

Homeworkers Worldwide Bi-annual Report 2021-2022



Workers 'roping' clothing in Tiripur, India, 2021 (Credit: SAVE)

Homeworkers Worldwide, Company No. 3796677, Charity Number: 1195399.

**c/o Bohorun's Business Solutions, Howley Park Business Village, Howley Park Road, Morley,
Leeds, LS27 0BZ. www.homeworkersww.org.uk.**

Homeworkers Worldwide Activity Summary 2021/2022

During this period, Covid 19 continued to cast a long shadow over our work, as periodic lockdowns continued in both the UK and Asia for much of 2021, and non-essential travel and events remained curtailed for much of 2022.

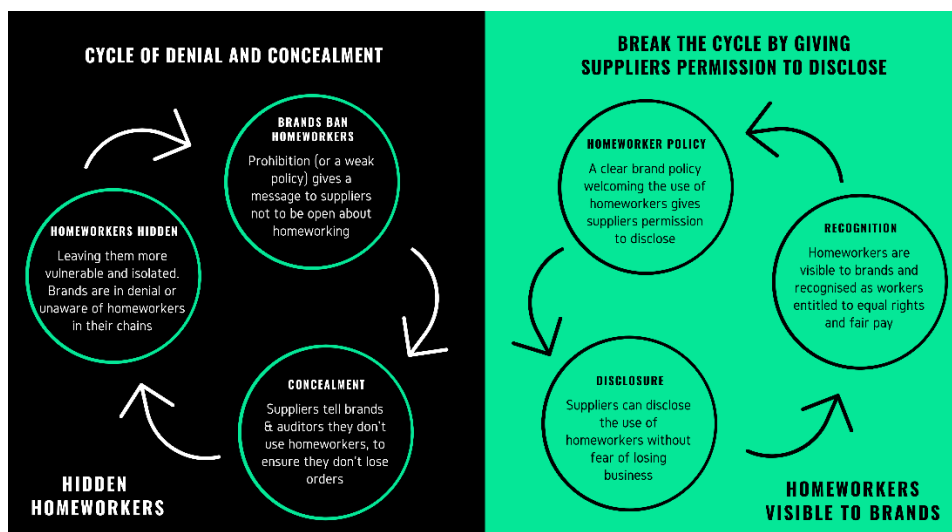
This inevitably impacted on homeworkers' livelihoods, as many shops and factories were closed for lengthy periods, with knock-on effects on the availability of work further down supply chains where homeworkers are most commonly located. Homeworkers and their families faced further challenges as they are almost always excluded from social security or severance pay. Fortunately our partners on the Hidden Homeworkers project, with the support of our funder (in this instance, the European Community), were permitted to divert some funds to provide humanitarian assistance to respond to the hardship that resulted.

During 2021-2022 the focus of much of our work remained on the four-year Hidden Homeworkers Project, led by Traidcraft (recently rebranded as Transform Trade) and HomeNet South Asia, and co-funded by the European Commission. This project was set up to improve the situation of homeworkers producing clothes, footwear and homewares for global supply chains in India, Pakistan and Nepal.

Our role within the project is to lead on engagement with brands and multi-stakeholder initiatives (such as the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative), raising company awareness and understanding of the challenges facing homeworkers, and encouraging them to take positive action in response. To support this work, we launched our [Toolkit: Finding Hidden Homeworkers in Apparel & Footwear Supply Chains](#), a suite of online resources that make it easier for brands and suppliers to improve transparency and working conditions for homeworkers in their supply chains.

Improving Supply chain Transparency

This Infographic is taken from the Toolkit and contrasts the cycle of denial that results when Brands ban homeworking within their supply chains, with the greater openness that results when Brands adopt a clear Homeworker policy, giving their suppliers permission to recognise homeworkers within their supply chain, and disclose their presence to their customers.



Further achievements of the Hidden Homeworkers project during this period include:

- In 2021, our partners in the textile manufacturing hub in Tirupur, South India, registered 1,956 homeworkers in a new trade union, and a total of 1,179 wage cards were distributed to homeworkers in Karachi, Tirupur and Kathmandu, enabling homeworkers to keep their own records of their work and wages due.
- In 2022, we worked with our long-standing partner Cividep India to trace the links between (very) low paid homeworkers stitching shoes in Tamil Nadu and seventeen global brands, challenging the brands to take responsibility for improving transparency and working conditions.
- In 2022, we convinced two brands, one sourcing embroidered Christmas decorations, and the other evening dresses, from supply chains involving homeworkers, to work with us to map these supply chains and explore ways to improve transparency and working conditions.

Networking and Advocacy

Throughout 2021-22 HWW continued to participate in the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative, with our Director Lucy Brill joining the ETI Board as a representative from the NGO Caucus in June 2021, and participating actively in their activities on gender, the fashion industry and also emerging work on transitions and futures, exploring how climate change, and brands' efforts to reduce their carbon footprint, impacts on workers within supply chains. For example, we collaborated with sister NGOs Women Working Worldwide and Banana Link on an ETI blog series highlighting the challenges facing women workers within global supply chains. HWW's contributions included Gender and Casualisation: the elephant in the room, and Putting homeworking on the Gender Agenda.

Through the Hidden Homeworkers project we've also made links with other multistakeholder initiatives, including Germany's Sustainable Textile Partnership, the Fairwear Foundation in the Netherlands and the Fair Labor Association in the US. HWW has called on all these initiatives to recognise and address the challenges facing homeworkers working with the supply chains of international corporations. It's also been really good to work closely with the Dutch NGO Arisa, on advocacy and brand engagement with leather footwear brands, as their Together for Leather project has been researching different aspects of the same leather footwear supply chains as Hidden Homeworkers in south India.

We continue to support Labour behind the Label's 'Pay Your Workers' campaign, and to participate in the Clean Clothes Campaign, supporting proposals for the European Parliament to pass legislation requiring companies to monitor their supply chains for human rights and environmental issues, and (in theory at least) making it easier for workers and communities to hold them to account where they fall short. Whilst we welcome these proposals, we are concerned that unless carefully drafted and implemented, they could create risks for precarious women workers such as homeworkers. In June 2021 we published a briefing paper discussing the risks of the proposed legislation and how best to ensure its impact is positive.

Communications, Governance and People

Since 2020, we have had a major refresh of the Hidden Homeworkers website, thanks to the skill and hard work of former administrator Ishbel Watson. Our Director regularly blogs on business

and human rights issues; see for example, [How mandatory human rights due diligence could safeguard women homeworkers working within global supply chains](#), and [Concerning evidence from the field ...](#), the latter highlighting concerning evidence from our partner SAVE in Tirupur, revealing increased informalisation of work & ETI base code breaches in textile supply chains in Tirupur in Tamil Nadu, India. We also post regularly on LinkedIn, where Lucy has a strong network of connections interested in our work, and have set up a regular Newsletter on Mailchimp, which now goes to over 300 partners, NGOs, supporters, donors and brands.

In 2021, after much deliberation, trustees decided that HWW should apply for charity status. Our application was successful and will, we hope, bring benefits for our fundraising work and thus contribute to the future sustainability of the organisation. The remainder of the Hidden Homeworkers project will be delivered under our existing company structure, but when that project ends in September 2023, we will transition all our operations across to the new charitable organisation.

We also decided to close the office in Dock Street, as staff were increasingly working from home (and for our administrator at the time, home had relocated to Glasgow!). Thanks to Linda Devereux, the office manager at Dock Street (and also HWW treasurer!), for all your support prior to and during this transition and to Al Garthwaite, one of our trustees, who has very generously provided a temporary home for our archives.

In 2021, we were contacted by a historian at Cambridge University, keen to develop a funded doctoral studentship based on these same archives. Our proposal was accepted and in 2022, Rose Dryzek, an Australian doctoral student started her PhD. Her fieldwork includes a commitment to work with HWW to sort and document this material, to provide an edited collection that will eventually be donated to Feminist Archives North hosted at Leeds University.

Our Director Lucy Brill continues to lead the organisation, ably supported by Peter Williams our Labour Rights policy consultant, and a team of great trustees. In 2022 Shanta Bhavnani agreed to join us as a trustee; she brings valuable experience of international human rights work, as well as legal and fundraising expertise. Jacqui Mackay also took over from Julie Jarman as chair of the organisation (although we're very glad to say that Julie remains a trustee). During this period we have had three Administrators; Ishbel Watson (until Dec 2021), Jeanne Volshenk (March – June 2022) and Gudrun Lauret (Sept 2022 – present).

HWW People

Director: Lucy Brill. **Admin & Comms:** Gudrun Lauret

Trustees: Linda Devereux, Jacqui McKay, Julie Jarman, Catriona Purdy, Peter Williams, Shanta Bhavnani, Al Garthwaite

Academic Adviser: Dr. Annie Delaney

Funding

In 2021-22 we received funding from the European Commission, Leeds City Council (Covid grants), the Ethical Trading Initiative, Liberty Retail Ltd, and from an anonymous donor, as well as several smaller donations from individuals.

With many thanks to all our funders, staff and trustees – and to our partners in South Asia, and allies here in Europe - for all their support during this challenging period.