madam Mercy Afrowa Needjan, President of the Greater Accra Market Association (AMA) and a former manager of the Makola Market Child-Care

Centre, said she has seen many improvements in the centre. There is a need to make space for more infants and toddlers she said, noting:

“There have been some positive improvements in the child-care centre, however, I have noticed that when the children are very small, that's when the mothers bring them to the child-care centre. As they get older, their parents withdraw them from the centre and take them to schools close to their homes. This is because the mothers wake up dawn to go to the markets and, if they have babies, they carry them along on their backs to the markets, so they can still sleep. As the children get older, they cannot carry them on their backs, nor will they be able to walk on their own when they are in a sleepy state at that early time of the morning. So, there should be [an] extra child-care classroom for more of the little ones between the ages of 1 to 3 years to keep a lot of them because they constitute the largest number at the centre. If we get an extra room to hold more of the little ones it will be good.”



Setting up Makola Market's child-care centre. Photo: Kweku Kyere



Madam Needjan also pointed to a future where tensions between traders, the AMA and the government are resolved through collaboration.

“The current management, who are all traders, do not want the Assembly to be part of the management because of what they have seen and have gone through before. There was a time the school was in a terrible state; the walls were broken and the Assembly seem not to care. The teachers were adamant about their work as long as they got their salaries at the end of the month.

When the association saw this situation, it wrote a petition to the AMA and they came to observe the situation. We requested that they leave the school for us to manage as we are directly affected because we have our children there. They tossed us up and down for a while and finally gave in and left it for us. And after they left it for us, they have seen the difference at the place with regards to the children’s welfare and the management of the child-care centre.

I would suggest that, going forward, the management of the care centre be handled by both the traders and the Assembly. They can come together to manage it jointly. Because if one side knows that the other side is monitoring or checking the other, I think things will improve a bit. I think if the market leaders are able to manage the place well, it is okay.

If the government promises to do things right, and that what happened in the past won’t occur again, the current management will allow them. But even [with] that, the current management won’t leave everything in the hands of the government knowing what has happened before.”



Madam Mercy Afrowa Needjan, President of the Greater Accra Market Association, with Kweku Kyere of WIEGO’s Focal Cities Accra team at Makola Market in 2023. Photo: Julian Luckham



# CHAPTER 3 SOUTH AFRICA



Photo: Dennis Gilbert



# Piloting a pop-up child-care facility in inner-city Durban

From a pedestrian bridge connecting the Durban station to the herb market, audiophiles selling bargain beatboxes blast the latest hits across Durban's central transport nexus. Tucked into every available nook, tailors sew pinafores, crafters fashion beaded accessories, vegetables and fruit are piled into perfect pyramids, herbalists and healers scoop out portions of healing elixirs and traditional medicine, and restaurateurs prepare African delicacies and take-away mielies. The streets and walkways are crammed with commuters and customers, and porters and barrow pushers carry huge loads across streets and down alleys. And, at the end of the day everything gets packed away and stored in locked wooden crates, ready to begin again the next day.

Warwick Junction, home to eight markets, is a taxi hub, a complex interchange of roads and rail, and the workplace for street vendors, waste pickers, recyclers and market traders who serve about half a million commuters as they pass through the city each day. The market's approximately 8,000 workers are among the city's poorest and work long hours, typically starting early in the morning and working late into the evening to catch the commuter trade.

## Background to Warwick Junction's child-care crisis

Women traders juggling working and child care share many of the challenges faced by their colleagues around the world, outlined in chapters [2](#) and [4](#). South Africa has detailed Early Childhood Development bylaws,<sup>60</sup> however, like Ghana, these bylaws ignore the needs and rights of workers in the informal economy with regard to child care and often are not fully implemented or adequately funded.

For example, domestic workers and street traders report working until childbirth and returning soon after the baby is born, as they do not have access to maternity leave and need to earn an income. While some legislation supports breastfeeding in workplaces – for example, there are maternity protections for workers in informal employment such as domestic workers – the regulations refer to offices, factories or plantations, rather than city streets and roadsides where women feel uncomfortable breastfeeding and changing nappies in public spaces. These policies become impossible to realize for women in a way that would feel safe, accessible and dignified for mothers.<sup>61</sup>

Domestic workers and street traders report working until childbirth and returning soon after the baby is born, as they do not have access to maternity leave and need to earn an income.

### STATISTICS



- **30%** of total employment in South Africa is informal, which amounts to just under **5 million** workers.
- In Durban, the proportion of people employed in informal employment is **26%**.
- Women make up a slightly higher share of Durban's workers in informal employment (**27%**) than men (**25%**).
- In the major metros, about **10%** of work in informal employment (representing just under 190,000 workers) is in street vending, **2%** is in market vending.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> [Child Care Services and Women's Work](#), Webinar, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> WIEGO, UNICEF and ILO Policy Brief. July 2021. [Family-Friendly Policies for Workers in the Informal Economy](#).

<sup>62</sup> WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 19. [Informal Workers in Urban South Africa. A Statistical Snapshot](#).



Richard Dobson, who heads AeT, a partner in the Child Care in Markets project, said traders are also reluctant to stay away from work for too long, as they risk losing their trading space from the municipality.<sup>63</sup> As he said:

“Studies have shown that if a trader is relocated from his or her customary base, it takes nearly 10 years to establish their active business again. It is not just about customers, it’s also about suppliers and a support network, which takes a long time to build up.”

Rapid urbanization and the ever-increasing influx of job seekers to dense portions of the inner city, such as Warwick Junction, has not been met with an increase in child-care services.

Good and affordable child-care facilities are scarce and registered private child-care centres are unaffordable for market and street traders. Parents who leave their children at day-care facilities far from the markets – the geography of apartheid persists and many traders live on the outskirts of the city in ‘townships’ – find they have to cut short their working days to collect them, often missing out on peak trading hours<sup>64</sup> and income. Richard commented:

“Imagine as a mother, you get a phone call to say your child’s temperature has spiked. If the child-care facility is far away this is not just an hour off work. Just packing up your stall takes an hour. Then you need to ensure your goods are securely stored. Next is getting to the child, and then to a clinic. In the meantime, the product you are selling will likely go off.”

In many cases, therefore, working mothers bring their children to work. But Warwick’s busy streets, crowded pavements and constant flow of traffic do not provide easy and safe spaces for infants and toddlers. Keeping children close, entertained, fed and out of harm’s way is near to impossible and interferes with work and potential profits in an economy where margins are small. Nokukanya notes:

“I am a street trader operating in Warwick and a mother to a beautiful daughter. Public spaces are not a safe haven, particularly for raising toddlers. I vividly remember an incident where one of our fellow trader’s child got injured while playing next to her mother’s trading stall. I was skeptical of bringing my child to work.”

<sup>63</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No. 2. [Labour and human rights frameworks promoting childcare for all workers.](#)

<sup>64</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No 1. [Quality childcare services for workers in the informal economy.](#)

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**Warwick’s busy streets, crowded pavements and constant flow of traffic do not provide easy and safe spaces for infants and toddlers. Keeping children close, entertained, fed and out of harm’s way is near to impossible.**

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Photo: Courtesy of AeT

## From crisis to crib to crate

AeT began addressing the child-care crisis with the design of a street crib. Richard describes it:

“Our journey started with a project for the World Health Organization (WHO) to promote breastfeeding in the first six months. The ingenuity mothers were already showing in terms of caring for their children at work in the markets, by using crates and storage boxes, was truly remarkable, so we decided to use the same idea. On the street, traders use a 1.2m x 0.7m packing crate made out of shipping pallets to store their goods. When the traders take all their goods out during the day, the crates are empty. So, we proposed converting these into cribs using some very simple adaptations. The street crib got us into the notion of talking about street ecology, as we call it. We looked at what equipment was available for people and how we could adapt it.”

When WIEGO approached AeT, the organization was beginning its next iteration of the street crib, Richard said.

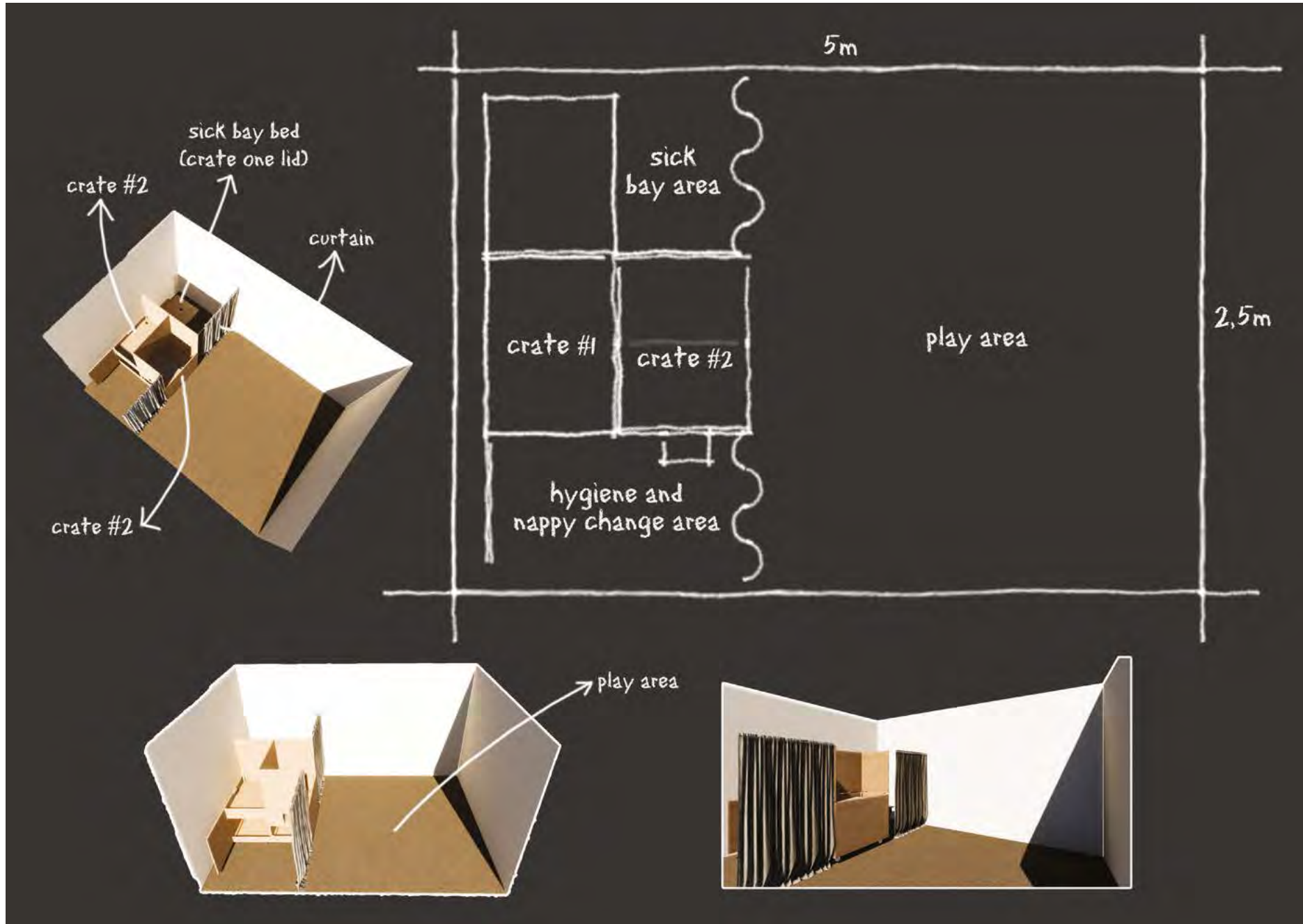
“The breastfeeding research undertaken by UKZN, WHO and WIEGO had already shown that infants need to be close to their mothers so they can easily be nursed. So we already had the idea of proximity in our heads. We also liked the idea of using what was available in the markets and already being used by traders, but now we were looking at designing an entire Early Childhood Development centre using crates. We started our design process by working on the crate lids and realized that if the lids could open in a particular permutation and become space partitions, just two crates can come together and form a kitchen, a nappy change area, toilet and sick bay. We then made an ECD centre that can be erected and dismantled in a day – easily folding into a storage crate for safe storage. We call it a care crate.”



Street ecology is the name of the game in Durban’s Warwick Square. The care crate is constructed from the packing crates that traders use to store their goods. Photos: Courtesy of AeT







Alongside the design process, AeT also needed to ensure that the pop-up centre would be approved by the eThekweni municipality and complied with the **city's bylaws**. As discussed earlier, South Africa's ECD bylaws – like Ghana's – ignore the needs and rights of workers in informal workplaces with regard to child care. However, unlike **Ghana** and many other countries, South Africa's bylaws are fairly detailed.<sup>65</sup> For example, the bylaws state that ECD units need to be registered. While protection for children is essential, when child-care centres manage to meet the stringent regulatory criteria set down by policy, they often have high running costs and high fees, which many market and street vendors cannot pay.

This also means women workers in the informal sector mostly rely on unregistered centres to care for their children. Many of these centres may fail to meet high-quality standards – and, in the case of South Africa, only registered centres can benefit from government support and subsidies. As Richard observed:

“The moment you start to formalize the response, the inclination is to be offering a certain standard, a standard that meets preconceived legislative requirements, and then the cost goes up.”

The bylaws focus on **formal workplaces, such as factories and offices**. The complexity of the South African context, the legacy of apartheid architecture, and the influx of job-seekers to Durban's inner-city has yet to be addressed, Richard said.

“Cities have not even got their heads around whether informal workers should have the right to be in the cities. So, apart from fighting for child care, the advocacy informal workers are engaged in goes a number of layers back... to the right to be in prime places in order to earn a livelihood.”

WIEGO'S work in Durban therefore focused on setting up ECD facilities that were not required to be registered. Under the bylaws, if an ECD centre accommodates six or fewer children, it does not need to be registered, it needs only a health compliance certificate. To acquire this, the ECD centre needs an indoor play area of 1.5m<sup>2</sup> of floor space per child and an outdoor area of 2m<sup>2</sup> per child. In Warwick, there is no outdoor space available, so each centre would need another 1.5m<sup>2</sup> per child. The bylaws also require children younger than three to be separate from older children. But most of the children requiring child care are younger than three.

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...women workers in the informal sector mostly rely on unregistered centres to care for their children. Many of these centres may fail to meet high-quality standards – and, in the case of South Africa, only registered centres can benefit from government support and subsidies.

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<sup>65</sup> [Child Care Services and Women's Work](#), Webinar, 2021.





Underutilized spaces between kiosks were turned into pop-up facilities for child care in Durban markets.  
Photos: Courtesy of AeT

While finding 18m<sup>2</sup> for a child-care facility can be challenging in a competitive market environment in the centre of the city, AeT found underutilized spaces between the kiosks of the Brook Street market (a market selling pinafores, hats, shoes and bags) and in the Early Morning Market (a vegetable market) that could become pop-up facilities for child care, close to where the mothers work.<sup>66</sup> They began work on a care crate, which evolved from the street crib concept. The care crate provides the legislative support amenities, for example, a space for preparing food, changing nappies and a sick bay.

Once the design was finalized, a set of the care crates was manufactured and the pilot began. The expectation is that eventually the care crates will be made by local street carpenters already working in Warwick Junction.

Six mothers who trade at the Warwick markets, including Samekiliswe, underwent a formal entry-level child-care training course with the organization EduBabe. The training shaped their outlook on child care and taught them the skills necessary to provide professional child care in Warwick Junction.<sup>67</sup> The care centres are equipped with toys and educational equipment, much of which was donated.



The facilities at Durban markets are equipped with educational materials.  
Photos: Courtesy of AeT

<sup>66</sup> [Child Care Services and Women's Work](#), Webinar, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Kate Heartfield. 2022. WIEGO's Child Care Initiative: An Impact Story.

## What's next for Durban's market and street vendors?

### From care crate to registered care

Now that AeT has completed the pilot, the organization will work meticulously through the necessary documents to get the informal centres “registered and then certified, and then eligible for a government subsidy,” Richard said.<sup>68</sup> The goal for the next phase of work is to register the Warwick Junction centres with the Vangasali programme run by the Department of Education. The programme is among government support put in place for informal ECD services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which **laid bare the crisis in child care**. Registering the Warwick Junction centres would allow them to apply for state subsidies, thereby keeping running costs and fees low.<sup>69</sup>

Once the centres are registered, the team will refine and develop the governance structure of the ECD centres and provide more training to the carers. AeT has allied with the Durban ECD Forum – a city-wide multi-stakeholder alliance comprising 32 organizations and facilities. Members of the forum will provide training and help develop **community-based governance mechanisms for the ECD centres**.<sup>70</sup> Efforts will be made to get sponsorships through advertising and publicity.

### Amplifying the voices of workers in informal employment

Throughout the process, the project has made great strides in capacity building and making officials more aware of the needs of workers. ECD experts in Durban's inner city are promoting the importance of high-quality child care in markets and playing a role in convincing local government officials of its importance.

Another key aspect of AeT's work has been drawing the links between child care and urban planning, making connections between the needs of workers in informal employment and public service delivery in urban spaces. Following its advocacy, child-care services are included in the **SALGA public space trading guidelines** for local government in South Africa.<sup>71</sup>

In late 2022, national early learning organization SmartStart visited the pop-up centres in Durban and expressed an interest in having the innovative design of the care crates adapted for other public spaces. A current challenge for AeT is to develop their care crates into something that can be replicated in other contexts.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Dobson, interview, 27.10.2021 Evaluation Report: ECD guidelines for child care in and around markets in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>69</sup> Echidna Giving. 2024-2026. WIEGO Grant Proposal. Child Care for Workers in the Informal Economy.

<sup>70</sup> Echidna Giving. 2024-2026. WIEGO Grant Proposal. Child Care for Workers in the Informal Economy.

<sup>71</sup> SALGA. [Public Space Trading Guidelines for Local Government 2021-2016](#).

<sup>72</sup> Echidna Giving. 2024-2026. WIEGO Grant Proposal. Child Care for Workers in the Informal Economy.

<sup>73</sup> Echidna Giving and Imaginable Futures. 2022-2023. WIEGO Grant Proposal. Child Care for Workers in the Informal Economy.

#### AWARDS AND INFLUENCE



The Pop-up Micro Child-Care Facility was commended with an AfriSam-SAIA Sustainable Design Award in 2019/2020, which brought visibility to the project in urban planning networks and possible solutions for child-care services in crowded city markets.

By 2023, AeT had also strengthened relationships with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education and the South African ECD community.<sup>72</sup> AeT has already shared its child-care model with the South African Cities Network, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and many ECD organizations, in constructively reviewing ECD guidelines to extend public subsidies to child-care services for informal and low-income workers.<sup>73</sup>



## CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY... AND SOLUTIONS

### Micro-design

Finding safe spaces for the pop-up facilities proved difficult in the packed markets. The space also needed to have protection from the elements. AeT first designed a tent that would need to be erected each day. But mounting and dismounting the tent proved too arduous during trials, so AeT looked at spaces where a tent could be permanently in place. Richard explained:

*“Instead of a tent, we looked at other ideas. For example, traders have overnight storage facilities about the size of a double garage. During the day these are empty, so they could be used to set up the care crates in.”*

The challenge with the tents led to the idea of using the care crates in a more permanent covered space, which led to an evolution in design, he said.

*“When we got agreement for a permanent covered spaced in the Brook Street market, we could think about design a little differently. We could enclose the front and add educational aspects. Doors can open in different ways to become chalkboards and interactive panels and, through clever micro-design, we can cater for different age groups.”*



See Early Childhood Development Action Network video: [Childcare services and regulation in urban public spaces](#)

### Building trust among attendees

To engage and build trust with mothers and carers in the market, three focus group discussions were held for AeT to understand their needs and discuss which services were particularly important to market and street vendors. The project was interrupted by COVID-19, which brought many challenges. By 2023, nine children per month were using the pop-up centres, but not regularly.

During the pandemic, many workers sent their children back to their homes in rural parts of the country, which meant there were fewer children in Warwick Junction. As the project took longer than originally planned, some of the children they had hoped would take part in the pop-up child-care centres were old enough to move into the formal education system. Though there has generally been good support from city officials, AeT found that after the pandemic, city officials were less accessible to the project team.

But, as mentioned earlier, the near collapse of the ECD sector during the COVID-19 lockdowns did lead to a national discussion and focus on child-care services in low-income areas catering to women in the informal economy and their children.

### Affordability

The pop-up child-care facility has received a lot of interest from women traders, but many say they cannot afford to pay fees. Richard noted:

*“There is a huge debate about this question of affordability. Many parents compare cost carefully: you want to charge x here, but I can pay y there. And then there are so many variables in terms of the quality of care that goes with each option. People are starting to demand that children start learning and affordability needs to be balanced against the service you are offering and the needs of the child.”*

### Permission

While relationships between traders and the eThekweni municipality are historically fraught, the team fought hard to gain the necessary permissions and support from the relevant local officials, in particular the Head of the Business Support Unit and the Manager of the Early Morning Market. Eventually, there was “senior level acknowledgement that this was something that should be considered and pursued,” Richard said.<sup>74</sup>

### Operational challenges

At first, the idea for running the child-care facility was that each informal-worker caregiver would give one day a week of their time to care for each other’s children, but this did not work, mainly due to the economic implications for workers. AeT then trained about 20 mothers in elemental child-care skills.



<sup>74</sup> Richard Dobson, interview, 27.10.2021. Evaluation Report: ECD guidelines for child care in and around markets in Sub-Saharan Africa.



# CHAPTER 4 RWANDA





# Publicizing needs, implementing policy and setting up child-care centres

In Rwanda, like in Ghana and South Africa, markets are the workplace for hundreds of workers in informal employment. A variety of goods are sold at different markets: tables are piled high with handcrafted goods, fabric, fresh fruit and vegetables, coffee beans, legumes, spices and sacks of dry grains. Many market traders are very poor, able to make a living on some days but, as the markets are seasonal and do not operate at full capacity during the rainy season, income fluctuates and is never guaranteed.

Many children in Rwanda are exposed to poverty. Their families sometimes go without food, resulting in malnutrition and poor health. These children are likely to do poorly in school and subsequently have low income themselves, thus perpetuating intergenerational poverty.<sup>75</sup>

## Progressive child-care policy

To tackle this, the Rwandan government has strengthened its child care policies, introduced the Child Care Reform Policy, and made a commitment to ensuring that all children grow up safely in families.<sup>76</sup> In 2018, the government introduced the National Early Childhood Development Programme, which coordinates programmes that support growth and development for children. The Rwanda Labour Law (2018) states that both informal and formal workers should benefit from the same protections, including social security. However, the number of informal workers and self-employed workers registered in social security remains marginal.<sup>77</sup>

But while supportive policy exists to protect children and their mothers, implementation is the challenge. The Ministry of Education began requesting the involvement of civil society in implementing service provision across the country. WIEGO partner SYTRIECI, a trade union for self-employed

<sup>75</sup> Ildephonse Nkiliye and Léon Fidèle Ndikubwimana. 2023. Situational analysis of children's early-life conditions, women informal cross-border traders in Rwanda.

<sup>76</sup> Ildephonse Nkiliye and Léon Fidèle Ndikubwimana. 2023. Situational analysis of children's early-life conditions, women informal cross-border traders in Rwanda.

<sup>77</sup> [ILO Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All – Rwanda component.](#)

<sup>78</sup> [ILO Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All.](#)

<sup>79</sup> NISR. 2021. [Labour Force Survey Annual Report.](#)



## STATISTICS

- Workers with informal employment as their main job account for almost **90%** of total employment.<sup>78</sup>
- The non-agricultural informal employment rate among women is **91.2%** with **57.8%** working as street vendors and in markets.<sup>79</sup>



The Child Care in Markets project's focus on Rwanda began in 2022. Photo: Courtesy of SYTRIECI

workers in the informal economy, began working on the Child Care in Markets project in 2022, focusing on six sites in four districts: Rubavu and Rusizi Districts in the Western Province, Burera District in the Northern Province, and Huye District in the Southern Province.

Secretary General of SYTRIECI Jeanette Nyirmasengesho, who lives in the capital, Kigali, said the focus should be on implementation of the good policies Rwanda has set up. “The informal workers’ needs have been accommodated by the policies. We don’t need to influence for changes. We need to emphasize implementation rather,” she said.

## Publicizing the benefits of ECD centres

With support from StreetNet International and WIEGO, SYTRIECI trained its members on why it is important to have their children cared for in ECD centres. Jeanette said:

“Some of our members ... don’t see the burden mothers are carrying, or the multiple roles women play. Some members do not see the value of setting up and supporting ECD centres. So, we began a series of live talks on the radio and television, and awareness workshops with our members on the importance of educating young children, and how we can do it. Members should take it as their first responsibility. Informal workers are also starting to see how they will benefit in terms of being able to work without interruption.”

As a result of this work, support for the ECD centres and the women who work there is growing, and more workers in informal employment are sending their children to the child-care centres. As Jeanette said, the media campaigns have built trust in the idea.

“In some villages, groups of women have set up informal ECD centres. These are run by parents, who rotate caring for the children.”

The government provides milk for these informal ECD centres and also offers training in child care for some groups.



Radio is being used to share information about the Child Care in Markets project. Photo: Courtesy of SYTRIECI



## Finding space in the busy markets



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In Kigali, where markets are being re-developed, SYTRIECI is working to ensure space is set aside for child-care centres from the start.

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*Photo: Courtesy of SYTRIECI*

The challenge with setting up child-care centres in the markets is finding space. Spots for vendors are at a premium and none have been set aside for child care. Like in [Ghana](#) and [South Africa](#), some street vendors bring their children to work with them, others leave them alone at home or in the care of relatives. Some children attend ECD centres near their homes, but these are often too expensive for workers in informal employment. Until recently, in the border town of Gisenyi in the Rubavu District, mothers were leaving their infants and toddlers with primary-school-aged children, while they crossed into the Democratic Republic of the Congo to trade. These children were then not able to attend school.<sup>80</sup>

In response, the Rwandan government, along with UNICEF and Action pour le développement du peuple (ADEPE), set up two day-care centres for cross-border traders, and six more in five districts close to markets. These provide women traders with a safe space to breastfeed and to leave their children while they work. At the time of writing, 745 children (332 boys and 413 girls) were using the services.

In Kigali, where markets are being redeveloped, SYTRIECI is working to ensure space is set aside for child-care centres from the start. This involves bringing municipal authorities and traders together to look at where space can be created for child-care facilities. The work in Kigali will also draw on the [care crate infrastructure developed in Durban](#) to address the concerns that the City is likely to raise regarding limited space for child-care provision.

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<sup>80</sup> WIEGO, UNICEF and ILO Policy Brief. July 2021. [Family-Friendly Policies for Workers in the Informal Economy](#).



## What's next for Rwanda's market and street vendors?

With government support, SYTRIECI is training some mothers to become child-care workers. Also, alongside WIEGO, the union is conducting research in the markets to understand how women who bring their children to work are coping and how this affects their income.

As WIEGO's Focal Cities team did in Accra in its work to ensure worker voices are heard, SYTRIECI will share the results of its research with early childhood development specialists, government officials and workers in informal employment. This will be the basis for building a multi-stakeholder platform on child care with regular quarterly meetings. The group will develop principles, guidelines and recommendations to guide the government's work on child care in markets. The guidelines will outline the best way to include child-care centres in markets and how these should be governed and managed. The aim is to share the guideline development process with more governments in Africa.

SYTRIECI is also working with its members to develop Village Saving and Loans Association groups for women with young children. These groups comprise 25-30 members and the association's aim is to allow women to receive a loan to develop an income-generating project from which they can pay child-care fees. As well as contributing to the financial sustainability of market-based child-care centres, these groups could also serve as a platform for educating mothers and raising awareness on various ECD issues.



Jane Masta, StreetNet International Organizer for Africa, (above) in Kigali. With support from StreetNet International and WIEGO, trade union SYTRIECI provides training for its members on various aspects of early childhood education. Photos: Courtesy of SYTRIECI



# CHAPTER 5

## CHILD-CARE INITIATIVES AROUND THE WORLD FOR WORKERS IN INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT



Teacher Jyotsna Mahendra and teacher aides Rita Khajri and Kasha Solanki in 2015 at a day-care centre set up by SEWA in Ahmedabad, India. These centres allow SEWA members to earn an income while their children are in a safe, educational space. Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

# The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

In India, informal employment accounts for 93 per cent of the workforce, and 94 per cent of women work informally. Workers in the informal economy usually work very long hours for very little pay, and many are illiterate. Despite the significant contributions workers in informal employment make to the economy, few laws protect these workers in India.

SEWA is a registered trade union which has been organizing women in the informal economy in India since 1972. SEWA has nearly three million members across 18 states, including home-based workers, vendors, hawkers, labourers, service providers and small producers.

SEWA has been addressing child-care issues since the organization began, and takes a ground-up approach beginning with consultation with workers to understand their needs.

“Women wanted someone to take care of the children. They realized that they needed to go to work and they needed a day-care centre, which should be full day care. And of course it wasn't available. The public provisioning has never been there.” (Susan Thomas, national health co-ordinator for SEWA)<sup>81</sup>

SEWA set up day-care centres in Ahmedabad in 1986 as part of the Sangini Child Care Workers Cooperative. The centres provide full-day service, allowing parents to work without interruption, knowing their children are being well cared for. The

cooperatives are staffed by SEWA members who are trained in child care at the SEWA Academy. These workers are not required to have any formal education, although it is mandatory for crèches to be staffed by at least one person with formal education. Day-care centres are also being run in Surendranagar in collaboration with the Gujarat Rural Labour Board.

An evaluation study of the child-care centres in 2007 showed that both the quality of life and the income of mothers was better among those who used the child-care facilities (income improved by 50% when mothers were able to access child care), expenditure on children was less, and children who attended the facilities were healthier and “better behaved”<sup>82</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on women working in the informal economy in 2020 and 2021, especially when child-care centres were closed. Many families went without food due to loss of income. During this time, when children who had been fed at the centres were now going without this daily meal, SEWA cooperatives provided food for parents to collect.<sup>83</sup> SEWA also made daily activities available via text and video so parents could continue educating their children while the centres were closed.

SEWA has created a national platform, bringing together workers in informal employment and women's rights, child rights and worker organizations. Its cooperative child-care model is the springboard for WIEGO's work.

SEWA's cooperative child-care model is the springboard for WIEGO's work.



<sup>81</sup> Kate Heartfield. 2022. WIEGO's Child Care Initiative: An Impact Story.

<sup>82</sup> WIEGO Child Care Initiative Literature Review.

<sup>83</sup> SEWA Sangini Cooperative. [Providing Child Care for Women Informal Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic in India.](#)



# La Unión de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de la Economía Popular (The Union of Workers in the Popular Economy – UTEP)

In Argentina, 46 per cent of the work force (about five million people) are workers in the informal economy, such as home-based garment workers and street vendors.

UTEP is a trade union in Argentina that represents workers in the informal economy and those excluded from the labour market and defends their rights. UTEP brings together workers who previously have not had the means to voice their demands and negotiate collectively for their rights.<sup>84</sup>

In the early 2000s, UTEP, together with the Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos (MTE) and the Che Pibe Foundation, set up 12 child-care centres in four provinces of Argentina (Corrientes, Cordoba, Chubut and Buenos Aires). Women who work in the informal economy played a leading role in setting up these centres – Centros Infantiles de Recreación y Aprendizaje (CIRA) or Children’s Leisure and Learning Centres – as cooperatives.

The child-care cooperatives provide a safe educational space for children while their parents work, which often extends beyond normal working hours late into the night. Having access to the CIRA centres means that women in informal employment no longer need to leave their young children at home unattended or take them to work with them. Children from the ages of 45 days to 15 years can be accommodated.

During COVID-19, the CIRA centres were transformed into soup kitchens and workers delivered food parcels to families. Once the pandemic was over, UTEP committed to building more centres across the country.

UTEP is running a series of training sessions for child-care workers in the cooperatives on issues including poor nutrition, child abuse, and low learning and development outcomes. It is hoped that this will result in greater recognition and support from the government and donors for worker-run and owned child-care cooperatives.

Women who work in the informal economy played a leading role in setting up the child-care centres as cooperatives.



<sup>84</sup> MTE/UTEP. [Popular economy workers' child-care facilities offer critical services during the COVID-19 pandemic in Argentina.](#)

# CONCLUSION

**WIEGO's child-care initiative has made more visible the needs of market vendors, street traders, domestic workers and waste pickers, and given a voice to workers in informal employment.**

At a policy level, the project seeks to ensure that child care is recognized as part of the national social protection system by formalizing and ensuring income support for workers in informal employment. Policies must provide access for all to child-care services, health care and a healthy work environment and ensure that everyone has access to social assistance and workplace support for breastfeeding. Alongside this child care, workers need decent work including a living wage, access to social protection and appropriate skills training.<sup>85</sup>

Investing in public child-care services can lead to a triple dividend by improving education and health outcomes among marginalized children, facilitating women's participation in the labour market including transitioning from informal to formal employment, and creating new decent work opportunities for women and men in the care sector.<sup>86</sup>

In **Accra**, Ghana, the project has paved the way for workers in informal employment to contribute to the development of policies that affect their livelihoods. In the past, their needs were largely ignored.

In **Durban**, South Africa, focusing on developing infrastructure for child-care services through piloting the care crate, an award-winning piece of microdesign, has shown that space for children can be created even in jam-packed urban settings. And that having access to affordable child care in the work place can reduce stress, save money and ensure that the developmental needs of young children are met.

In **Rwanda**, informal child-care centres are being set up with parents at the helm, supported by training from the government and SYTRIECI. Through awareness campaigns in the media, traders are seeing the benefit of early childhood development centres in terms of both ensuring that children are safe and stimulated and relieving the burden of juggling child care and feeding a family, which rests on women.



Trading at a market in Kigali.  
Photo: Courtesy of SYTRIECI

<sup>85</sup> WIEGO Policy Brief, July 2021. [Family-Friendly Policies for Workers in the Informal Economy](#).

<sup>86</sup> ILO and WIEGO Policy Brief No 1. [Quality childcare services for women in the informal economy](#), citing UN Women, 2015.



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Women in Informal Employment:  
Globalizing and Organizing

### 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](http://www.wiego.org).

