

Part IV
**Home work
and the COVID-19 pandemic**

► 1. Introduction

156. As the Committee noted in its 2020 General Survey, work may be carried out in many different settings, which can include the employer's premises, but also the worker's home or other premises that the worker may choose.²⁴⁶ Home work is extremely diverse, ranging from traditional crafts to the garment and textile sectors, assembly and packaging and information technology services, including telework. The Committee recalls in this regard that, during the preparatory work, not all countries agreed on the need or the timeliness of addressing telework in the context of homework, given their many substantive differences with respect to issues such as working conditions or the categories of workers involved.²⁴⁷

157. Home work is a main source of income for millions of workers around the world, most of whom are women, and who are concentrated in the informal economy. Homework is also an important link in national and global supply chains, often at the lowest levels.²⁴⁸

158. The Committee recalls that the central objective of Convention No. 177 and Recommendation No. 184 is twofold.²⁴⁹ First, the Convention calls on Members to adopt, implement and periodically review a national policy on home work aimed at improving the situation of homeworkers, in consultation with the social partners and, where they exist, with organizations concerned with homeworkers and those of employers of homeworkers (Article 3). Second, the Convention calls for the national policy on home work to promote equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners (Article 4).

► 2. Working from home in response to the pandemic

159. In March 2020, as lockdowns were imposed around the world to impede the spread of the virus, large portions of the world's workforce, estimated at close to one-in-five workers globally, found themselves working from home.²⁵⁰ As of mid-April 2020, measures had been taken in 59 countries to implement teleworking for public service personnel deemed to be non-essential.²⁵¹ In addition, many governments have encouraged private employers to allow working from home to promote social distancing.²⁵² This unprecedented experiment in working from home has led to renewed interest in its implications for both workers and employers. Organizations that had never entertained the possibility of their workers working from home have started to do so and have seen potential gains from using this form of working, including the possibility of reducing costs. As will be seen below, working from home presents a number of challenges for workers. One of these challenges lies in the question of who should bear the costs of working from home, such as electricity costs, space and furniture, computers, printers, headphones or connectivity. These costs normally fall on the employer, but are often shifted to the worker in the context of telework. Furthermore, telework also presents other risks, such as the blurring of lines between the worker's personal and professional life, the

²⁴⁶ ILO, General Survey of 2020, para. 476; Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177), Article 1.

²⁴⁷ ILO: Home work, Report V(1), 1995, 10 and 78. See also 2020 General Survey, paras 614 and ss.

²⁴⁸ ILO, General Survey of 2020, para. 482, citing Jenna Harvey, [Homework, Gender and Inequality in Global Supply Chains, Discussion Paper](#), (UN Women and WIEGO, 2018); Jenna Harvey, [Homeworkers in Global Supply Chains: A Review of Literature](#), (WIEGO Resource Document No. 11, 2019).

²⁴⁹ ILO General Survey of 2020, para. 489; Convention No. 177, Articles 3 and 4.

²⁵⁰ ILO, [Working from Home: Estimating the Worldwide Potential](#), Policy Brief, April 2020.

²⁵¹ ILO, [Working from Home](#).

²⁵² ILO, [Working from Home](#).

right to disconnect and the issue of privacy. Moreover, due to their isolation, homeworkers face increased risks of domestic violence and sexual harassment.²⁵³

160. The ILO has estimated that in 2019, prior to the pandemic, there were approximately 260 million home-based workers worldwide, representing almost 8 per cent of global employment. Following the onset of the pandemic, this number now far exceeds the 2019 figures.²⁵⁴

161. As lockdowns were imposed, the ILO estimated that approximately 15–18 per cent of the world's employed population could work from home, with figures ranging from one-in-three in Northern America and Europe to one-in-six in sub-Saharan Africa.

162. Much research has been carried out into the potential of home work as a response to crisis²⁵⁵ and to estimate the extent to which different occupations could be carried out remotely. It is expected that labour force survey data compiled after the onset of the pandemic will confirm the greatly increased percentage of workers who are working from home. The estimates will also help to determine the activities that cannot be undertaken remotely (for example, plant operation, building and assembly, and sales work).

163. In any event, many enterprises have discovered through practice that working from home offers the opportunity to continue working while preventing the spread of the virus and ensuring the safety of workers. In order to survive, some enterprises have had to convert their activity, as demand has fallen drastically during lockdown. For example, in many countries, homeworkers are producing PPE for local use, often much more rapidly than industry.²⁵⁶

164. Studies that have examined experiences of working from home during the pandemic have highlighted the important divides between countries. The number of people who are able to perform the same occupations from home varies significantly from one country to another. In many developing countries, the great majority of workers are in sectors in which work cannot be carried out from home (such as construction and informal services). National differences are also due to the digital divide, resulting from poor connectivity, the scarcity of computers and communication devices, and lack of training and knowledge of the main tools for remote working.

165. As working from home is likely to take on greater relevance in future, it is useful to probe more deeply into its implications for employers and workers, the associated labour and social rights, and the action and policies adopted to ensure that home work is decent work.

Teleworking as a crisis response measure

166. The Committee notes that, following the outbreak of the pandemic, the urgent measures adopted in many countries to contain the spread of the virus gave rise to a significant increase in the use of teleworking as an alternative working arrangement that can both protect workers from infection and ensure business continuity. Beginning in March 2020, a large proportion of the world's workforce started working from home. As employers began to rely increasingly on teleworking and adapted their operations to facilitate the practice, many enterprises noted the potential advantages of teleworking, including savings on rent, office space and utility costs.

167. However, the transition to teleworking is not always easy. Many companies have not moved to paperless or digitalized operations. MSMEs in particular find it more difficult and expensive than larger enterprises to adapt to teleworking, which means they often cannot survive long periods of lockdown. Access to information and communication technology (ICT) is also a challenge in many countries.

²⁵³ The Committee recalls in this regard, the provisions of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

²⁵⁴ ILO, [Working from home: From invisibility to decent work](#), Geneva, 2021.

²⁵⁵ General Survey of 2020, paragraph 491.

²⁵⁶ ILO, [Working from Home](#); WIEGO, [Informal Workers in the COVID-19 Crisis: A Global Picture of Sudden Impact and Long-Term Risk](#).

168. From the viewpoint of workers, working conditions change radically when working from home. For some workers, home means the possibility to work without interruption. However, the general lockdown has meant that many workers have had to share their working space with other members of their family, making their work more stressful. Many workers have had to assume greater family responsibilities due to the closure of schools and other facilities. For some workers, working from home can be synonymous with isolation, which can have a detrimental impact on their mental and physical health and productivity.²⁵⁷ It is therefore crucial to ensure that teleworkers are in contact with supervisors, colleagues and the organization as a whole.²⁵⁸

Brazil – 13 per cent of the workers interviewed during a special round of the continuous national household survey (PNADC) indicated in May 2020 that they were teleworking to avoid being exposed to the virus, or because of the lockdown. One quarter of these teleworkers are professionals, 19 per cent are teachers and 8 per cent are managers. In comparison, only 5 per cent of the workforce are professionals, 4 per cent are teachers and 3 per cent are managers. A worker's occupation can therefore determine not only who may be able to telework, but also who is more likely in practice to be engaged in teleworking.²⁵⁹

Slovenia – In 2019, the Labour Inspectorate received information on 2,036 (2018: 1,379) agreements on homeworking. Most cases concerned office work by means of computers and appropriate information technology. Home work was offered to workers with employment contracts concluded for an indefinite period and in some cases also to workers with fixed-term contracts. In the first half of 2020, including the time of the declared coronavirus epidemic, the number of persons working from home increased significantly. The Inspectorate was informed about home working arrangements by 10,525 employers.

The *IOE* highlights that lockdowns and confinements have accelerated the digitalization and modernization of work processes and work arrangements. Many companies have shifted their business operations online and allowed their employees to work remotely from home. This has created a push to develop new business models, an increase in online platforms that match demand and supply of goods, and a need for upskilling technological tools for online meetings, collaborative work and client engagement. This development has created new opportunities as well as new challenges for employees and employers. For example, digitalization offers more flexibility of arrangements and opportunities to modernize business operations by making them more eco-friendly and app-based. However, it also poses new risks with cyber threats and privacy concerns. These new developments are still in the early stages and are likely to evolve over time as we adjust our attitudes and habits to accommodate the use of technology. It is important that home work policies not be restricted or limited to the existing forms of technological advancement by heavy regulations and policies, in order to reap the benefits and opportunities of these changes.

²⁵⁷ See Part V below.

²⁵⁸ ILO, [Teleworking During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: A Practical Guide](#), 2020, 10.

²⁵⁹ *Brazil*, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, “[Em maio, 13,3% das pessoas ocupadas exerceram tele-trabalho. Estudo teve por base PNAD Covid-19 do IBGE](#)” 8 July 2020.

Business New Zealand indicates that the COVID-19 epidemic has highlighted the growing importance of telework for employees who would not have previously been categorised as homeworkers. The extent to which this changed approach to work will become permanent is not yet clear, but for both employees and employers it raises questions that relate to matters such as health and safety responsibilities, whether work activities should, or can, be supervised, responsibility for the cost of consumables such as power, computer use, printing, heating, and so on. Questions of this sort will likely increase in significance the longer the 'new way of working' continues. Business NZ further highlights that the extent to which the growing 'working from home' phenomenon will affect pay rates and other terms and conditions cannot yet be known. But it could undermine attempts to unionise and to bargain collectively.²⁶⁰

169. The Committee has addressed the use of telework in its 2018 General Survey concerning working-time instruments,²⁶¹ as well as in its 2020 General Survey, where it notes that telework carries with it both advantages and disadvantages. Workers may benefit from reduced commuting times, increased flexibility in organizing their work, and a better balance between their personal and professional responsibilities. At the same time, given the limitations concerning access and availability of care systems, home work may give rise to a double burden for workers with family responsibilities.

Australia – The [Child Care Subsidy Amendment \(Coronavirus Response Measures No. 2\) Minister's Rules 2020](#) established a new funding arrangement for the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its impact on child care enrolments and attendance. The new arrangements make child care services fee-free for families. The changes took effect on 6 April 2020 and remained in place until 28 June 2020.

Luxembourg revised its rules regarding special leave entitlements for family reasons. According to the Labour Code, salaried employees with a child under the age of 18, who requires the presence of one of his parents in the event of a serious illness, accident or other compelling health reason, were eligible for this entitlement. The situation of a child who has been isolated or placed in quarantine or confinement at home by the competent authorities with a view to containing the spread of an epidemic has now been added to the list of compelling health reasons. Subsequently, the list was expanded to also include the situation of a child in school under the age of 13 whose school was closed or whose classes remained suspended for reasons directly related to the health crisis or who cannot be cared for by any school or reception facility.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ The Committee recalls in this regard that Article 4(2)(a) provides for the right of homeworkers to establish and join organizations of their own choosing and to participate in the activities of such organizations. Paragraphs 11 and 12 of Recommendation No. 184 indicate that the national policy on homework should address any obstacle or restriction in this respect. In its 2020 General Survey, the Committee dealt with this question in paragraphs 556 to 559.

²⁶¹ ILO, [General Survey Concerning Working-Time Instruments – Ensuring Decent Working Time for the Future](#), 2018, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Report III (Part B), International Labour Conference, 107th Session, paras 736–745; ILO General Survey of 2020, para. 617; Eurofound and ILO, *Working Anytime, Anywhere: The Effects on the World of Work*, (2019 Update), February 2017.

²⁶² [Demander un congé pour raisons familiales lié à la pandémie COVID-19](#) .

170. Employers may also benefit from cost savings, in terms of reduced office space, utilities and other expenses. On the other hand, disadvantages for workers often include a tendency to work longer hours, as well as increased costs for utilities, equipment and office space in the home – all leading to greater challenges in maintaining the balance of responsibilities.

Switzerland – An employee who was working from home lodged a complaint against his employer, maintaining that he should be reimbursed by the employer for the additional costs he was required to bear. He claimed that, in order to work from home, he had had to take over a specific room in the family home as a home office, and had incurred additional expenses for electricity and related costs. The Swiss Supreme Court found in favour of the plaintiff.²⁶³

171. Some countries had already introduced legal provisions on telework as crisis response.

France – Ordinance N° 2017-1387 of 22 September 2017 amended the Labour Code to introduce section L.1222-11, which provides that, in exceptional circumstances, including the threat of an epidemic, or in the event of force majeure, the implementation of telework may be considered as an adaptation of the job made necessary to allow the continuity of the enterprise's activity and guarantee the protection of employees.

Peru – Supreme Decree No. 010-2020-TR, contains provisions on remote work. The Government indicates that the main characteristics of remote work are: The employer has the power to unilaterally implement remote work in the present emergency context; – The variation to remote work does not affect the nature of the employment relationship, the remuneration and other economic conditions applicable to the employment relationship; - The ordinary working time that applies is the working time agreed with the employer in advance (i.e. when work is performed in person) or that which the parties have agreed upon in connection with the remote work. The constitutional limit of 8 hours per day or 48 hours per week applies; the employer must inform the worker of the occupational safety and health measures and conditions that must be observed during the performance of the remote work, including those to eliminate or reduce the most frequent risks in this modality; computer, telecommunications and similar equipment and means (Internet, telephone or other) that are necessary for the provision of the service may be provided by the employer or the worker; when the worker provides the means or mechanisms for remote work, the parties may agree on the form of compensation for the additional expenses arising from the use of such means; the employer assigns the necessary facilities for access to the computer systems or applications required.

²⁶³ Federal Tribunal, ruling No. 4A_533/2018, of 23 April 2019. However, see M. Mueller, and C. Roos. [COVID-19: Supreme Court Ruling on Mandatory Compensation for Use of Home Office Does NOT Apply to Remote Working During COVID-19 Pandemic](#), Pestolazzi Attorneys at Law, 25 May 2020.

Spain – On 23 September 2020, the Royal Decree Law 28/2020 of 22 September, on remote working distinguishes between remote work and on-site work. Remote work is defined as the work activity which is carried out in the worker’s home or in the place chosen by the worker, during all or part of the working day, on a regular basis. Teleworking is defined as type of remote working carried out exclusively or predominantly using computer, telematic and telecommunication means and systems. The Law guarantees the equal rights between on-site and remote workers and the same total remuneration among workers. It guarantees the right of the worker to return to work on-site. Also, remote workers will have priority for new jobs that are totally or partially performed on-site. The new law further establishes that the remote working agreement must be in writing and that the costs involved in remote work should be compensated by the company.

172. The Committee notes that the temporary introduction of mandatory home working, and particularly teleworking, in many countries was itself a measure introduced by the government or by employers to protect the safety and health of their employees.

Greece – The Government indicates in its report that, due to the steady rise of COVID-19 cases in the region of Attica, mandatory telework of 40 per cent of employees in the private and public sectors was decided.

Israel – The Government indicates in its report that, to cope with the consequences of the pandemic, special arrangements have been made in the private and public sectors to extend the possibility of homeworking in order to reduce physical presence at the workplace.

173. The Committee further notes that the policy framework proposed by the ILO to address the pandemic includes teleworking as one of the measures recommended for the protection of workers as well as employers.²⁶⁴ A number of countries have developed regulations governing telework as a policy response to COVID-19.

Belgium – “Telehomework” is among the emergency measures introduced in response to the pandemic. It is mandatory in non-essential sectors for employees whose work allows it, requiring such workers to work from home.

²⁶⁴ ILO, [COVID-19 and the World of Work: Impact and Policy Responses](#), ILO Monitor, 1st Edition, 18 March 2020.

Ecuador – The Humanitarian Support Act of 19 June 2020 introduced amendments into the Labour Code regulating telework.²⁶⁵ The legislation now makes a distinction between: autonomous teleworkers, who work permanently outside enterprise premises; mobile teleworkers, who have no fixed workplace and whose main working tools are ICT on mobile devices; part-time teleworkers, who work two or three days a week at home and the rest of the week in the workplace; and occasional teleworkers.²⁶⁶

Malawi – The Ministry of Labour, Skills and Innovation has issued COVID-19 workplace guidelines that promote teleworking for “non-critical” staff.²⁶⁷ The April 2020 guidelines were developed in consultation with the Employers’ Consultative Association of Malawi (ECAM) and with workers and trade unions through the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) and businesses through the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI) and drawing on the technical expertise of the ILO.²⁶⁸

Saudi Arabia – The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development issued guidelines in March 2020 on remote working in the private sector.²⁶⁹

174. Some countries have taken measures to: enable the electronic registration of employees working from home;²⁷⁰ simplify the safety and health obligations of employers in respect of teleworkers;²⁷¹ ensure that workers are compensated for costs arising from teleworking;²⁷² ensure the recognition of work-related accidents occurring at home;²⁷³ and temporarily simplify the procedures enabling employers to apply for subsidies for the introduction of flexible working arrangements, including remote working.²⁷⁴

Republic of Moldova – In its report, the Government indicates that the Labour Code was modified in 2020 and provides that workers engaged in remote work enjoy the same rights and guarantees provided by the law for workers who work on enterprise premises. The conditions for remote work may be established in the collective agreement, in the employment contract or in the internal regulations of the enterprise. The employer is responsible for the safety and health of workers performing work remotely.

²⁶⁵ New section following section 16 of the Labour Code. The new section following section 25 of the Basic Public Service Act introduces a similar provision for the public sector. See also Ministerial Decision No. MDT-2020-076 on “emerging telework”. Teleworking had already been the subject of Ministerial Decisions covering the private and public sectors, adopted in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

²⁶⁶ Legal provisions regulating teleworking have also been adopted in other countries, for example in the *Plurinational State of Bolivia* ([Supreme Decree No. 4218 of 14 April 2020](#)) and *Ukraine* (Law No. 540-IX of 30 March 2020 amending certain legislative acts to ensure additional social and economic guarantees in connection with the spread of coronavirus).

²⁶⁷ *Malawi*, Ministry of Labour, Skills and Innovation, [COVID-19 Workplace Guidelines](#), April 2020.

²⁶⁸ *Malawi*, [Joint press release, Ministry of Labour Skills and Innovation \(MOLSI\), Government of Malawi, Employers Consultative Association of Malawi, Malawi Congress of Trade Unions and International Labour Organization](#), April 2020.

²⁶⁹ Saudi Press Agency. [Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development Issues Guideline for Remote Work in Private Sector](#), 17 March 2020.

²⁷⁰ For example, in *Greece*.

²⁷¹ For example, in *Croatia* and *Spain* ([Royal Legislative Decree No. 8/2020 of 17 March 2020, section 5](#)).

²⁷² For example, in *France*.

²⁷³ For example, *Argentina* and *Austria*.

²⁷⁴ For example, *Republic of Korea*.

175. While taking due note of the measures taken by many countries to ensure some level of protection to those workers that are teleworking, the Committee highlights the challenges that telework (and home work in general) presents to employers and the public authorities. These include issues such as occupational safety and health or working time, as well as how to ensure their effective implementation and supervision.

176. Policy responses have sometimes taken the form of agreements between the social partners.

Côte d'Ivoire – A nationwide bipartite memorandum of understanding for a joint COVID-19 response recommends the implementation of teleworking whenever possible.²⁷⁵

Germany – In companies with works councils, rights and obligations regarding home work are usually regulated in an agreement which usually contains provisions on the weekly number of home office days, occupational health and safety, data protection, assumption of costs, liability, or other elements. For example, a sectoral crisis agreement has been concluded in the chemical industry which, among other measures, promotes enterprise-level bargaining on teleworking.²⁷⁶

Italy – The regulations adopted in response to the pandemic allow the introduction of smart working arrangements without the conclusion of an individual agreement between the employer and the employee, as is normally required.²⁷⁷

177. Several European countries have concluded bilateral agreements which temporarily allow cross-border workers to telework on a full-time basis without being required to pay social security contributions in their country of residence.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ ILO, [Employers and Workers Negotiating Measures to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19, Protect Livelihoods and Support Recovery: A Review of Practice](#), ILO Brief, July 2020.

²⁷⁶ Planet Labor. [Germany: Chemical Industry Social Partners Strike Crisis Agreement](#), No. 11774, 27 March 2020.

²⁷⁷ *Italy*, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. [Smart Working](#).

²⁷⁸ See in this regard, for example: Wim Cocquyt and Zuzana Jasenovcova. [Impact of COVID-19 on the Applicable Social Security Legislation](#), Fragomen.

► 3. The effects of the pandemic on homeworkers

178. While the pandemic has forced many workers and enterprises to work from home, with its opportunities and challenges, it has also shed light on the difficulties already faced by many workers who rely on home work for their livelihoods. Their situation is aggravated by the risk of exposure to the virus and its socio-economic consequences. The homes in which homeworkers live and work are often crowded and lack basic services, such as running water and sanitation, which means that observing necessary hygiene routines and remaining in isolation, as recommended or required by national authorities, is not feasible. Millions of homeworkers who live in poverty, and often work in the informal economy, need to continue working to survive and to feed themselves and their families. However, the support measures adopted by governments and employers to mitigate the impact of the crisis frequently exclude homeworkers.

(a) Plummeting demand disproportionately affects the income of homeworkers

179. The lockdown measures that shut down entire sectors of national economies, with consumers often reducing the consumption of goods and services to the minimum, has affected the entire economy in many countries and has disrupted the functioning of international and national supply chains. Many enterprises have not been able to produce and/or sell their products. Homeworkers, who are often on the lower tiers of supply chains, have been particularly badly affected as their orders and supplies have been interrupted, with a consequent loss of income.²⁷⁹

(b) The garment sector particularly affected

180. In the garment industry, the pandemic has caused brands and retailers to close shops and cancel orders from sourcing factories, resulting in mass lay-offs and a devastating effect on the livelihood of homeworkers at the lowest tiers of global garment supply chains.²⁸⁰ When retailers curtailed or shut their operations due to lockdown measures, many cancelled existing orders. Not only did homeworkers no longer receive new work orders, but many received no pay for work already completed.²⁸¹ Local communities that depend on work for global supply chains have also been badly affected by cancelled orders.

In *India*, in Tirupur, the “T-shirt factory of the world”, where T-shirts are produced for over 200 international brands, the workforce includes over 40,000 homeworkers, mostly women engaged in embroidery, stitching, making screen prints and appliques, inserting the tie into tracksuit pants, cutting loose threads, removing stains and packaging. Work in Tirupur has been slow since January 2020 due to the lack of raw materials arriving from China in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. With the lockdown in India since 24 March 2020, work has ceased and homeworkers are without any income. Factories in the state of Tamil Nadu, where Tirupur is located, were initially ordered to close until mid-April, and the stay-at-home order was extended.²⁸² Even when the lockdown was lifted, only 25 per cent of homeworkers registered with the Social Awareness and Voluntary Education organization (SAVE) have managed to secure work, albeit at severely reduced piece-rates.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ See the situation in South East Asia in WIEGO, [Home-based workers face a new kind of isolation](#). See for example, Worker Rights Consortium, “[My children don’t have food. I can withstand this hunger, but they cannot: What the crisis means for the people who make collegiate apparel](#) (page 5, example from *El Salvador*).

²⁸⁰ Homenet South Asia, [Voices from the Ground: How COVID-19 has Affected Homeworkers in South Asia’s Garment Supply Chains](#), 18 June 2020.

²⁸¹ ILO, *Home Work Report*; M. von Broembsen, *The World’s Most Vulnerable Garment Workers Aren’t in Factories – and Global Brands Need to Step Up to Protect Them*, WIEGO, 21 April 2020.

²⁸² ILO, *Working From Home*; M. von Broembsen, *The World’s Most Vulnerable Garment Workers. Aren’t in Factories – and Global Brands Need to Step Up to Protect Them*, WIEGO, 21 April 2020.

²⁸³ Homenet South Asia. *Voices from the Ground*.

181. In this context, the Committee encourages governments to consider providing training and placement services, where appropriate, to enable homeworkers and other members of local communities affected by the crisis to upskill or reskill in order to transfer, provisionally or permanently, to other sectors or to pursue alternative income-generating opportunities.

(c) Social security and income support measures

182. The financial hardship faced by homeworkers due to the pandemic is compounded by their lack of access to income support and social protection. In many countries, homeworkers, the majority of whom are in the informal economy, are not covered by the national social security system. They are also often excluded from the COVID-19 support measures taken by governments.

Bulgaria – While Bulgaria has ratified Convention No. 177,²⁸⁴ homeworkers are not covered by the social security system or by the COVID-19 support measures available to employees in enterprises.²⁸⁵

183. In most Asian countries, homeworkers are not covered by emergency relief packages, although certain measures, such as reduced electricity bills, have in some cases been granted to poor households.²⁸⁶

In *India*, under the national social security system, employees receive 70 per cent of their wages when they are on paid sick leave. However, homeworkers are not covered by the scheme, or by other cash transfer measures adopted during the pandemic.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ *Bulgaria* ratified Convention No. 177 on 17 July 2009.

²⁸⁵ Homeworkers in *India* and *Pakistan* face a similar dilemma. According to Homenet South Asia, a regional network of organized homeworkers with members in eight South Asian countries, the economic bail-outs introduced in *India* and *Pakistan* exclude the estimated 38 million self-employed and subcontracted homeworkers in those countries.

²⁸⁶ For example, *Cambodia*, *Lao People's Democratic Republic* and *Nepal*. See: WIEGO, [Home-Based Workers Face a New Kind of Isolation](#), July 2020.

²⁸⁷ See WIEGO, [The world's most vulnerable garment workers aren't in factories—and global brands need to step up to protect them](#), 21 April 2020.

► 4. Measures adopted to safeguard the rights of homeworkers in the context of crisis response and recovery packages

184. Some governments and employers have adopted measures to mitigate the catastrophic effects of loss of income during the pandemic, most of which are applicable to workers in the formal economy. But even where plans exist to provide relief for workers in the informal economy, homeworkers are excluded, or find it very difficult or impossible to claim the relief that is available.²⁸⁸

Thailand – The Government has announced a package including cash grants of 5,000 Bhat, equivalent to 50 per cent of the minimum wage, to help support Thailand's estimated almost 3.7 million homeworkers. The package also includes lower interest loans.²⁸⁹

185. The Committee notes the Call to Action made by brands and retailers/e-tailers, manufacturers, employers' organizations and trade unions, other stakeholders and development partners to address the difficult situation faced by workers in the garment sector, many of whom are homeworkers. The Call is intended to catalyse action across the global garment industry to help manufacturers survive the economic disruption caused by the pandemic and protect the income, health and employment of garment workers. As a result of the Call to Action, the ILO convened an International Working Group, coordinated by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), representatives of clothing brands and manufacturers, workers' and employers' organizations and governments, to further elaborate the implementation steps necessary to deliver on the commitments made.²⁹⁰

Germany – Within the framework of the Call to Action, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is providing €14.5 million to an ILO multi-donor programme to help garment sector workers affected by the pandemic in seven countries. The integrated strategy of the programme is intended to assist both workers and private sector businesses to rebuild their economic activity, mitigate further interruptions in the supply chain and provide direct support to garment sector workers, especially women in *Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar* and *Viet Nam*. The initiative will build on the activities of three existing ILO areas of work, the Vision Zero Fund (VZF), social protection and the Better Work Programme, making use of their local networks and operations.

²⁸⁸ See [WIEGO, Home-based Workers Face a New Kind of Isolation](#).

²⁸⁹ WIEGO, [Home-Based Workers Face a New Kind of Isolation](#).

²⁹⁰ ILO, [COVID-19: Action in the Global Garment Industry](#), 22 April 2020. See also ILO, [ILO/Germany Programme to Protect Garment Workers Affected by COVID-19](#), Multi-donor programme, Press release, 8 September 2020.

186. Moreover, organized homeworkers have demonstrated the benefits of solidarity during the pandemic.

Bulgaria – Home-based workers adopted the original strategy of accompanying their claims to officials with gifts of their wares with a view to drawing attention to the importance of their products for people, local economies and traditions. The strategy was successful and the Council of Ministers, the President and municipal mayors have agreed to provide interest-free loans and other types of support.²⁹¹

Ethiopia – Organized home-based workers have established a task force to raise awareness and educate members about prevention. Women in Self Employment (WISE) is supplementing state distribution of basic food and sanitation products to the most vulnerable households among their 19,000 credit and savings cooperative members.²⁹²

Uruguay – The Single Trade Union of the Needle (SUA) has organized the production of reusable masks by its homeworking members. On 19 March 2020, the first 30,000 masks were completed for the Montevideo Police Union. The Uruguayan judiciary first ordered 6,000 masks to be used at trials and hearings, then increased its order to 20,000 masks. The Montevideo Municipal Office ordered 20,000 masks, then increased its order to 100,000, and the Uruguayan Air Force contacted SUA to request the development of 300 kits containing surgical robes, masks, caps and shoes.²⁹³

187. Similar initiatives have been launched in *Cambodia*, *Ethiopia* and *Kenya*.²⁹⁴

188. It remains to be seen whether teleworking will continue to grow at the rapid pace seen during the pandemic. However, it appears likely that teleworking is here to stay. For all its devastation, the pandemic has nevertheless provided a timely opportunity to reflect on how this modality of work could afford adequate protections and safeguards to ensure decent working conditions for the millions of largely invisible workers who work from their own homes.

Slovenia – At the initiative of the social partners (at the 330th Session of the Economic and Social Council on 3 July 2020), the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities began activities relating to the ratification of Convention No. 177. The ratification will contribute to create awareness and information of workers and employers regarding the possibilities of working from home and the relevant legal framework that enables the organisation of homeworking.

²⁹¹ Leslie Vryenhoek, [Innovation and Unity: How Home-Based Workers are Adapting to the COVID-19 World](#), WIEGO, 11 May 2020.

²⁹² WIEGO, *Home-Based Workers Face a New Kind of Isolation*.

²⁹³ WIEGO, “Experiencia del Sindicato único de la aguja de Uruguay”, 23 de abril de 2020.

²⁹⁴ WIEGO, *Home-Based Workers Face a New Kind of Isolation*.

