Edited by
URSULA HUWS

ACTION PROGRAMMES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HOMEWORKERS

TEN CASE-STUDIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE GENEVA

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ILO: *Proceedings, Asian Subregional Tripartite Seminar on the Protection of Homeworkers, Manila, 5-9 December 1988* (Geneva, 1989).

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ILO: *Practical actions for the social protection of homeworkers in Philippines* (Bangkok, 1993).

ILO: *Practical actions for the social protection of homeworkers in Thailand* (Bangkok, 1993).

ILO: *Practical actions for the social protection of homeworkers in Indonesia* (Bangkok, 1993).

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ACTION PROGRAMMES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HOMEWORKERS

TEN CASE-STUDIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Edited by
URSULA HUWS

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Preface

This book constitutes part of a series of ILO activities which aim to collect and disseminate information on the social protection of homeworkers. The need to focus attention on this category of workers has grown out of the concern over their precarious employment conditions, which result from their ambiguous legal status, their isolation and low bargaining position. Furthermore, it has been observed in recent years that this form of work is increasing due to the globalization of the economy and a casualization of the labour force.

The preparation of this publication was prompted by the outcome of the Meeting of Experts on the Social Protection of Homeworkers, which the ILO organized in October 1990. Among the action proposed by the experts, particular mention was made of the need to exchange information on successful strategies and programmes that have aimed to improve the working and living conditions of homeworkers.

The purpose of this study is to promote action through the provision of practical examples of programmes that have contributed to breaking the isolation of homeworkers, making them aware of their rights, helping them to organize and to increase their bargaining power, and generally improving their socio-economic situation through the provision of assistance and support services. When selecting examples for inclusion in this study from among some of the better-known programmes identified in previous ILO work, an effort was made to illustrate the range of types of programmes, and cover different countries and regions. The presentations follow a common outline which placed special emphasis on the background and history of the programme, the steps that were followed leading to the results achieved, the lessons learned in the course of implementation and the potential to replicate the programme in other settings. The case-studies were written in the course of 1993 by authors who had a direct knowledge of the programme in question.

Other activities of the ILO on the issue of home work have resulted in a number of publications and have included various technical cooperation projects, particularly in the Asian region. This work helped to prepare the ground for the selection of home work as an agenda item for discussion at the International Labour Conference in

1995. It will be for the tripartite delegations of over 170 ILO member States attending the Conference to decide whether international standards for the protection of homeworkers are appropriate and if so what form they should take.

It is hoped that this publication will also make a contribution to the general debate on the question of home work at the Conference and demonstrate how legislation to protect homeworkers can be reinforced through action programmes.

F.J. Dy,
Chief,
Conditions of Work and
Welfare Facilities Branch

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New information and communications technologies now permit workers to perform their jobs far from central offices, production facilities or co-workers. Telework, sometimes called "telecommuting", is found in workers' homes in satellite or neighbourhood centres, and in mobile jobs without any fixed location. In the 1970s and early 1980s, it was predicted that electronic work at home would become the norm for many millions of workers and change social and business patterns established since the start of the Industrial Revolution. This has not happened, and it is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future. Instead, telework has developed in mixed forms linked with broader shifts in information processing and telecommunications.

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ACTION PROGRAMMES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HOMEWORKERS

Homeworkers are a particularly vulnerable category of workers due to their ambiguous legal status, their isolation and their low bargaining power. Action-oriented programmes aiming to break the isolation of homeworkers also make them aware of their rights and help them to organize and to improve their bargaining position. These programmes generally improve homeworkers' socio-economic situation through the provision of assistance and support services, and have made substantial contributions to the improvement of their working and living conditions in many countries. Such programmes are an important complement to legislative action, and provide immediate and direct benefits for homeworkers.

This book presents a selection of ten case-studies from eight countries — Australia, Canada, India, Japan, the Netherlands, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States — as examples of such programmes. Several of these were initiated and carried out by trade unions, others by non-governmental organizations. In some cases the homeworkers have formed their own organizations, associations or commercial enterprises. The background and history of each case provide the context and describe the problems the programme aimed to address. As the programme defines its objectives and develops the different stages of its activities, progress is assessed and valuable lessons are learned. At the end of each case-study, the authors assess the problems encountered and the results achieved, as well as describing the plans for the future.

The introductory chapter by Ursula Huws provides an overview of the similarities and diversities of the approaches used to reach and organize homeworkers. Her critical assessment of the actual and potential impact of action programmes on the well-being of homeworkers is particularly useful for any concerned individuals or organizations that may wish to replicate such programmes.

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