



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Division of the National Health Laboratory Service



International
Labour
Organization



Informal economy workers and the epidemics of HIV and TB



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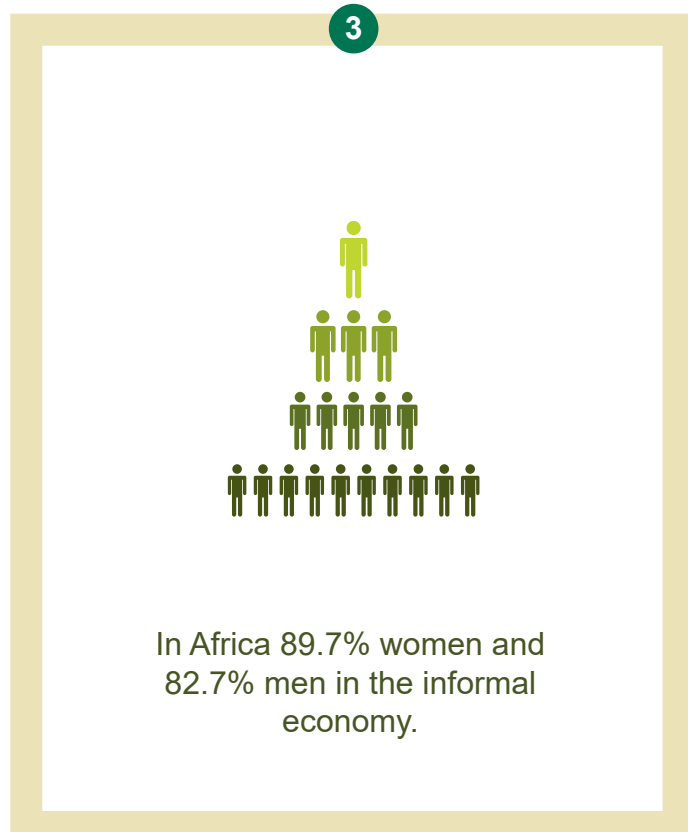
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The informal economy and workers' health and safety



The informal economy is an economic activity that takes place outside the formal norms of economic transaction established by the state. Employees are informal workers if their employment relationship is, in law or in practice, not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits. More than 6 in 10 workers and 4 enterprises in 5 in the world operate in the informal economy, these numbers are not slowing down. Workers in the informal economy do not have opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men in the informal economy.

What do we know about the informal economy?



¹ International Labour Organization. Tackling vulnerability in the informal economy. 2019.

² International Labour Organization [Internet]. Informal economy. Geneva (Switzerland): ILO; 2023 [cited 2023 March 18]. Available from: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/lang-en/index.htm>

³ International Labour Organization [Internet]. Decent work. Geneva (Switzerland): ILO; 2023 [cited 2023 March 18]. Available from: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-en/index.htm>.

⁴ International Labour Organization. Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture. 2018.

⁵ International Labour Organization [Internet]. Informal economy. Geneva (Switzerland): ILO; 2023 [cited 2023 March 18]. Available from: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/lang-en/index.htm>

⁶ International Labour Organization [Internet]. Decent work. Geneva (Switzerland): ILO; 2023 [cited 2023 March 18]. Available from: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-en/index.htm>.

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The informal economy is broad and includes various types of jobs such as home based workers, taxi driving, waste picking and street vending, etc.



Taxi Driving



Waste Picking



Street Vending

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There is poor access and coverage of health services, and in particular occupational health services, which contributes to poor health outcomes for the informal economy workers. The nature and location of informal economy work usually pose as a barrier in accessing health care services, including HIV and TB services.



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Workers have a high risk of TB exposure as a result of socioeconomic and behavioural factors, with those exposed to silica dust (construction and manufacturing work) having an increased TB risk. The conditions of work in the informal economy also make informal workers extremely vulnerable to both HIV and TB exposure.



Recognizing the economic contribution, and health and safety challenges faced by informal economy workers, the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and informal economy stakeholders have collaborated to provide multiple services and resources on occupational health and safety including HIV and TB for the informal economy workers. These include among others:

Research on HIV and TB Workplace Program for Street Vendors

A situational analysis conducted as part of planning for an HIV TB workplace program for the street vendors in one of the City of Ekurhuleni's busiest taxi rank in Ntshong, Katlehong. The research aim was to gain knowledge on the work environment of street vendors and assess their actual perceived needs for HIV and TB health services. The research team working with the City of Ekurhuleni and street vendors conducted a walk about risk assessment of the area where informal workers worked and held meetings to discuss the work conditions



as they relate to HIV and TB services. The walk about risk assessment highlighted two aspects of workplace hazards, hazards that are due to the working conditions and hazards due to the type of trade and tasks performed by the street vendors. Poor access to health services was the main concern in the discussions held. Workers reported that they have not received any structured training or education on HIV and TB in their workplaces. They also reported HIV related stigma and discrimination that made it difficult to talk about HIV and TB with other workers. Based on these findings a comprehensive training on all aspects related to the identified OHS hazards and risks, including HIV and TB prevention, was recommended. For further information on the research please see: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10482911211069621>

Video on Informal economy workers in a taxi rank

The video clip focuses on the three pandemics that have collided (HIV, TB and COVID-19), not only generally but in the workplace. It provides information to the informal workers on the prevention of these pandemics. For full video please follow the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZC_AeXSop7M

HIV and AIDS and the World of Work



The ILO Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work, 2010 (No.200) notes that HIV and AIDS have a serious impact on society and economies, on the world of work in both the formal and informal sectors, on workers, their families and dependants, on the employers' and workers' organizations and on public and private enterprises and undermine the attainment of decent work and sustainable development.

The Recommendation further states there should be no discrimination or stigmatization of workers on grounds of real or perceived HIV status. Prevention of all means of HIV transmission should be a fundamental priority. Workplaces should facilitate access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

The South African Code of Practice on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work (Government Gazette No.35435) in its scope in terms of who is covered, indicates that 'The Code applies to: 4.2 All the sectors of the economic activity, including the private and public sectors and the formal and informal economies.' Further detail and guidance for the informal economy is provided in the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) Technical Assistance Guidelines (TAG) published in 2012. For further information, please see:

[**ILO Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work \(No.200\)**](#)

[**South Africa Code of Good Practice on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work**](#)

[**Technical Assistance Guidelines on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work**](#)

⁷ Rockefeller foundation. Insights into informal workers and their health. <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Insights-Into-Informal-Workers-and-their-Health.pdf>

⁸ Naicker N, Pega F, Rees D, et al. Health services use and health outcomes among informal economy workers compared with formal economy workers: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Int J Environ Res Health 2021; 18: 1-15.