

Homeworkers Worldwide Annual Report 2020



[Homeworker stitching leather shoe uppers, Tamil Nadu]

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Homeworkers Worldwide Activity Summary 2020

2020 has been a challenging year for all, especially for those living on low incomes around the world. Economic shutdowns led many brands to cancel orders from their overseas suppliers, in many cases, even when these had been completed and were ready to ship to the UK! As informal workers, homeworkers are rarely able to claim social security, and many were also excluded from the minimal emergency relief that was available in some producer countries. We've been keen to work with our local partners in South Asia, to support them as they seek ways to respond to the continuing crisis.

At Homeworkers Worldwide although we've always engaged with overseas partners virtually, we've also had to adjust to the 'new normal', with our staff team working from home, and trustee meetings transferring to zoom. This year we've grown our small staff team, with Ishbel Watson joining us in March 2020, bringing order to our finances and admin, and her excellent design skills to strengthen our communications. We also have a new trustee Jacqui Mackay, and a wonderful team of volunteers committed to supporting our work. We are grateful that despite the extreme circumstances of 2020, our team has remained focused to continue our work.

The Coronavirus Pandemic

Covid-19 has had a severe impact on homeworkers across the world, as many brands responded to the initial lockdowns in the global North by cancelling orders and refusing to pay even for completed goods. As a result, many local factories had no money to pay their factory workers, let alone informal workers such as homeworkers, who were often left unpaid for completed orders. In many supply chains, production has been slow to restart, leading to on-going hardship for homeworkers and their families, including those [stitching shoes](#) and [making clothes](#) in Tamil Nadu, South India. As informal workers, homeworkers are rarely able to benefit from their employer's social security schemes, and some may be excluded even from emergency food relief, if they are migrants without the necessary residents' permits.

At HWW, we have focused our efforts in supporting our partners to address how best to respond to these unprecedented times. We continue to support the Clean Clothes Campaign's [Pay your Workers](#) action, calling upon brands to take responsibility for unpaid workers within their supply chains. In July, our Hidden Homeworkers partner [HNSA](#) released a [joint statement](#) calling on brands to make a supply-chain relief contribution (SRC) to compensate the wage loss of all their production workers, including time-rated, piece-rated, subcontracted and homeworkers.

All local partners were also able to adapt their project activities to provide Covid-specific health and safety training and emergency relief, and also temporary livelihoods support, through making and marketing face masks. SAVE, our partner in the garment manufacturing hub in western Tamil Nadu, supported a group of homeworkers to register their own unorganised workers trade union. On May 22nd they joined the nationwide day of action called by the Indian Trade Union Movement to resist the Covid-related labour law reform.

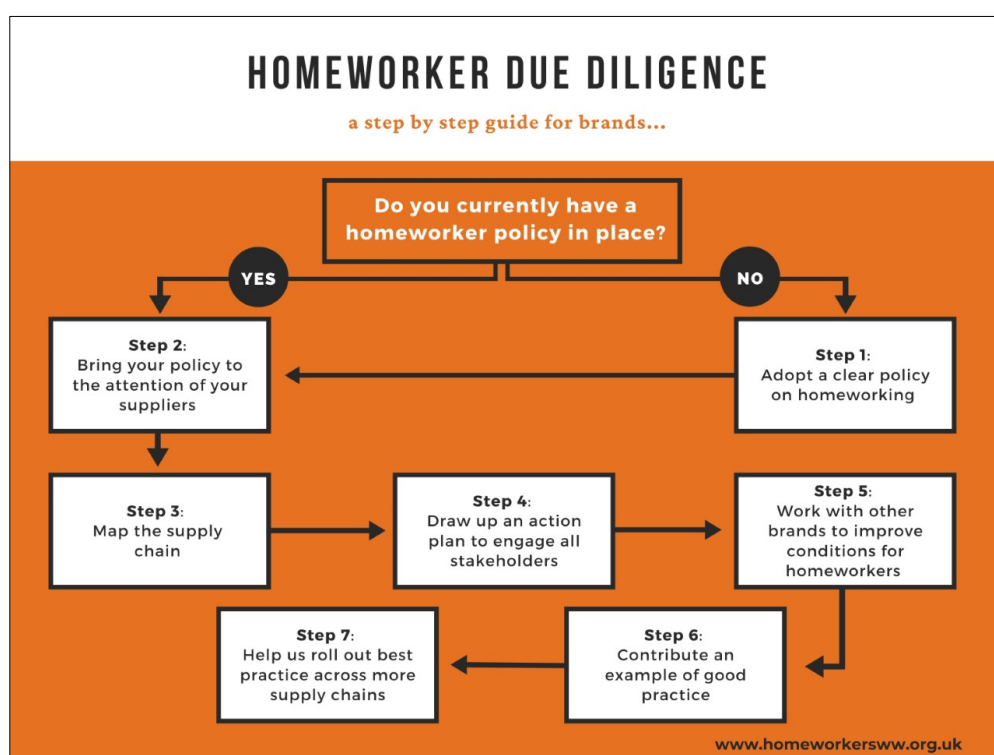


1SAVE volunteers prepare Food parcels

HWW we were able to support their relief work through a JustGiving page to support migrant families in the area excluded from government support, which raised £881. Thank-you to all those who supported our Appeal!

Hidden Homeworkers

We continue to work on the Hidden Homeworkers project led by our partners Traidcraft Exchange, and co-funded by the EU. This four-year programme works with HomeNet South Asia and their member organisations in four locations, and seeks to improve the working conditions of homeworkers making clothes and footwear in India, Nepal and Pakistan, for sale by international brands and retailers. HWW leads the brand engagement activity strand, seeking to hold companies to account for working conditions throughout their supply chains, and seeking ways to work with brands and suppliers to improve transparency and working conditions, right down to the homeworkers. This infographic provides a useful map of the different stages on this journey, as brands firstly recognise homeworkers' rights, and then work with other supply chain stakeholders to introduce tools to improve transparency, and then to improve pay and working conditions.



Networking

In the first quarter of 2020, through the Hidden Homeworkers, HWW was able to promote homeworkers' rights at major events including the OECD's Garment and Footwear Forum in Paris in February 2020. Although the global pandemic put a stop to further international travel, we have been continued to represent Hidden Homeworkers at online events arranged by the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative, the German Sustainable Textiles Partnership and the US' Fair Labor Association.

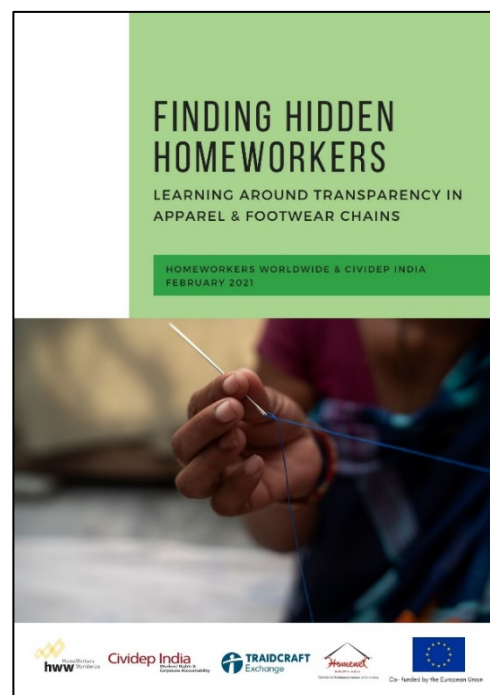
UK Textile and Garment Industry

The pandemic also exposed once again the precarious situation of workers within UK textile and garment manufacturing. Last year HWW's campaign partner [Labour Behind the Label](#) highlighted continuing serious labour rights abuses in Leicester, with brands such as Boohoo failing to pay workers

minimum wage. This situation was compounded by the pandemic, with reports of workers who had tested positive being threatened with losing their jobs if they did not come in to work in the factory. HWW has supported [on-going calls](#) for effective action to address these concerning issues, in Leicester and also in other UK production hubs, including [Greater Manchester](#), where we carried out our own research in 2018.

Research and Publications

Through the Hidden Homeworkers project and in partnership with Cividep India, we have completed [research](#) to document the experiences of practitioners who have sought to improve homeworkers' conditions, and in 2021, we will launch a new Toolkit for Brands, collating tools and best practice to improve transparency and traceability in homeworker supply chains. We have also written [blogs](#) for the Ethical Trading Initiative, and completed a gendered analysis of our work to improve transparency and piece rates for homeworkers stitching leather Footwear in South India. This [report](#) was produced using a template from Bananalink and Women Working Worldwide, and extends this important series of gendered case studies in agro-export industries into textile and footwear manufacturing.



In 2020 we also worked with Cividep India and RMIT University (Melbourne, Australia) to create a [blog series](#) titled 'Invisible Workers', hosted by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. This provided a great opportunity to highlight the challenges faced by homeworkers within global supply chains, and the adverse impact of Covid 19 and subsequent lockdowns. HWW's contribution explores the relationship between [homeworking and child labour](#), explaining how the oft-repeated link between homeworkers and child labour is driven by low piece rates and insecure work, and highlighting [recent research](#) that shows that when well-managed, homeworking can bring positive benefits for children.

Funding

During 2020, Homeworkers Worldwide secured funding from the European Community, the Ethical Trading Initiative's Participation Fund, Pentland Brands, Leeds City Council and a number of individual donors. Our financial situation remains challenging, particularly as our current Hidden Homeworkers project includes a significant match funding requirement.

Thanks

Our thanks to all our funders, trustees (including Peter Williams and Nesta Holden), our staff and team of volunteers: Caitlin Robinson, Meg Rowley, Shanta Bhavnani, Beth Nagle, John Ward and Maya Fabrizio.

Director: Lucy Brill. Admin & Comms: Ishbel Watson. Trustees: Linda Devereux, Al Garthwaite, Nesta Holden, Julie Jarman, Catriona Purdy, Peter Williams, Jacqui MacKay. Academic Adviser: Dr. Annie Delaney.