

Hidden Homeworkers: Working Towards Improving Transparency And Traceability Of Homeworkers In Garment And Footwear Supply Chains In India, Nepal and Pakistan



The terms ‘invisible’ or ‘hidden’ are often used when referring to women homeworkers in garment and footwear supply chains. Their work is often undervalued and remains unseen by the retailers and brands they produce for. Because of the hidden nature of their work, they are vulnerable. And face issues like, unfair pay, irregular work, poor working conditions, lack of worker rights, human rights abuse, violence and harassment by contractors, and occupational health and safety risks.

Homeworkers rely on contractors or intermediaries for work that supports their livelihood and helps them overcome poverty. For this, they tend to tolerate various injustices. This does not mean that homeworkers should be restricted from taking up work in the supply chains. Cutting their access to work only pushes them further into poverty and disrupts their lives. Instead, homeworkers need support and assistance in developing a common identity that enables them to assert their rights and achieve recognition as vital players in garment and footwear supply chains. Recognising this, HNSA is working with a consortium of partners, both global and local, to address the issues faced by homeworkers and to bring about better visibility for them, especially aiming to bring about recognition for them among brands.

Currently, HNSA is implementing a programme titled “Hidden Homeworkers – Improving Transparency and Traceability to Improve Working Conditions of Homeworkers in Apparel and Footwear Chains”. This is a four-year programme that launched in April 2019. This initiative is co-funded by the European Union and focuses on homeworker issues in apparel and footwear supply chains in India, Nepal, and Pakistan. At the international level, HNSA is currently partnering with Traidcraft Exchange and Homeworkers Worldwide. At the local level, HNSA is closely working with its affiliates, namely, SABAH Nepal, CLASS Nepal, SEWA BHARAT-Delhi, SAVE, and HomeNet Pakistan.

Throughout the programme, it seeks to -

- Build awareness and understanding of the role, rights and working conditions of homeworkers amongst apparel/footwear brands.
- Improve transparency and traceability across apparel/footwear value chains.
- Improve capacity of homeworkers to access their rights, entitlements and services.
- Build coordination and capacity between key stakeholders across the apparel and footwear sectors to enable ongoing development of responsible value chains.

Transparency and traceability that reaches the level of homeworkers is fundamental if brands want to understand the situation of homeworkers. This project strives to increase visibility for homeworkers and increase recognition of their work.

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