

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
ITUC OnLine

Organising for Decent Jobs – Formalising Informal Work

Brussels, 14 July 2016 (ITUC OnLine): The power of workers' organising to fight the desperation of the informal sector is revealed in a new report published by Equal Times <http://www.equaltimes.org/recommendation-204-ending?lang=en#.V3qSmnu9b3U> with case studies from 17 countries documenting union action to formalise informal jobs. The report outlines the success of union organising to transform the lives of waste recycling workers in Brazil, moto-taxi drivers in Rwanda, domestic workers in Belgium and Lebanon, street vendors in Ghana, artists in Uruguay and workers from many other sectors in many other countries. The work of the Indian Self-Employed Women's Association SEWA is highlighted in a country where 92 per cent of the economy is informal, while in the USA, worker-focused alternatives to the so-called "gig" economy, where internet platforms are being used by businesses to break down the employment relationship, are examined.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said: "While debate rages about the future of work at high-level meetings and conferences around the world, people are getting on with the job of shaping the future by organising unions and building workers' power to lift the more than 40 per cent of the world's workforce into formal, decent employment. Anyone who doubts the effectiveness of workers exercising their fundamental right to organise should be convinced of its value once they have read the hard evidence that this report shows."

A common strand through the report is the use of an international instrument, ILO Recommendation 204, which sets out how countries should formalise informal economic activity.

"This is a clear example of the benefits that international labour standards can bring, when governments fulfil their responsibilities and workers are free to organise. With swathes of the global labour market outside the scope of regulation and worker protection, and dangerous informality trends in developing and industrialised countries, there is an urgent need for the lessons from this report and so many other examples of successful union organising to be spread far and wide. The world is experiencing huge levels of inequality and insecurity which are having severe impacts on families and communities, and posing a real threat to a sustainable economy and to democracy and human rights. All of the great advances in history have been made by people working together, and this report shows how the power of workers' organising can deliver decent work now and in the future," said Burrow.

The ITUC represents 180 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 333 national affiliates.

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