

Enhancing Social Protection for Home-Based Workers in the Digital Era in Kenya

Summary

This briefing summarises evidence gathered through a combination of survey data, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with informal workers working from home in different sectors in rural and urban areas of Kenya. It explores the extent to which digitalization enhances or exacerbates access to social protection and the role of informal worker associations in facilitating member access to formal social protection schemes. The article provides unique insight into what characterizes informal workers, and the circumstances under which associations may ensure social protection for their members. Our analysis shows that members of informal worker associations are significantly more likely to participate in formal insurance schemes compared with non-members, albeit with some variation across location, sector, and worker types. Moreover it shows that informal worker associations often play a dual role by providing both direct short-term social cushioning and enabling enrolment in formal social insurance schemes.

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Background

The ILO Convention No. 177 defines home based work as work carried out by a person in a home setting or in other premises of the individual's choice, other than the workplace of the employer for business (making of products or a service for sale). These categories of workers include - teleworkers like digital platform workers (working remotely in their homes), handicrafts, and electronic assembly among others¹, including garment stitching, weaving, embroidery, food processing, automobile and mechanical repair².

¹ <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/working-home-invisibility-decent-workce> - Geneva: ILO, 2021.

² <https://www.wiego.org/blog/tracking-home-based-workers-ethiopia-and-kenya>

The ILO report show that only ten member states have ratified convention No.177 which promotes equal treatment of home-based workers³.

Globally there are about 260 million home-based workers, representing about 8% of the global workforce with women being the majority at 56 %⁴. In Kenya (83%) of the Labour force is in the informal sector where Home based workers are also included. Therefore, there is urgent need to develop regulations that will ensure the informal sector challenges are addressed⁵.

Key Messages

As digitalisation transforms industries and work practices, it is essential to ensure that Home based workers are not overlooked or left behind. Here is why integrating digitalization and robust social protection measures for this sector is both a necessity and an opportunity:-

- **Inclusion in the Digital Economy and Social protection:** Digital tools and platforms can provide home-based and informal workers with greater access to markets, training, and resources. By facilitating their digital inclusion, worker associations can enable these workers to improve productivity, increase earnings, and secure a fair share of economic growth.
- **Access to Social Protection:** Integrating digital solutions can streamline the delivery of benefits such as health insurance, pensions, and unemployment support. This ensures that these workers receive the safety net they need to maintain their well-being and economic security.
- **Data-Driven Digital technology:** - Can provide valuable data incorporating sectors that had been excluded like home based workers for effective planning and inclusion in social protection

³<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/homeworkers-need-be-better-protected-says-ilo>

⁴<https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/working-home-invisibility-decent-work:ILO,2021>

⁵<https://repository.kippira.or.ke/handle/123456789/4819>:KIPPRA 2023 Discussion paper: Analyzing structural heterogeneity self-employment in Kenya

- **Empowerment through Education and Training:** Investing in digital literacy and training programs equips home-based and informal workers with the skills needed to thrive in a digital economy. This not only enhances their employability but also supports their ability to adapt to technological changes.
- **Promoting Fair Competition:** As digital platforms grow, it's crucial to create a level playing field. Ensuring that home-based and informal workers have access to the same digital tools and protections as their formal counterparts helps prevent unfair competition and exploitation.

The issues

Home-based workers are often “invisible” in policies and are hidden in the confines of their homes. Moreover, majority of home-based workers are women and therefore invisibility of their contribution reinforces of the negative stereotypes of women contribution in the Labour Market⁶.

As Kenya rapidly advances into the digital era, this workforce ‘invisibility’ in policies translates into lack of prioritization for inclusion in state social protection programmes, making them more vulnerable to any shock.

Call to Action

Informal workers associations should advocate to national and local government policymakers, officials, agencies and regulators to:-

- **Invest in Digital Infrastructure:** Develop and support digital infrastructure that facilitates access and connectivity for home-based and informal workers.
- **Design Inclusive Policies:** Create policies that integrate these workers into formal social protection systems through digital means.
- **Promote Digital Literacy:** Fund and support educational programs that enhance digital skills for these workers.

⁶ <https://repository.kippira.or.ke/handle/123456789/4819> Phyllis Mumia Machio , et al., (March 2024); *Women’s Participation in Decent Work in Kenya, Working paper, University of Nairobi and Partnership for Economic Policy*

- **Foster Collaboration:** Engage with stakeholders, including worker organizations and digital platforms, to ensure that policies are practical and responsive to the needs of home-based and informal workers.
- **Develop New Social Protection Mechanisms:** Create and implement tailored social protection measures specifically designed for the diverse needs of home-based workers, addressing their unique employment patterns and income irregularities.
- **Improve Data Collection and Research:** Enhance the collection of data and conduct research to better understand the demographics, needs, and challenges of home-based workers, thereby informing more effective and targeted policy interventions

Conclusion

By adopting these recommendations, Kenya can create a more inclusive and equitable framework that ensures these workers benefit from digital advancements and have access to essential social protections. This approach will not only improve the livelihoods of these workers but also contribute to a more robust and resilient economy.

Let's work together to build a future where every worker, regardless of their work setting, is valued and protected.