



HomeWorkers  
Worldwide

# hww Organising For Rights

**Declaration of  
Ev-Ek-Sen: Turkish  
Union of Homebased  
Workers**

**SPECIAL REPORT:  
HWW UK PROJECT**

**New Photo book  
on Vietnam**

# We Work At Home

The Newsletter of  
Homeworkers Worldwide

Issue 7  
Autumn 2010

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## Editorial

This summer saw the fifth anniversary of the death of Viji Srinivasan. Viji dedicated her life to empowering and supporting women. She worked to improve the livelihoods of rural women, working with homebased workers, fisherwomen, sharecroppers and farmers, street vendors, adivasi women and the daughters of traditional sex workers. From 2000-2005 she was the regional coordinator for HWW in South Asia.



Photo: Maja Medic

Her work concentrated on women and girls in Bihar, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu, but she was also an inspiration to her many friends all over the world.

This issue of We Work At Home includes a special feature on homeworking in the UK. At the beginning of 2010 Homeworkers Worldwide launched a new project which aims to provide a voice for UK homeworkers. For the past few months we have been meeting with homeworkers to discuss the problems they face when they try to earn a living from home. Concerns include a lack of work, few employment rights and an inflexible benefits system. Now we are using the information we have gathered to develop policies and work with homeworkers to lobby for change.

Special thanks go to photographer Tessa Bunney for the use of her photographs including the image on the front cover. Tessa has just published a book of images of homeworking in Vietnam. You can find out more about the book, and see some more of her photos in this newsletter.

# The Northern Homeworking Project: A new voice for UK homeworkers

The Northern Homeworking Project has been working with the Rochdale Homeworking Support Group to identify homeworkers' main concerns.



The Northern Homeworking Project was established in January 2010 to explore current trends in homeworking in the UK, focusing primarily on Northern England.

Following the closure of the National Group on Homeworking in 2008, UK homeworkers were left without support or representation. This small project, funded by Oxfam, aims to provide UK homeworkers with a voice, building on previous work, identifying current trends in homework and campaigning on key issues. The project is based at Homeworkers Worldwide. We are using the knowledge and expertise gained through years of work with homeworkers internationally, and applying this to our work in the UK.

The project is mapping the kinds of work women are doing at home and identifying their main concerns. We are addressing different kinds of homework including 'own-account work' (working for yourself) and 'dependent homework' (working for another person or business). Some of the problems homeworkers in the UK face include low pay, irregular work and a complicated benefits system. We are working to provide a voice

for UK homeworkers, and through campaigning and lobbying together with homeworkers we hope to ensure this voice is heard by policy makers. Our resources are small and we have a big job to do, so we are working closely with partners and supportive organisations to make the biggest impact we can.

One of the most successful parts of our work so far has been a peer research project in Rochdale. We have trained members of the Rochdale Homeworker Support Group in interview techniques and these women have interviewed other homeworkers they know to find out more about their work, and what their priorities are for a UK homeworker campaign. Tanzeem Mahmood, Rochdale's Homeworking Development Officer said, 'Doing these interviews has been a very good exercise. They've gained skills, and confidence from going out and doing these interviews on their own. It is effective using homeworkers to do the research because they can easily access other homeworkers, and they are trusted.'

For more information please email: [nesta@homeworkersww.org.uk](mailto:nesta@homeworkersww.org.uk)

## Sheila's story: Earning a living and rocking the boat

**S**heila lives in a village in Derbyshire, and has been a homemaker for over 30 years. Sheila began work as a machinist in a garment factory at the age of fifteen. For ten years she worked in a number of large sewing factories, including Viyella Aertex. She began homeworking 35 years ago when she was pregnant. Sheila sewed all kinds of baby wear, as well as women's nightwear.

*'I remember when my daughter Tracey was about three she would pinch the dress pieces from my sewing table. I looked down to see she was putting the dresses together on the floor, copying me.'*

Work from local firms would come and go, and Sheila worked for many different companies over the years. For a while she worked making children's kilts.

*'I made thousands of these. The pay wasn't brilliant but it was piecework and because I got quick I earned a decent wage. You'd sew the nylon under-top onto the pleated kilt skirt, overlocking and lockstitching. They came in bundles of 24 and I could sew a bundle in 20 minutes.'*



When this work dried up, Sheila began taking homework from another garment company,

*'But the pay was rubbish and I decided to go out to work.'*

By now, Sheila's daughter was at school, and she was able to go out to work. From 1980 to 1988 Sheila worked at a Thorntons chocolate factory.

*'I worked there for eight years as a temp. The deal was if they kept you for two years as a temp then they'd make you permanent but they used to play crafty. They'd keep you on for one year, eleven months and three weeks then finish you. Your first day back at home they'd ring and ask you to come back. After eight years I'd done every kind of job there. I turned round and said, I'm fed up of being taken for a mug. If you don't offer me a permanent position, the next time you get rid of me I won't*

*come back. They thought I'd be back, but when they finished me again then asked me to come back I said no. I never worked for them again.'*

Sheila looked for work in other factories but couldn't find anything that fitted around her daughter's school,

*'At the time it wasn't the done thing to have flexible hours. You worked eight till five and that was it. Time was time.'*

After leaving Thorntons, Sheila went back to doing homework because she couldn't find anything that fitted round her family life.

*'I was doing bits and pieces for various companies and I was a bit of a naughty girl for a while because I didn't declare it. But a lot of the outwork companies didn't want you to declare it because it saved them money too, so they paid you cash in hand.'*

Sheila had experienced problems with her hearing for many years and around this time her doctor sent her to the hospital to get it checked out. They discovered she had various problems including a perforated ear drum. The doctor said this was probably caused by the high noise levels in the sewing factories where Sheila used to work.

*'It was all down to the noise levels. Health and safety hadn't been brought in at that time, they didn't see it as a problem. Now I can never go back to work in a factory, because the noise level could cause me to lose my hearing altogether – so I can only work from home. But even if I wanted to, there's no needle trade factories round here anymore anyway.'*

Sheila then began working at her husband's firm.

*'There were six outworkers, some had been doing it for fifteen years. You couldn't work at home unless your husband worked for the firm. They didn't want outsiders.'*

Sheila was packing for this construction components firm when the minimum wage was introduced and she realised the homeworkers weren't receiving it. She saw an advertisement for the National Group on Homeworking and asked them to send her all their information on the national minimum wage.

*'The other outworkers all wanted the minimum wage but they wouldn't back me up because they were scared to lose their jobs – but I wasn't scared. I knew if they sacked me they'd have to give me a damn good reason. People were telling me not to rock the boat, but if I'm told "don't rock the boat" then I'll bloody well rock it.'*

Sheila took all the information she had to her boss and told him she was entitled to the minimum wage.

*'I told him we can do this the easy way or the hard way, but I know what I'm entitled to and I'm going to get it. He agreed to pay me and all the other outworkers the minimum wage.'*

Sheila got more involved with the National Group on Homeworking, and took part in research and campaign work. She visited the House of Commons and spoke to MPs about the issues facing homeworkers. At one point she was invited to appear on television to speak about her experiences. She decided not to go ahead because her employer was against it and they employed her husband too.

*'If it was just my job I had to think about I would have done it because I won't be threatened by anyone. But it was Neil's job too, he'd worked for them for far longer than me and I didn't want any repercussions for him.'*

Several years later the work from the company began to dry up.

*'I was told there was no more outwork four years ago. I said if I'm going to be finished I want redundancy. The company didn't like it, but I got it. Because I got it, and told the other outworkers, they got it too.'*

Sheila's daughter Tracey was sewing specialist ballet tights at home, so Sheila started to do some of this work too. Their supplier of work was claiming that some of their work wasn't up to standard and she wasn't paying them for it. They knew they were doing the work right so they went straight to the factory to get the work direct and cut out the intermediary. The



factory was happy with their work so they continued working in this way until the company brought all the work inside, and moved to Leicester.

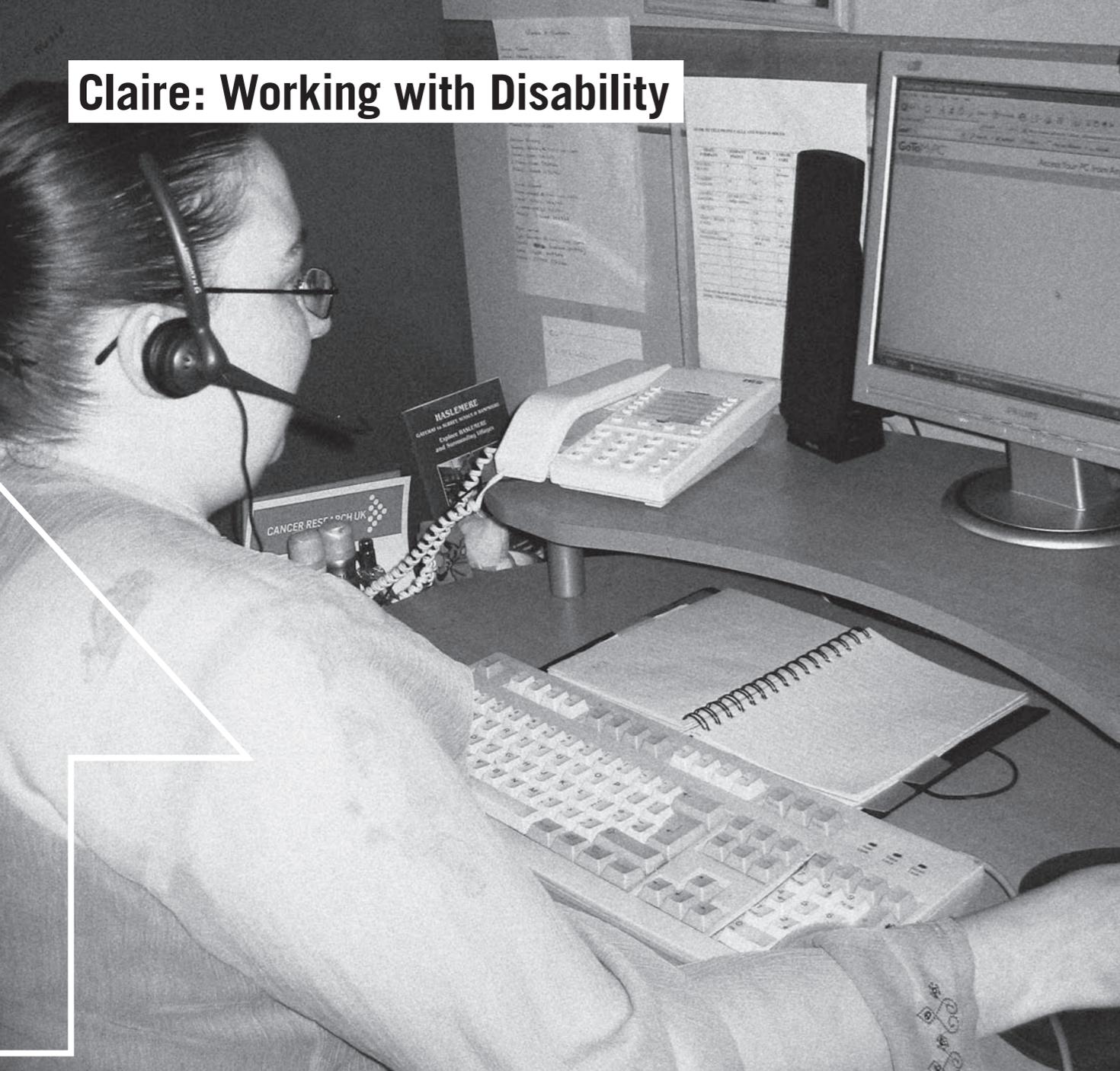
Meanwhile Sheila had been homeworking on and off for a local sportswear firm for about ten years. She began making polo shirts and children's PE kits, which the boss had electronically embroidered at his unit, then the firm moved on to producing mini replica football kits for car windows. Sheila was sewing these kits on and off – though the work was very irregular – until about 18 months ago, when the work dried up and her boss shifted his embroidery unit to Leeds.

*'There is little work in this area anyway, but nothing at all for homeworkers. If there was any homework, I'd have found it and I'd be doing it. Things have definitely got worse over the recession. Lots of small firms have closed and we don't have the unions to back the workers anymore. The newer firms don't recognise the unions, so fighting has to be done by people on the shop floor who don't know their rights. There's no-one to stand up for them. People have lost their voice.'*

*'I've got £6000 worth of machinery – my industrial machines – and they're sat here doing nothing. I do my own things, and a few little jobs for neighbours – but you can't charge your neighbours. Other than that the machines are doing absolutely nothing.'*

Since then, Sheila has been making cards, gift boxes, and ribbon-wrapped soaps at home to keep busy. She usually makes these for family and for gifts but also makes some to order for a small charge. She volunteers in a local Leonard Cheshire Care Home, and uses her knitting, crochet and craft skills to help them raise money. She also does car boot sales both to earn some money for herself and to raise funds for Leonard Cheshire.

## Claire: Working with Disability



**C**laire lives in Yorkshire and works for a virtual call centre from home. Claire works from home because she has several long-term health problems preventing her from going out to work. Politicians are currently calling for more people with long-term health problems and disabilities to get back into work, and Claire has done just that for years - but despite the fact she feels her employer is supportive and 'willing to work around' her there are still many obstacles that make work difficult.

Claire suffers from spondylitis (arthritis of the spine), and has recently been diagnosed with fibromyalgia (a muscle fatigue syndrome). She

is seeing a pain therapist who is also helping her to deal with some of the emotional effects of her condition. She has felt anxious and guilty about having to take so much time off work and the pain therapist has helped her cope with depression.

She has been working for the same company for the past four years, and is generally pleased with her terms and conditions. In the past she has worked in telesales from home, but this was commission-based and she found it was not worth the time she had to spend on it. She began her current job as a casual worker, doing different hours each week but after about a year she became a permanent employee, working 30 hours a week.

Last year Claire was promoted and received a pay rise and free broadband connection. She worked as a supervisor, responsible for the eight other homeworkers on her shift. As well as doing the basic job of taking calls and checking information she would deal with these homeworkers' problems - such as IT problems or rude or aggressive telephone calls. She said that she was often asked if there was any organisation homeworkers could contact for support, but had to tell them that there wasn't. Recently she decided to give up this promotion and return to her previous role.

*'I loved it but the stress got too much.'*

Since stepping down from the promotion, Claire earns slightly above the minimum wage, but is expected to pay for her own broadband connection and phone line. Calls for work purposes are free. Since Claire stepped back from the supervisor role, her employer is now removing her broadband connection and she will have to re-install her own at her own expense. Claire accepts this - although it will prove disrupting to her work - but is unhappy with the way the company dealt with it.

*'They just send me an email saying they'd disconnect me. Why couldn't they speak to me in person? I was in and out of hospital at the time and this just added to my stress. You need broadband in order to do the job so I was really worried. I wasn't a happy bunny.'*

Claire feels that communications have got worse with the company, and that they used to do more to keep in touch with their homeworkers.

*'They used to give me a call everyday, now I don't hear from them. They are willing to work round me, and my disability, but where it used to be easy to talk to them about it I've lost that personal contact.'*

Claire has had to take six months off work in the last year with ill health. As an employee, she receives sick pay (then half sick pay, then statutory sick pay) but her employer has recently introduced a new policy of 'rolling sickness'. This is a new system which she doesn't fully understand but in practice

it means she received far less sick pay when she was ill in hospital recently. Her employer has, however, agreed to pay for the time she needs to take off for hospital appointments where previously she had to take this as annual leave.

*'They've adopted a lot of new policies recently, looking at the pay roll, HR and the Disability Discrimination Act. Some of the policies are better, but this rolling sickness is the worst thing they've done.'*

Claire is a strong advocate of disability rights, *'The Government winds me up the way it treats disabled people.'*

She also has concerns about the benefits system. Three years ago when Claire was working varied hours, and receiving disabled tax credits it made things very complicated.

*'They'd work it out based on the hours I did most often, but because my hours changed it meant sometimes I wouldn't get my full entitlement.'*

Now she works fixed hours she is getting a fixed amount. Claire receives Disabled Living Allowance, and has a note from her GP saying it is therapeutic for her to work. She thinks benefits should be simpler and supports the idea of increasing the amount people can work without losing benefits.

*'I remember when it happened to me, and it is a big thing when you lose your rent and council tax.'*

Claire was a member of the National Group on Homeworking, and campaigned with them. She is concerned that there is no support for homeworkers now NGH has gone, and was really pleased to hear about the Northern Homeworking Project taking up these issues.

Claire thinks employers need to be clearer about their policies, and that all companies should have the same policies on things like sickness so people know where they stand. She also thinks employers should be more aware of the DDA, and their obligations to adapt to people with disabilities.

**'I loved it but the stress got too much.'**

Members of Rochdale Homeworking Group and National Group on Homeworking after a meeting with the Low Pay Commission to discuss minimum wages for homeworkers.

## Homework in the UK: What are homeworkers' concerns?

**F**or many years, campaigns on homeworking in the UK have highlighted some of the major problems facing homeworkers, particularly the problem that they are not recognised as workers, with basic employment rights. A major step forward was made with the introduction of the minimum wage, which specifically included homeworkers.

However, homeworkers still face a number of obstacles in accessing 'decent work'. Some of these arise from their lack of recognition as workers, others from their situation as women with main responsibilities for unpaid homework, particularly childcare. The cost of childcare makes it impractical for many women to go out to work, especially when jobs on offer are part-time and precarious. Thus many women still look for work they can do at home, mainly through lack of alternatives.

Here we highlight another problem faced by homeworkers: the rigid nature of the benefits system which is still designed mainly for someone in a regular, permanent job. While employment has become more and more flexible, the benefits system has not changed. We would welcome comments on any of these issues. If you have experience or opinions on any of these issues, we would be happy to hear from you. If you would like to be kept in touch with the Northern Homeworking Project, email Nesta or write to us at the address on the back of this newsletter.

### How irregular work and inflexible benefits can trap homeworkers.

One of the major issues facing homeworkers, whether they work for someone else or on their own account is the irregularity of their work. Not knowing how much work she will be getting from one week to the next can make it very difficult for a homeworker to plan her family life, and especially her family budget. Irregular work poses an additional problem for homeworkers who are receiving certain welfare benefits.

Our research shows many homeworkers are struggling to find work. But even if they do find work, the transition from unemployment to work that is irregular and precarious poses its own problems. Currently job seekers allowance is withdrawn pound for pound if you earn more than £5 a week. This £5 limit is known as the 'earnings disregard' and amounts to less than one hour working on the minimum wage.

If a homeworker has been out of work for some time, then manages to get hold of a few hours work one week she is faced with a dilemma. Should she inform officials, so the relevant amount is deducted from her benefits – even though there is no guarantee she will receive any more work the following week? Or should she keep quiet about her work and put

herself at risk by continuing to claim benefits she may no longer be fully entitled to?

Delays in the system are also a disincentive to declaring work. Changes of circumstance can take weeks to process, and as people in poverty and those on benefits are less likely to have significant savings, even a brief delay in payments can cause real hardship. There is a growing recognition that the existing benefits system is not working well, and that it needs a thorough overhaul. Iain Duncan-Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, is committed to doing just this, and has recently issued a consultation paper 21st Century Welfare.

Duncan-Smith has looked in-depth at the problem of the low earnings disregard, and argues it provides a disincentive to work (or to declare work). An increase in the earnings disregard would be an extremely positive step, meaning homeworkers on low and irregular incomes would not have to worry about declaring their work and losing their benefits until their income was substantially higher. The government consultation does not name a specific figure for increasing the earnings disregard, but before entering government Duncan-Smith's own 'Dynamic Benefits' report suggested the level could be raised as high as £100. This would make an enormous difference to many homeworkers, whose earnings are often well below this, but there may be restrictions on who this applies to.

Homeworkers who we have spoken to have all expressed support for an increase in the earnings disregard. One said it would be a big help because then, 'People won't be scared. They will be able to declare their work.' Another said people should be able to earn more before their benefits were withdrawn because, 'I remember when it happened to me, and it is a big thing when you lose your rent and council tax.' While the earnings disregard proposals look positive, there is much in the government's consultation paper that remains unclear. It is hard to predict what the overall impact on homeworkers will be. We would like to see a flexible benefits systems that responds quickly for those whose income is irregular. We also want a system that recognises the value of women's work both paid and unpaid and makes childcare affordable. Finally, we would like to see an emphasis not just on the responsibility of individuals to find a job, but on the responsibility of employers to provide jobs with decent conditions and fair pay.

## Welfare Rights and Working Rights

*'A lot of the outwork companies didn't want you to declare it because it saved them money too, so they paid you cash in hand'*

Welfare rights can stand alone as a vital issue for homeworkers. But the way the welfare system operates is also important because it impacts on a worker's ability to assert their employment rights.

The existing benefits system pushes many people into working informally. They do not declare their earnings because they are afraid of their benefits being withdrawn, or being disrupted as the system struggles to process any changes of circumstance. As a consequence they are unable to be open about



their work, or complain if they are unfairly treated. This creates yet another obstacle to homeworkers accessing rights such as the minimum wage.

Indeed an official responsible for minimum wage enforcement who we spoke to confirmed he would report anyone who he believed was working informally and 'fiddling' the benefits system. This is extremely discouraging to anyone working informally whose rights as a worker are being abused. In this way the 'benefits trap' becomes an exploitation trap. Workers who are working informally through necessity, perhaps precisely because their wages are so low, are unable to challenge employers who are exploiting them for fear they themselves will be punished.

## Weaving Our Union, Knot by Knot

*Declaration on the Launch of Ev-Ek-Sen (Union of Homebased Workers) and Call for Unity*

**I**n November of last year, homebased workers founded the first trade union for homebased workers in Turkey - Ev-Ek-Sen, after many years working in local projects as well as national and international networks.

Ev-Ek-Sen has been officially registered. However, according to Turkish law, only workers registered for social security have the legal right to form a trade union. Since homebased workers are not officially recognised as workers, Ev-Ek-Sen is going to have to fight a protracted legal campaign to win its right to exist.

The union has issued a declaration calling for support from all those who have a common interest in this struggle for the right of freedom of association and for workers' rights for homebased workers, particularly organisations of formal and informal workers, and the women's movement.

The full text of the declaration is available on the Homeworkers Worldwide website. Here we print extracts from it, highlighting some of the key points made.

The union was founded as the outcome of a long campaign in many different parts of Turkey: "We have built our union on the basis of discussions we have had and needs we have specified during the organizing activities carried out in all parts of Turkey, from Urfa to Aydin, Mersin to Istanbul, from Hatay to Ankara, from Mugla to Yuksekova, from Antalya to Sivas."

**Most homebased workers are women and not recognised as workers:**

*"We, homebased workers, are among the most invisible sections of precarious workers, so that there are even times we find it difficult to explain that we also work, that we are also workers like all other workers."*

*"It is not unusual for our own-account work to be confused with micro-entrepreneurship. We are however workers. For in most cases our own-account work is carried out side-by-side with work on order or piece-rate work (dependent on factories). When we have a stall in the market, the sale of our products is only a secondary goal; the primary goal is to receive new orders by exhibiting samples of our products and to deliver completed orders. The examples we exhibit on market stalls serve as our curricula vitae. Thus our activity in the marketplace is dependent work, but is easily confused with own-account or independent work. We want to make it known that we carry out dependent work, that we are workers."*

*"In addition, since we are 'after all' women, there is a tendency to believe we are only finding something to do in our leisure time. However, we as homebased workers, have to work in order to survive, just like all other workers. We work in order to make a living, not as a leisure time activity."*

*"Our primary aim is: by launching our trade union, we want to make our work visible, to be recognized as workers. We demand rights equivalent to those of all other workers. We demand our rights arising from our homebased work."*

The union aims to unite all homebased workers, whatever their employment relations and whatever sector they are working in. Previously, they have organised many local organisations, mainly based on income-generating activities. Now their new trade union is a rights-based organisation aiming to win recognition and improvement in working conditions.

*"We want to improve the conditions of our homebased work, win the rights enjoyed by formal workers, those registered for social security, for example health insurance and the right to a pension*



*when we are too old to work. We want to work and live under better circumstances. What we want is not only work, not any work, but secure and "decent work," to cite the ILO."*

Winning the right to organise as a trade union goes hand in hand with winning social security rights for homebased workers. In this sense, there is a common struggle for all those informal workers, without social security, and even for formal workers to defend the rights that they have.

*"If we can win the case for our right to organise, this will be a very significant gain not only for members of Ev-Ek-Sen, not only for all home-based workers whether unionised or not, but for all workers with or without social security. For this reason, throughout the legal process we want to walk together not only with informal or precarious sections of workers, but with all women, with all workers (that is, also with those with formal protection), and with all their organisations as well."*

Specific targets of the campaign in Turkey are the Social Security Act (SGK in Turkish, formerly SSGSS) and the Trade Union Act, which the union is campaigning to replace.

**In addition to workers' organisations, the union wants to unite with the women's movement:**

*"In Turkey, as in the rest of the world, women are the majority among insecure workers. And that is directly connected to our position as women within the sexist division of labour: regardless of the type of work, there is the unpaid domestic labour of all women. We women carry out domestic work such as cooking, washing the dishes, laundry etc. required by the maintenance of everyday life of the household; we undertake the care and responsibility for our children, old people, sick and disabled relatives; and we maintain the stability of social life as required by*

*the job of the husband. Therefore women, whatever their employment status, constitute a very important group of allies for homebased workers."*

**The declaration ends with a call for unity and support from organisations in Turkey and internationally:**

*"Our solidarity is not limited to national boundaries. Throughout the years we have been trying to organise, as we have been weaving our union knot by knot, we have always been in solidarity with organisations of homebased workers in other countries and with the Federation of Homeworkers Worldwide (FHWW), our international organisation. They have brought their strength and craft to our struggle and vice versa. We have also experienced the significance of international solidarity through other cases. The Novamed case in Antalya Free Zone in southwest Anatolia and more recently the DESA case exemplify international solidarity as well as how inseparably interwoven are the women's movement and the labour movement."*

*"We also have connections and solidarity with organisations of workers without security, which we shall develop and strengthen. If we have in common that we are being exploited as labourers; if the conditions leading to the exploitation of our labour are also common; then we have a common struggle."*

*"Let us unite our forces for the universalisation of social security, for the organising of workers without security in rights-based organisations of their own choice, for the change of the applicable law in Turkey and the abolition of the current Social Security Act!"*

**For the full text of the declaration, and details of actions you can take in support of Ev-Ek-Sen, see HWW website or email direct to: [evksen@gmail.com](mailto:evksen@gmail.com)**

## Missed the Goal for Workers: The Reality of Soccer Ball Stitchers in Pakistan, India, China and Thailand

**A** new report by the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) reveals that, despite years of campaigning to eradicate it, child labour still exists in the soccer ball industry. In addition most workers are on temporary contracts and women homeworkers are receiving some of the lowest rates of pay.

Following public exposure in the late 1990s, child labour became the defining labour problem in the soccer ball industry. Yet despite the outcry, and numerous multi-stakeholder initiatives and monitoring programs designed to eliminate it, ILRF found that child labour continues to exist. ILRF also found that non-permanent workers are the standard for the hand-stitched soccer ball industry. In Pakistan, India and China, factories outsource the labour intensive stitching process to workers in stitching centres and in homes who work on a casual or temporary basis.

These workers are subject to frequent and serious violations of their labour rights. Workers are often paid below the legal minimum wage and their incomes can barely cover basic needs. While they are vulnerable to occupational health hazards, their status makes them ineligible for many social protections including health care. The rights to organise and bargain collectively are usually legally barred to workers with informal employment status.

At one Pakistani manufacturer, ILRF researchers found that all interviewed stitching centre or homeworkers were employed on a casual basis and almost all of them were paid below the legally required minimum wage. In the same manufacturer's supply chain, workers spoke of gender-based discrimination. Female homeworkers were paid the least and faced the possibility of losing their jobs permanently due to pregnancy.

A decade-long campaign with an exclusive focus on child labour left fundamental issues such as low wages and unsatisfactory working conditions in the industry almost unresolved. Moreover, an approach

based on monitoring or certifying manufacturers will not solve these problems unless the companies that buy the soccer balls are also willing to address the negative impacts on working conditions resulting from their own purchasing practices.

ILRF concludes that continued use of a multi-stakeholder process which includes trade unions, industry, local manufacturers, civil society, and monitoring entities is essential in order for workers' rights to be protected in the production of soccer balls. The process needs to include giving a voice to women homeworkers and other casual workers to ensure that their voices are heard.



From April 15 to May 5, 2010, the International Labor Rights Forum and SweatFree Communities conducted a speaking tour to raise awareness about the realities that Bangladeshi garment workers and Pakistani soccer ball stitchers face on the job, and to encourage local action for sweatshop workers' rights. *"The tour took us to 15 cities in eight states. We gave 29 presentations for students, union members, environmentalists, and other community members. In addition, we held 11 meetings and briefings with a variety of government officials, including purchasing department staff and elected officials, to discuss the new Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium and how government purchasers can support workers' rights."*

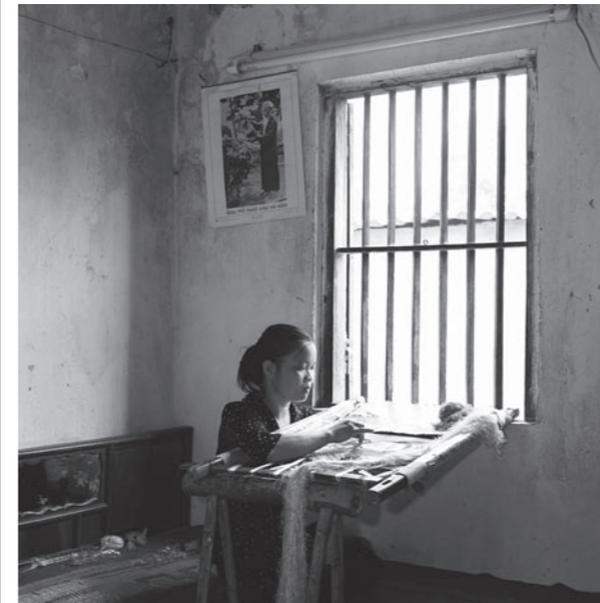
Kalpona Akter and Zehra Bano brought stories of dismal working conditions from Bangladeshi garment workers and Pakistani home-based soccer ball stitchers. But they also brought stories of worker power and inspiration and showed their own fierce commitment to struggle for change. Zehra Bano is the General Secretary of the Home-Based Women Workers Federation of Pakistan.

**For the full report on football stitchers, see the website of International Labor Rights Forum: <http://bit.ly/foulballcampaign>**

## New Photo Book on Homework

**A** book has been published on homework in Vietnam, by photographer Tessa Bunney. The book is a collection of images of homeworkers in craft villages around Hanoi, and is the result of two visits Tessa took to Vietnam between 2006 and 2008.

Tessa visited many small villages, each known for a particular craft or industry. Some villages made baskets, others copper pots, noodles or incense sticks. While some villages have craft traditions



going back centuries, nothing is set in stone, as Tessa writes *"When I'd previously visited 'pork pie' village they were making palm hats and now, here in rice paper village, they are making pork pies! But as I'm constantly being reminded 'everything is flexible' in Vietnam!"*

There is also a sense of change in the air as the villages are on the cusp of rural life and urban industrialisation. As Hanoi expands ever outward and land is bought up for development the villages



are losing the farmland they are dependent on. As a consequence, homework has become an even more essential part of farmer families' income.

The pictures are very beautiful but they do not romanticise the subject. Instead they show us everyday life as it is lived – the children, the cramped space, the mess, the hard work and the skills – of those who work at home.

**For further information or to order 'Home Work' by Tessa Bunney visit [www.tessabunney.co.uk](http://www.tessabunney.co.uk)**

The book is also available to order from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

All photos Tessa Bunney.

## News in Brief

### ILO Convention on Home Work

**S**even countries have now ratified the ILO Convention on Home Work (177): Albania, Argentina, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands. Bulgaria ratified the Convention in 2009 and plans to pass a new law on homework. Kaloian, the homeworkers' association, has been consulting with homeworkers and meeting with government officials to ensure that their demands and views about a new law are heard. In Sri Lanka, an MP in the Parliament has called for the government to support HomeNet Sri Lanka in its campaign for the adoption of a national policy on homework.

### ILO Convention on Domestic Work

**A**s a result of a long campaign by organisations of domestic workers, supported by trade unions and NGOs, this summer's International Labour Conference (ILC) agreed to go ahead with a Convention on Domestic Work. This decision was taken after the first reading of a draft which will be finalised at next year's conference. Like homeworkers, domestic workers have been mainly invisible and excluded from protection by traditional labour legislation. The majority are women and the invisibility of their work is partly because it is done behind closed doors in the home. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than 100 million people are currently employed as domestic workers. They do important work, looking after children, taking care of the elderly and allowing parents – especially mothers – to pursue careers.

Nonetheless, this group of workers is among the least protected internationally. Abuse comes in many ways, from unpaid overtime to severe restrictions of freedom of movement, physical violence and sexual abuse. Most are isolated and dependent. Many are underage. In rich countries, many migrant women do housework and their rights are usually quite limited. The ILC has now made it very clear that domestic workers have basic rights such as the freedom of association as well as rights to formal employment contracts and regulated working hours. Moreover, the conference tackled specific issues such as the right to privacy. In principle, all domestic workers should enjoy these rights, whether they have permits of residence or not. The ILC draft convention does not make any such distinction.

### GoodWeave: Developing New Standards

**R**ugMark International is well known for its work to eliminate child labour from the carpet industry by developing a brand which is certified as free from child labour. Now RugMark is moving on and is developing a new GoodWeave label to apply to all those working in the sector, including many homebased workers.

*“Both the existing RugMark label and the new GoodWeave label assure that no children under age 14 were employed by the facility responsible for making the labeled rug.”*

*“In addition, GoodWeave will, in time, represent an enhanced set of values that places the RugMark mission in a broader context of environmental and social responsibility. Through a new set of standards under development, GoodWeave label directives will be more rigorous, transparent and defined, and with input from a multi-stakeholder standards committee.”*

Up to the present, RugMark has focused mainly on the weaving of carpets and rugs in India and Nepal. But they are hoping to expand their work in the sector.

For more information, see GoodWeave's website: <http://www.goodweave.org/>

### Resources

**H**WW paper on impact of Free Trade Agreement between EU and India. Negotiations are currently taking place to finalise a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the European Union and India. Most of the discussions about the FTA have been taking place behind closed doors but it is anticipated that they will be finalised by the end of this year.

Ruth Bergan has completed a discussion paper on the negotiations and the possible impact of any agreement on informal workers, particularly homebased workers. The paper is being finalised as we go to press and we hope to put it on our website by September. We would welcome any response or comments from our readers.

## A Living Wage

### A Living Wage for Garment Workers

**I**n recent years, campaigns to improve conditions for garment workers have shifted emphasis from demanding minimum wages to the call for a living wage. This is because in many countries the minimum wage is set too low to support a decent life, especially in a situation where prices are rising, particularly for food.

The concept of the living wage is that all workers should be paid enough to cover their basic costs for housing, food, education, health and other essential costs, with a certain amount of money for other costs. The actual wages, in different countries, have to be calculated according to a common formula which includes basic expenses and related to the costs in each locality.

At present, the focus tends to be on factory workers. Research has shown that the majority of homeworkers do not even receive minimum wages, let alone a living wage. HWW would like to see campaigns include the demand for a living wage for all workers in supply chains, including homeworkers and others working informally.

### Asia Floor Wage

**T**he Asian Floor Wage campaign was launched globally in October 2009. The campaign is a response to the fact that when workers in one countries fight for a wages increase, retailers can shift their orders to another country where wages are lower and prices cheaper.

“The Asia Floor Wage, is different in each country's national currency, but has the power to buy the same set of goods and services in all countries.

“An Asia Floor Wage for the garment industry will help us fight poverty, develop economically with decent labour standards, and improve the lives of workers who are mostly women.”

For more information, see their website: <http://www.asiafloorwage.org/>

## Action Aid Report

**I**n July of this year, Action Aid launched a report focusing on the demand that UK retailers, particularly Asda, make a real commitment to paying living wages to workers in companies supplying the garments they sell. The report points out that up to the present, only one major UK retailer, Marks and Spencer, has made a definite commitment to pay the living wage by 2015.

The report explains that responsibility for bad pay and conditions for garment workers is shared along the chain and that UK retailers have a major role to play, particularly at a time when there is evidence that retailers are paying their suppliers lower prices. Liability for wages and conditions has to be shared between manufacturer, supplier and retailer.

In Bangalore, India, there is evidence of violation of labour rights, particularly an increased minimum wage, in companies that produce for export. Some companies have refused to pay the increase in the minimum wage, let alone a living wage, at a time of sharply increasing costs for workers.

ActionAid calls on Asda and all other garment buying companies to:

- 1/ Publicly commit to pay a living wage, as defined by the Asia Floor Wage coalition, and publish a timetable for implementation.
- 2/ Ensure that prices paid to factory suppliers cover the cost of a living wage.
- 3/ Ensure that workers and their representatives are central to the implementation of a living wage, and promote trade union rights in factories.

The full report can be found on ActionAid's website: <http://bit.ly/asdalivingwage>



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## **Northern Homeworking Project**

For specific information on the UK project please contact:

**Email: [nesta@homeworkersww.org.uk](mailto:nesta@homeworkersww.org.uk)**

### **APPEAL FOR DONATIONS TO FUND PUBLICATION OF THE NEWSLETTER**

Many thanks to all who have responded to our appeal for funds to keep the newsletter going. Many of you have sent donations which have helped us to produce and distribute the newsletter. We apologise if you have received more than one request. As a small organisation, we do not have the resources to send out different mailings and we hope you will understand.

## **HWW Resources**

### **RIGHTS AND RECOGNITION FOR HOMEWORKERS**

A pamphlet highlighting the ongoing work of HWW

— *order your copy today.*

### **THE MAPPING PACK**

Basic guidelines for action-research with homebased workers

### **VERTICAL MAPPING PACK**

Tracing production and marketing chains

### **WE WORK AT HOME THE TRAINING MANUAL**

Comprehensive training manual, drawing on experience of mapping work in Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe

— *available on paper or CD*

### **WE WORK AT HOME**

Booklet outlining results of first two years of the programme — with colour photos — *available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi and Tamil.*

### **PHOTO PACK**

Set of A4 colour photos of homebased workers and their organisations from different countries doing mapping

— *ideal training or educational tool.*

### **POSTCARD PACK**

Set of 16 colour postcards illustrating mapping in different countries — can be used as a mini photo pack

— *available in English, Chinese, Japanese and Bahasa.*

### **FROM CHILE TO CHINA**

Small book, illustrated with colour photos, describes different kinds of organisations that came out of the mapping programme.