



Ethical Trading Initiative
Respect for workers worldwide



Working conditions for homeworkers

What employers need to know...

- ✓ Do you employ workers who carry out work at home?
- ✓ Do you pay workers a piece rate for their work?

Then this leaflet is for you

Even if workers work from their homes, they still have a right to expect fair working conditions. This leaflet tells you what fair treatment means in practice, and what you can do to help improve homeworkers' working conditions.

Millions of women and men around the world do paid work at home. Goods made by these homeworkers are sold in shops in Britain and elsewhere. People buying these goods want to know that the workers making them are earning a decent living. That is why many companies, including some of the biggest UK clothing stores, have joined an organisation called the **Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)**, which seeks to improve the wages and conditions of all workers making their products.

The ETI Base Code

ETI member companies have all signed up to the ETI Base Code. The Code sets out the minimum working conditions that they expect their suppliers and contractors to provide to their workers – including homeworkers. The Code is based on international law. Many homeworkers in India and around the world are making goods for ETI member companies.

What working conditions should homeworkers expect?

The ETI Base Code says that all workers – including homeworkers – should expect the following minimum conditions:



Freedom to choose work

No one should be forced to carry out work and homeworkers should be free to take work from anyone.



Freedom to organise for better conditions

Homeworkers have the right to meet together, to join a homeworkers' association and/or union of their choice, and to negotiate their conditions of employment with contractors.



A safe and healthy workplace

Steps should be taken to prevent accidents and injury to homeworkers arising from their work, and to minimise any work hazards. For example, homeworkers should receive the equipment and training they need to do their job safely.



Protection for children and young people

Children should not miss school because of work and should not be employed in hazardous processes. Homeworkers should be encouraged to send their children to school.



A living wage

Homeworkers should be able to earn enough to live on and support their families. Piece rates should be set so that if homeworkers work 48 hours a week, they would earn at least the legal minimum wage. And they should be paid on time for all the work they do.



Time to rest

Homeworkers should not be forced to work more than 48 hours a week.



No discrimination

Homeworkers should earn the same money and be treated the same as anyone else doing the same job. Employers should not give preference to, or discriminate against, men or women or people from different religions, ethnic groups or castes.



Regular work

Employers and/or contractors should try and offer homeworkers regular work, and they should let them know when work is likely to be available and when it is likely to be in short supply. Homeworkers should receive similar welfare benefits to workers in a factory. If they are not eligible for government schemes, then company-funded or self-help schemes should be made available.



No harsh treatment

Employers should not threaten or shout at homeworkers, or deceive them. Employers should not withhold payment when it is due.

What can you do?

If homeworkers' working conditions do not meet the minimum standards that ETI members and other customers expect you to provide then you can:

- Work with your customers to **negotiate product costs that cover piece rates equal to or higher than the legal minimum wage.**
- **Develop standardised systems for setting piece rates** which ensure that rates paid to homeworkers are equivalent to or higher than the minimum wage.
- Make sure you **pay homeworkers promptly** for their work and check that they receive agreed piece rates.
- **Keep records of the work homeworkers do**, including how long they work, how much they do, how much they are paid, and times that work is distributed and collected.
- Make sure you **pay men and women equally**, for work of equal value.
- **Raise homeworkers' awareness of health and safety issues.** Encourage them to keep their workplace clean, tidy, well lit and ventilated. Help them to avoid working for long hours at a stretch.
- **Encourage homeworkers to register for healthcare schemes and other welfare and savings schemes.** In India, artisans – including homeworkers doing embellishment work – are entitled to receive health care by registering with the Ministry of Textiles.
- Try to **provide regular work to homeworkers.** Let homeworkers know when work is likely to be available or may be in short supply.
- **Do not give homeworkers unreasonable deadlines** for orders. If that is unavoidable, pay them fair overtime rates.
- **Tell homeworkers about issues of children working** and the legal minimum age of employment. Do not allow children to work in hazardous conditions. Encourage homeworkers to send their children to school.
- **Tell homeworkers about their rights** and what they can do about them, in a way they understand.

Information and help

For more information on how to improve homeworkers' conditions, see the **ETI Homeworker Guidelines: What suppliers can do** (www.ethicaltrade.org/in-action/projects/homeworkers-project/guidelines).

Suppliers and contractors in **India** can contact the following organisations for more information about improving conditions for homeworkers:

National Homeworker Group (NHG)

Tel: 099 6845 0952

Email: nhgindia@hotmail.com

Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

SEWA Reception Centre, Opp. Victoria Garden,
Bhadra, Ahmedabad 380 001, India

Tel: 079 2550 6444 / 2550 6477 / 2550 6441

Bareilly Homeworker Group (BHG)

82A Model Town, Bareilly 243 122, India

Tel: 093 1994 4407

Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS)

120 Babur Road, New Delhi 110 001, India

Tel: 011 3315 519 Email: hms@nde.vsnl.net.in