

Informal Worker Organizing Summaries and Strategies

The following summaries were gleaned from research reports on South Africa, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Korea, Mexico, and the U.S. Each country inventory analyzes the broad topic of informal work including working definitions, the current status of informal workers, and informal worker organizations. Each inventory was written by scholars and researchers who have conducted relevant projects or are currently based in and/or studying those countries. The reports also used (to varying degrees) secondary academic sources and statistics to supplement data in each location. There is a varied nature to each inventory as they were conducted independently, and thus the short summaries of summaries attempt to capture some of the main themes around informality in each country as well as potential organizing examples and models.

South Africa (Sarah Mosoetsa)

South Africa is a unique example of worker organizing in many aspects, particularly because of its long history of apartheid and strong constitutional changes in the post-apartheid constitution, which provide several interesting examples of transitions around newly granted rights and political inclusion as well as cases of a lack of implementation. Informal workers are defined broadly in the country and remain largely unorganized with limited state protection, since the post-1994 progressive labor laws really only apply to those in full-time employment and not the majority who fall outside the scope of the legislation; those in the informal economy. Immigrants from Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, China and Pakistan work in the informal sectors of domestic work, street trading, and construction while South Africans work in the taxi industry and manufacturing.

The official definition of informal workers in South Africa is broadly defined and categorized in two groups; 1) the *self-employed* who run small unregistered enterprises, and 2) *wage workers* who work in insecure and unprotected jobs. Additionally, some informal workers, such as home-workers, do not fit neatly into one or other of these categories, yet also have a lack of adequate legal recognition, regulation and protection. Over 12 million workers constitute the total workforce of South Africa, with at least 2.1 million of those in the informal sector, though numbers are growing. **The relationship between the South African state and informal workers is quite adversarial, as exemplified by the use of force to regulate informal workers and enforcing local laws.** Additionally, employer associations in the taxi and construction sectors are powerful and have obstructed union and state efforts to regulate these sectors.

However, domestic workers and taxi drivers enjoy some benefits from state-granted labor protections. **South African domestic workers have long served as a global example in terms of post-apartheid rights “on the books” and the more recent ratification of C189, as they have a long history of unionization and collective action,** first into the Amalaita and Izigebengu gangs and then into the African Domestic Servants League. In 1986, the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) was created from five other unions, which then became SADSAWU in 2000, the South Africa Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union. SADSAWU has support from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), as well as other groups such as Solidarity,

FNV, Ditsela and the ANC, which assists with SADSAWU's efforts to recruit and mobilize across the country in both rural and urban areas. **However, South Africa remains a highly unique example due to its post-apartheid state that is still struggling with rampant racism and classism, but at the same time it also remains an important example of new political rights for a marginalized population. Perhaps one of the largest lessons taught by domestic workers in South Africa is the sometimes complicated and fraught outcome of implementing progressive legislation in a changing and dynamic country undergoing significant shifts.**

The **taxi recapitalization program was launched by national government in an attempt to regulate the taxi industry and create space for organized labor to organize taxi drivers**, but this initiative has been challenged by a lack of implementation, as well as employer associations' refusal to comply. Additionally, there have been issues with *spaza* shops, or small township businesses, because of their predominantly immigrant ownership base. The African National Congress (ANC) took up this issue recently when it discussed the rights of non-South Africans' involvement in the informal economy, and stressed the need for these immigrant workers to comply with local legislation, just as is required of South African owners.

In 2000, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) resolved to organize informal workers, with a few affiliated unions taking on that challenge, such as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the South African Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) and South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU). **SATAWU has made considerable progress in recruiting minibus taxi drivers through a piloted organizing strategy, yet unfortunately the strategy was unsustainable in the long run and failed because of employer intimidation.** However, these efforts still demonstrate that it is possible to mobilize casual and permanent workers together through collective action. Similarly, NUM has started a process of developing a strategy for organizing construction workers. **In the street-trading sector, traders who are dependent on a single supplier or who sell similar goods may come together to increase their power in negotiating with suppliers through cooperative buying arrangements.** However, in the construction sector, organizing has been very difficult because of the nature of short-term projects.

SACTWU has had some success in organizing home workers since 2010 through recognition of the specific nature of this work and home workers' needs and limitations, such as by ensuring that members do not have to pay subscription fees. **COSATU has also facilitated the formation of a street vendor coalition in Johannesburg** that responds to government policies around informal work by demanding full participation, joint decision making in policy decisions and by-law amendments, and joint management of street trading. However, the "Inner-city Rejuvenation Program" displaced Johannesburg street vendors before and after the 2010 FIFA World Cup, with arguments regarding a need for "clean streets" and litter not being good for tourism and business. Durban, however, has an overall positive relationship with street vendors, with respectful policies that allow workers to trade within the city, though there have also been complications in Durban (such as during the World Cup).

Informal workers throughout the country are represented by 29 organizations that are affiliated with WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing), such as SEWU (Self Employed Workers Union), which later closed down, and SASEWA (African Self-Employed Women's Association), which is affiliated to StreetNet. Some of these organizations operate informally because of the undocumented status of their immigrant membership.

Brazil (Carlos Salas and Lucas Kerr)

Informality is widespread in Brazil, and often corresponds to the lack of an official labor card (*carteira de trabalho*) within the employment relationship, and thus to vulnerability, low income and precarious working conditions, as well. The Brazilian economy continues to grow as does its working population, with those 15 years and above representing 75% of the 189 million residents of the country. **Roughly 30% of that population works informally.** Research by WIEGO has focused on four categories of informal workers: domestic workers, home based workers, informal traders, and wastepickers/recyclable waste collectors. Poverty levels are high in these groups, as over half of the waste pickers are poor (56%) whereas overall only 17% of the Brazilian population is categorized as such.

The garment industry played a huge role in the industrialization process of Brazil, and much of that production is home based work that is characterized by *flexibilização*, an increase in labor flexibility through outsourcing. **These workers have a variety of diverse strategies in terms of organizing, as they face a lack of overall labor protections and social security. Three of the case studies the Brazil report examines include Ibitinga, UNISOL, and DIEESE.**

Ibitinga is a town in the northeast region of São Paulo State that is known for its needlework and role in the embroidery industry. In 1987, women needleworkers organized to create the Ibitinga Stitchworkers Union, which helped to raise labor standards, register workers with the Ministry of Labor in order to get their *carteira de trabalhos*, and legalize the industry. In 2001, the union signed a convention with local employers so that home based workers and those working in outsourced firms could also get their labor cards. Similarly, the Sindicato das Costureiras de São Paulo e Osasco, a union of seamstresses, was established in the mid- to late-20th century and has also been active in organizing home based workers.

Numerous other cooperatives have emerged in Brazil over the last 20 years as workers searched for alternative forms of employment in the midst of liberalizing policies. These organizations garnered support from the first Lula government between 2003-2006, when Senaes (the National Secretariat of Solidarity Economy) was established under the Ministry of Labor and Employment. **One of these earlier cooperatives from 2000, UNISOL, was founded to carry out the broad project of economic and social inclusion, democratization in workplaces, and equity and income sharing. UNISOL works to promote the development of cooperatives at the national level, with over 700 current cooperatives and 50,000 affiliated cooperativists. One notable example is Justa Trama, which successfully uses cooperatives organized along each step of their productive chain, beginning with the production of cotton up until the final product.**

DIEESE, or the Inter-union Department of Economic and Social Studies, is an organization established over 50 years ago to as a research center for the large unions of Brazil. Its 2009 project, “Reducing Informality through Social Dialogue,” brings together local actors and government agencies in order to protect informal workers through a system of monitoring projects and interventions. They began with five local projects in order to test the intervention model that works in two stages—first, the mobilization of social actors, through awareness-raising visits in selected locations, followed by workshops for mapping demands and the creation of an action plan. The initial projects were chosen because of the high incidence of informality, the possibilities and capacity for social mobilization and conflict resolution, along with previous cooperative experience. Those groups selected were 1) street vendors in Porto Alegre, 2)

construction workers in Curitiba, apparel in Pernambuco, 4) agribusiness sector in rural Morrinhos/Goiania, and 5) family farming in the rural sector of Itaporanga.

Canada (Leah Vosko, Mark Thomas, Angela Hick, and Jennifer Jihye Chun)

In Canada, *precarious employment* describes poor quality jobs in the labor market, or forms of employment characterized by low wages and few benefits, limited prospect for higher wages or economic advancement over time, minimal legal and social protections, few, if any, employment benefits and statutory entitlements, and little to no control over work activities, scheduling or job tenure. Generally, these positions have some form of exclusion from social and legal protections that are normally guaranteed for full-time employees. **However, the term “informal employment” is rarely used to describe precarious forms of employment in Canada, as the informal sector is relatively small in Canada, and there are multiple challenges to using the term “informal work” to describe the dominant forms of precarious employment in Canada, such as part-time work, temporary agency employment, subcontracted work and other forms of limited-term, contractual employment such as temporary foreign employment under labor migration programs such as the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) and the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) (Vosko et al., Canada Inventory).** Additionally, it is important to note that in the Canadian case, employment law provides workers with access to employment insurance, pension benefits, mandatory sick pay and statutory holiday pay, parental leave, and workers compensation if injured, yet access to all of these benefits depends upon worker status: employees who are identified as “full-time” are fully eligible, while coverage of those who are identified as “part-time” or “temporary” is more limited. Enforcement also remains a problem in the country, as it is difficult to investigate each workplace in order to ensure that individual workers are receiving their entitled benefits.

In addition to unions, **worker centers also practice community unionism** and help to draw precarious workers into the fold of social and economic inclusion. **This practice seeks to address the needs of nonunionized workers and the broader working class community through a combination of education, networking, organizing and legal advocacy by bringing together hybrid groups with shared concerns and mixing participatory community and worksite based organizing.** Coalitions such as the BC Employment Standards Coalition, the Global Justice CareVan Project, Good Jobs for All Coalition, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC), and Vancouver Living Wage Campaign are all employing community unionism in efforts to reach out to precarious workers. Additionally, unions and labor councils such as the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Communication Workers of America—Canada (CWA), the Hospital Employees Union (HEU), Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) have all put forward creative efforts to bolster mobilizing and organizing of precarious workers. Worker centers and associations such as Agricultural Workers Alliance (AWA) Immigrant Workers Centre/Centre des Travailleurs et Travailleuses Immigrant (IWC/CTI), Independent Worker Association (IWA) [which was founded by the United Steelworkers of America and Migrante Ontario], Windsor Workers’ Action Centre (WWAC), Workers’ Action Centre—Toronto (WAC) have also exercised serious efforts to advocate for immigrant workers, lobby for political change, enforcement labor laws, and educate care-givers about their rights, among other initiatives. Agencies such as the ILO, the Metcalf Foundation and Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS) also coordinate on behalf of precarious workers, and newly founded worker cooperatives which use non-hierarchical structures of cooperative governance also offer exciting organizational alternatives.

Canada's relevant organizing strategies among the precariously employed include the New Union Project. Two of Canada's largest unions, the CAW (Canadian Auto Workers) and CEP (Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union) created the New Union Project, which would offer a form of associated membership to workers who are not employed at a workplace that is organized by CAW, CEP, or the new union. Specifically, this new union would offer services and support to non-union workers who are engaged in conflict, involve itself regularly in community campaigns and struggles, use its resources to fight for justice and security for all workers, and to shift towards "movement-building" as opposed to simply servicing local union members. **Another interesting development is the Bad Boss Hotline,** which dates back to efforts of the Ontario Federation of Labor and the Employment Standards Work Group (ESWG) in the 1990s. The hotline received many reports of employers violating Employment Standards, which were recorded and compiled into a report that was used to provide support for later campaigns by the ESWG to pressure the government for improvements to legislation and enforcement. The report was titled *Bad Boss Stories* and included detailed accounts of labor violations. **Legal action around temporary foreign workers has also taken place,** such as when the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 115 and the Construction and Specialized Workers Union Local 1611 filed a court action against HD Mining to block worker permits for the 200 Chinese temporary workers and to protect Canadian and permanent citizen miners, essentially preventing the industry from turning to informal workers instead of using protected unionized workers. According to the court documents, the company was going to pay the temporary migrant workers \$10 an hour less than the prevailing industry wages in Canada, and provide no benefits to workers. **Finally, class action suits** have been waged, such as the 2006 case waged by the Construction and Specialized Workers' Union, Local 1611 on behalf of 38 Latin American workers against their employers, SELI Canada, Inc. These workers had been discriminated against on the basis of their race, color, ancestry, and place of origin, and eventually the company paid each of these workers \$10,000 for injury to dignity. **Another class action lawsuit against Denny's was waged for labor violations with temporary foreign workers** which was finally settled in 2013, resulting in a \$1.3 million dollar agreement that paid the 50+ Filipino workers for lost hours, overtime, airfare costs, and employment agency fees.

Finally, the following Canadian unions, organizations, and coalitions/ initiatives are some of the most predominant groups who are attempting to raise industry standards and improve policies for all workers, rather than just those in individual worksites or in particular kinds of jobs, including Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC); Good Jobs for All Coalition; BC Employment Standards Coalition; Canadian Auto Workers (CAW); Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL); Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE); United Steelworkers Canada and Migrante Ontario: Independent Worker Association (IWA); United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Agricultural Workers Alliance (AWA); Workers' Action Centre (Toronto), specifically their *Stop Wage Theft* campaign; Windsor Workers' Action Centre; Immigrant Workers Centre/Centre des Travailleurs et Travailleuses Immigrant (IWC/CTI); Canadian Labour Congress (CLC); and the New Union Project (merging of CAW and CEP).

China (Pun Ngai and Tong Xin)

In the last three decades, China has undergone dynamic economic shifts which have greatly affected its population of urban poor, rural migrant workers, and internal migrant workers who comprise a significant number of China's working population, and who feel most strongly the effects of

informalization, market reform, and labor flexibility. Informal workers in China remain largely unprotected by the state, and though important unionization has occurred with rural migrant workers, the majority of informal workers are unorganized. Research on informality in China studied categories of precarious workers which are specifically of note, including **domestic workers, student workers in the manufacturing industry (Foxconn), and subcontracted male laborers in the construction industry.**

Trade unions throughout China and especially in the West have been attempting to link up with the ACFTU (All-China Federation of Trade Unions), which as of September 2011 had a total membership of 259 million nationwide, of which 37 percent, or 96.56 million, were said to be rural migrant workers. There are also high numbers of unionization even in privately held [non-state] companies, as high as 82% as of June 2012. However, only recently has the ACFTU begun to organize rural migrant workers, who were historically excluded from union membership. Between 2003 and 2007, union membership of rural migrant workers had a huge upsurge, growing from virtually no members to an estimated 70 million.

In terms of organizing strategies of existent worker centers, the Chinese Women Working Network (CWWN) was created in 1996 in Hong Kong by a group of activists, academics, social workers, labor organizers, and feminists who first created a women worker's center which gradually expanded to offer health services, counseling, advocacy, and worker rights education to female migrant workers. In the last ten years, there has been less support of CWWN by ACFTU, and CWWN has since relocated to the labor-intensive export production zone Bao'an District where it continues to offer advocacy to workers.

Domestic workers are incredibly populous in China, as numbers from 2010 estimate 15 million workers across the country, with increasing demand for more domestic workers. Domestic workers who are employed privately in one household are not entitled to labor protections such as basic health and safety, public holidays, regulated work hours, etc., in China, but those that work directly for an agency and are dispatched to clean several households are entitled to protections through the Labor Law and Labor Contract Law.

A labor NGO in Beijing, Home for Female Workers, has been organizing domestic workers since 2004 by creating a space for self-development, emotional support, worker rights education, and information sharing through monthly meetings, cultural activists, counseling, and occupational planning. Home for Female Workers also has used funds to assist more than one hundred women workers who were in dire need of financial support, but for the majority of domestic workers, they remain unorganized and without access or knowledge of this kind of organizational assistance.

For construction workers, a labor NGO called Toiling on the Earth was created in 2008 in Beijing by labor sociologists, student activists, and social workers in order to advocate for construction workers' rights, especially around contract law, occupational injuries and severe health concerns on the job, and trade union organizing. The first NGO of its kind, Toiling on the Earth also organizes outreach programs and cultural activities for construction workers, and it conducts national surveys and releasing research on the construction industry in order to influence policy.

There is a relatively new form of student labor in China that corresponds to a ‘student internship’ program, as utilized by Foxconn in 2010, with poor working conditions and forced overnight work. These students’ classification as interns rather than employees allows them significantly fewer labor protections, and while the Regulations on the Management of Vocational School Student Internship specifies that interns must be paid, they often earn less than the minimum wage. This type of ‘vocational education’ is growing, **though the labor abuses have been met with some opposition from concerned researchers, international organizations, students themselves, and other groups**, such as the University Foxconn Research Group that has released two reports on the use of student laborers.

India (Rina Argawala)

Indian informal workers’ organizing strategies depend on where they sit on the spectrum of informal work, with contract work on one end and self-employed work on the other. Contract workers operate in a traditional wage-based, employer-employee relationship (though one that is not legally recognized or protected), while self-employed workers are owners of a small business that employs up to 5 employees. Contract workers are fighting for measures that de-commodify their labor, such as welfare boards, social security, and increased wages, while self-employed workers fight for measures that ensure their “right to work” without harassment from local authorities, such as increased regulation through licenses and taxes, and access to work space.

Informal workers in India utilize a variety of organization types; 1) NGOs that are legally registered which allows them the ability to receive foreign funding, 2) trade unions, which use a membership-based model and are more common for informal workers, and 3) large organizations that cut across industries to highlight the similarities of all informal workers and to gain greater leverage through a larger membership base. **Welfare boards in India are a unique tripartite arrangement** in which state governments, employers, and workers have representation and contribute funds after workers prove their informal work status. Through these boards, informal worker unions are gaining governmental recognition. Bidi (hand-rolled cigarette) manufacture workers are using welfare boards successfully, as are garment workers in Gujarat. Domestic workers have also launched welfare boards in some states. These welfare boards provide (in exchange for membership fees) “trade-specific benefits to informal workers, such as education scholarships for workers’ children, health-care clinics, houses in women workers’ names, expenses for weddings, funerals, and disability, and pensions. In some trades (such as garments), workers have also fought to receive work-related tool kits and equipment through the Welfare Boards. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Welfare Boards help consolidate the identity of informal workers, provide a forum for informal workers’ concerns, and issue a state-sanctioned worker identity card to informal workers, even in the absence of employer recognition,” (Agarwala, India Inventory, 2013).

SEWA, the Self-Employed Women’s Association, was founded in 1972 and remains the most famous informal workers’ organization in India that recently (2011) became a legally registered, national-level union federation. SEWA’s membership is comprised entirely of informal women workers, with over 100 million members across informal occupations. **SEWA uses innovative strategies in its struggles to improve work and livelihood conditions for workers within their informal labor status while fighting for recognition of that status, noted in its use of cooperatives.** Cooperatives give informal workers an alternative source of income that draws from group-based support, and SEWA also provides direct services to its members, including a

bank with savings and loans products, health care, and leadership and business development training.

SEWA is also known for its global work beyond India, such as its transnational advocacy networks for sub-groups of informal workers, HomeNet South Asia, which connects home-based workers' organizations, UNIFEM, and academic researchers. HomeNet South Asia aims to increase home-based workers' visibility in the public sphere, security from protective laws, and economic rights. **Using newsletters, an updated website, and regional workshops, the network maintains close communication across continents, and was instrumental in advocating for the ILO Convention 177 on formal rights for home based workers. SEWA also participates in StreetNet, a transnational network of street vendors that increases the visibility of street vendors' contributions to urban economies, attains local licenses for street vendors, and incorporates street vendors' representation in urban development policies.** Finally, SEWA helps to lead and coordinate WIEGO and their policy and advocacy research. SEWA also organizes informal workers in Turkey, Nepal, Burma, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Afghanistan. **SEWA organizers from India travel to these countries and help local workers form new organizations by training them on organizational structure and governance, teaching them how to collect data on local informal work, and facilitating their connections with government officials.**

Domestic workers have been forming organizations in recent years, including Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam, Delhi Domestic Workers' Union, Desiya Garhika Thozhilali Prasthanam, Andhra Pradesh State Domestic Workers' Union, Karnataka Domestic Workers' Union, Akhila Karnataka Domestic Workers Trade Union, Karnataka Domestic Workers' Movement, Maharashtra Rajya Gharkamgar Kriti Samiti. These unions are fighting for legal recognition, social security, minimum wage, identity cards, holiday pay, and protection against sexual harassment. Some of these organizations are affiliated with the Asian Domestic Workers Network (ADWN), which brings together domestic workers across Asia.

Indian street vendors have begun striving for national-level policy in recent years. Unlike waste pickers, street vendors represent a range of different castes, with only a few coming from the lowest castes and many having moderate levels of education. Many enter the occupation after the vendor him/herself or the vendor's spouse lost a job in the formal economy; 58 of 60 interviewed street vendors in Mumbai reported this to be the case. **The National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) was spearheaded by SEWA, is located in Delhi, and is the main street vendor organization, which operates as a federation of unions and NGOs across India. NASVI's main goal is to get the Government of India to pass a national law that regulates street vending and creates 3 street vending zones in municipalities (no vending, restricted vending, and restriction-free vending) as well as creating procedures for photo census, the issuing of licenses/identity cards, and the registration of street vendors.** Under the national policy, municipalities would create a town vending committee (TVC), which would manage the registration and licensing of vendors and serve as a regulatory board for vending in the city. TVCs would be formed by members of local government officials, street vending organizations, resident welfare organizations, and other civil society/NGO groups, and would **ensure that vending zones were equipped with public toilets, waste disposal, electricity, drinking water, storage facilities for goods, child-care facilities, and parking areas.**

Indian waste pickers often work as unprotected, unregulated, "disguised" contract workers for a private company. **The Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) union (which began**

in 1993) has become the most successful waste pickers' organizations in the country, employing several strategies: 1) securing identity cards from the municipal government, so they could avoid police harassment when collecting waste from public spaces, 2) launching a new collective, SWACH, which attains waste collection contracts from housing complexes and businesses, enabling SWACH members to regularize their work through contracts, increase their earnings through user-fees, and minimize competition by securing work outside public spaces, and 3) incorporating members into existing government programs for low caste members since waste-picking overlaps caste status. Stree Mukti Sanghathana (SMS) in Mumbai has advocated to eliminate waste picking as an occupation and tried to turn their members into collectors with contracts but have not been as successful as KKP, through they have offered counseling and access to loans for women. Overall, politically affiliated unions continue to ignore waste-pickers and thus most of these organizations remain independent.

Taxi and rickshaw drivers in India are organizing and waging strikes, though mostly at the local level. However, the rickshaw industry is completely unregulated, so drivers are subject to serious fraud and exploitation by agents and middlemen who sometimes issue illegal licenses and collect interest on their loans to drivers. Cycle rickshaw drivers are a very vulnerable group, as a study of 1,452 cycle rickshaws in Delhi found that only 132 were owners while 1,320 were pullers; more than 90% operated rickshaws owned by others with daily rental fees. Their unions are the Andhra Pradesh Auto Rickshaw Drivers and Workers Federation, Vijayadurga Auto Drivers' Welfare Association, and the All Bengal Rickshaw Union, and their main demands include increased government regulation, limited licensing to reduce competition, control of gas prices, and increased fares.

Informally employed garment workers in India who produce for the export market are generally hired as contract workers (who usually work at the factory premises, but are nonetheless vulnerable and unregulated), or piece-rate workers (who usually work at home). Informal workers who produce for the domestic market also include contract and piece-rate workers, but all are home-based and most are women. **Agarwala (2013) found that three distinct forms of unions organizing textile workers' in India:** 1) traditional unions that organize formal workers and are affiliated to political parties (though some, such as AITUC, are beginning to organize informal contract workers by meeting workers at the factory gates during tea and lunch breaks to recruit members and listen to grievances), 2) independent unions, such as the Garment and Allied Workers' Union (GAWU) in Delhi, Garment and Textile Workers' Union (GATU) in Bangalore, and Munnade in Bangalore, which explicitly organize formal and informal workers and target marginal workers such as women, tribals, migrants, etc., and also seek to help workers in their civic and home (not just work) lives, and 3) independent unions that exclusively target informal workers who work in sub-contractors' workshops or homes. These unions fight for minimum wages on a piece-rate basis, a universal minimum wage, welfare benefits, and improvements in working conditions. SEWA has fought for and attained Welfare Boards for home-based garment sewers and self-employed headloaders—the headloaders' welfare board provides medical and education materials while the garment sewers' welfare board offers a sewing box with scissors, a table, and other tools, Rs. 1200 for medical needs, and skills training. Furthermore, **the second group of unions engages in political mobilizations designed to alter public policy,** such as the Asia Floor Wage Alliance of 70 organizations in over 17 countries that seeks to win a continent-wide minimum wage of US \$475/month for garment workers.

India's carpet industry has used other forms of organizing since the growth of carpet exports in the 1980s. The Indian government created training centers that were supposed to only train workers over 12 years of age, but many younger children were also trained. By 1981, there were 600 centers training over 30,000 weavers under age 15 per year, but a strong international backlash against child labor in the 1990s cracked down on these practices. Rugmark thus emerged as the first organization started in India by Indians to introduce socially labeled goods, targeting consumers to exercise buying power and improve working conditions. However, Rugmark's impact upon child labor is debatable.

Because of the strength of informal workers' movements, laws in several Indian states protect the mass informal workforce of tobacco workers and construction workers. **While the construction industry is growing quickly and bidi production is on the decline, rather than fighting flexible production structures and demanding traditional work benefits from employers, bidi and construction workers are using their power as voters to demand state responsibility for their social consumption or reproductive needs, such as education, housing and healthcare.** To operationalize their demands, workers in both industries have attained welfare boards, which are quite advanced in some states. For construction workers, welfare boards provide education scholarships, pensions, wedding and funeral expenses, and disability insurance. For bidi workers, welfare boards provide health care clinics located in the workers' slums, education scholarships, and houses in women workers' names.

These groups of informal workers are also politicizing their unique class and gender identities to offer politicians a distinct vote bloc, **as they forge a class identity that connects them to the state through their social consumption needs and forces the state to recognize their work through the form of a state-certified informal workers' identity card. To mobilize the dispersed, unprotected workforce without disrupting production, informal workers are organizing at the neighborhood level, rather than on the shop floor.** Informal workers are also addressing issues arising from the intersection of class and gender, **with women workers taking active leadership roles in informal workers' movement, enabling them to challenge patriarchal assumptions about the value of work performed in the the private and public spheres.** Although informal workers in India have not yet secured guaranteed social rights for all citizens, they have secured some welfare benefits and a voice for a previously invisible labor force in parts of India. **These myriad informal industries of India demonstrate that "social movement structures have a limited capacity to predict informal worker movement success in the absence of a conducive political and economic framework from above,"** (Agarwala 2013).

Korea (Jennifer Jihye Chun)

Employment precarity, or the vulnerability of workers to an array of cost-cutting employer practices that depress wage standards, working conditions and job and income security, is understood as a defining feature of the 21st century South Korean economy. Workers employed informally and precariously are generally recognized under the umbrella category of irregular employment (*bijeonggyujik*), and though they lack traditional union-based methods to challenge deteriorating working conditions, they are organizing collectively for better working conditions and a sense of dignity. **The population of mostly women employed as golf caddies, home study tutors, and university janitors have created a national social movement that now includes both men and women in a variety of manufacturing, service and government jobs in well-known and profitable companies.**

In South Korea, these irregularly-employed workers have created diverse organizational forms to represent workers across occupations and industries, atypical employment arrangements, and different social groups, including transforming enterprise unions into industrial unions, revising the activities of local and regional unions, and creating alternative organizational forms such as women and youth unions and worker cooperatives. They have also **utilized a variety of strategies and approaches to resolve their labor dispute, from dramatic and often highly protracted symbolic struggles to broad-based policy campaigns to international solidarity appeals.**

Contractual discrimination is one of the most powerful ways that employers and the state undermine prevailing norms and standards in the social exchange of labor for a wage, using three mechanisms: concealment (masking a direct wage relationship through subcontracting or temporary employment), denial (employment misclassification to prevent workers from accessing labor rights), and avoidance (which allows employers to circumvent existing legal standards by employing workers under atypical and part-time contracts). Thus, invisibility then “creates the conditions for extreme vulnerability to arbitrary employer practices, due to the lack of public understanding about the actual conditions of work and the kinds of protective measures that can be created to prevent employer abuse and employment-based poverty,” (Chun, Report on South Korea, 2013). These mechanisms enable irregular forms of employment to function outside of regulated labor standards and thus contribute to a continued lack of protections against discrimination and labor abuse for the irregularly employed of South Korea.

The Korean Women’s Trade Union (KWTU) is an interesting example of a worker association that was founded in 1999 by the Korean Women Workers Association (KWWA), an NGO geared toward organizing and promoting the interests of women workers. The 1997-98 financial crisis had a disproportionate affect on women workers in Korea, as women experienced blatant gender discrimination in company layoffs and many had to turn to irregular employment. Thus, the KWTU member is open to any women worker in the country, regardless of geographic region and occupation. It has ten regional branches and 70 local branches, and its membership has grown from approximately 400 people in 1999 to approximately 6,000 members in 2013. KWTU cultivated its early membership with labor counseling, providing one-on-one assistance to workers who seek out the union for assistance with workplace issues. **It has also employed surveys as a strong and informed basis for organizing across occupation and sector.** Although its membership had steadily grown since its founding, over the last 4 years its membership has plateaued to key sectors and occupational groups, including university janitors, golf game assistants, hotel room cleaners, and school cafeteria workers.

Similar to the case of university janitors, KWTU began its organizing campaign in elementary schools by conducting a survey of the working conditions of cooks, nutritionists, librarians and assistants in science labs. Based on survey responses (2,369 responses nationwide in 11 cities) and a series of open forums and discussions on the survey findings, each regional branch outreached to temporary workers in schools. One of their main demands was to eliminate the “daily hired position.” The vast majority of irregularly employed school workers were hired on a day labor basis and were not paid during the two month summer vacations. Although the KWTU’s membership ranks in school cafeteria work have remained small, it publicized the issue of irregularly employed school workers to the broader labor movement. Irregularly employed public school workers account for over 40% of the total irregularly employed public workforce in South Korea.

Several different strategies have been utilized by South Korean irregularly employed workers, ranging from symbolic tactics to pragmatic approaches. The KWTU, for instance, has not been able to organize huge numbers, but where it lacks strength in numbers the KWTU has staying power; they have been able to sustain their organizing for over a ten-year-period while creating lasting worker organizations for women workers in vulnerable and precarious work. The more militant workers and unions have embraced strong symbolic tactics, such as head shaving, three steps, one bow, hunger strikes and tower scaling. As the symbolic tactics become more extreme in the case of hunger strikes and tower scaling, the number of workers participating in the symbolic action tends to decline. **Chun (2013) offers many more detailed accounts in her inventory on South Korea that cover more of these actions, which may be of interest to informal workers organizing in the US.**

Mexico (Enrique de la Garza, UNAM Team, and Hugo Sarmiento)

Rough estimates of the Mexican population of informal workers range from 33% to 60%, depending upon whether workers whose employers do not follow labor laws (such as the right to healthcare) are counted or not. Furthermore, federal labor law does not allow for Mexican workers in the informal sector to unionize, and thus only a small portion of informal workers are able to access healthcare.

As of 2012, over 130,000 licensed taxis operate in Mexico City, along with irregular "pirate" cars and cars known as "executive taxis" that offer the same service but without licenses and without using the meter to calculate the fare. Roughly 70% operators work independently, without any affiliation to a particular grouping or taxi driver organization. Since taxi drivers are technically self-employed, most of them have no labor protections, and 98.5% of them are male. However, concession owners hold the right to operate taxis on certain routes, and only 72% of these (as of 2012) are male, while the other 28% of concession owners are female. Organizations for taxi drivers differ in their structure and form, including: corporations, cooperatives, trade unions, associations and civil societies. These organizations range in size from 40 drivers to over 1,000 members, and they hold assemblies to discuss general issues such as rate changes, weekly quota payments, and other problems, including paperwork, license, and insurance complications. **Some of these organizations affiliate with larger organizations and broad social movements, such as the Francisco Villa Popular Front or the Confederation of Workers of Mexico.**

In 2009, a women-only group of taxis was created, with women drivers catering to women passengers. Popularly called "Angel Taxis," this organization of taxis demonstrates an important shift with regard to reducing harassment and attacks on women who are often subject to abuse and uncomfortable situations in public transport. Angel Taxis were created by trade associations from the Historic Center, including the Alternative Trade Association for a Decent Life and the Legitimate Association of Civic Commerce.

Microbus drivers work consistently long hours, averaging 60.7 hours per week throughout the country and 63.4 hours per week in Mexico City, with no benefits. Politicians and political deals weigh heavily on microbus drivers, as their licenses, routes, and traffic fines often depend upon the whims of particular candidates who order them to drive people to political rallies. Drivers have tried to form labor unions but authorities have denied their registration, and thus bus owners have much more power than drivers. Owners exercise their decision-making power at assemblies through

dictating particular traffic routes the drivers must follow, which often sends drivers into situations where they must violate traffic regulations in order to avoid driving in particular traffic routes.

There is little unionization of truck drivers in Mexico and those that are members of organizations belong to civil associations of truck owners. Truck driver cooperatives also exist, but not in large numbers, and they are paid piecework per delivery. Thus, unions who offer political support for candidates during elections, particularly for the PRI, vie not for improved working conditions for their members but for better business conditions.

The construction industry in Mexico is male-dominated and young, with 70% of its workers between the age of 20 and 39 years. 80% work without contracts, reflecting serious instability and job uncertainty. Many workers are employed in small units of up to 5 people rather than large firms, making it difficult to enforce labor violations and the level of unionization is virtually zero. Even state-sponsored large social housing projects are often outsourced to smaller and medium-sized construction firms. The construction unions that do exist belong to the CTM that traditionally has been a part of the corporatist state and the system of patronage defined by the corrupt relationship between political actors and union leaders.

Street vendors are a growing population in Mexico, with numbers on the upsurge toward over 2 million vendors, accounting for nearly 5% of the entire working population. 65% of the vendors are women, though male street vendors earn profits between 29% and 35% higher than female street vendors. The study found that women's lower profits relative to men can be attributed to a number of factors, including more responsibilities at home in terms of children and household duties, less access to credit and capital, differences between the types and scale of commercial businesses, as well as the types of goods traded and the amount of investment required. Additionally, women who engage in street vending also risk sexual assault at work and merchandise losses due to persecution, police extortion or raids by local law enforcement agencies. **However, female street vendors have built and consolidated networks that are important for those migrating to the city and attempting to settle there. They created an extensive network of mutual support to cope with adversity, to obtain a stall, to sell and to support each other when working in the streets or in the Metro Collective Transport System. They also use their networks to combat abuse by the police, road inspectors and other authorities and vendors.** Organizations are based on kinship relationships, shared neighborhoods and unions, and have become well experienced in negotiating with city authorities and federal government agencies. Street vendors have also organized themselves in the Alameda Central, Mexico City's central park, starting in 1995 with demands about preserving the cultural traditions of their 80% indigenous membership and the right to work and sell in public space.

Wastepickers in Mexico are usually the elderly, children, landless peasants, ex-convicts and more, who sort through waste to find some form of commercial value. Others buy recyclables and sell them to recycling industries or collection centers, where they are further sorted into large quantities of the same product. Most of them are men, and workdays tend to average 6 hours. There is a great deal of control in the landfills, as only pickers who are members of a specific organization in each landfill are allowed to work. In Mexico City, the Wastepickers Front and the Association of Solid Waste Pickers of the Metropolis are the two main wastepicker organizations. While formally these organizations are civil associations in which wastepickers are not considered partners, the research found that in practice they are informal private companies masquerading as civil partnerships that do not pay taxes or pay for worker benefits. These organizations commonly

are affiliated with the PRI and set exclusive agreements between managers and public officials on the exploitation of dumps in exchange for political support during elections, however, disputes between organizations also leads to clashes between them and government forces. The existence of informal relationships between politicians responsible for the collection and disposal of waste and the leaders of the wastepicker organizations results in a corrupt, inefficient system that is ultimately unfair to the pickers.

Domestic workers in Mexico face poor pay, job instability, lack of regular hours and discrimination within the home, especially for those who are migrants from Central America without papers. Isolation, abuse, the misrecognition of domestic workers as “part of the family,” inequality within the employer/employee relationship contained within the private space of the home, devaluation of housework as “real work,” and a belief that the job is transitory are both conditions characteristic of domestic work as well as reasons why organizing is difficult. In the mid-twentieth century, Mexico had about 30 unions that included domestic workers, but they gradually disappeared as unions evolved to represent more specialized groups, such as cooks, waiters or hotel employees. Not until the early 1970s were domestic worker organizations formed, but these mainly focused on training, support and guidance, and did not act as labor unions. **However, in 2000, CACEH was formed (Centre for Support and Training for Domestic Workers) which is a civil association of female domestic workers which challenges unpaid work and also promotes and defends human rights and the personal development of those who do domestic work, with a perspective of equity and social justice.** CACEH has broader network ties as well, as it is affiliated with CONLACTRAHO and is also part of the International Domestic Worker Federation (IDWF).

The U.S (Janice Fine and Ruth Milkman)

Since the 1970s, deregulation, deunionization and the increased use of business strategies that transfer risk from firms to workers have led to massive growth in precarious, unregulated, casualized, and informal work in the US. While the US has a significantly lower proportion of its workforce involved in informal and excluded labor than do the rest of these countries, this phenomena is still plaguing many low-wage industries, especially those that employ undocumented immigrants, such as residential construction, janitorial work, domestic work, including home health care, street vending, taxi and truck driving, restaurant and hotel work, small-scale manufacturing and warehousing, and the retail trade. **This glance at informal work in the US focuses on domestic workers, street vendors, taxi drivers, garment industry workers, truck drivers, and construction workers, as well as the upswing in worker centers.**

Worker centers have emerged as an important form of organization for workers traditionally excluded from other organizational forms. These centers provide legal and educational services to low-wage workers, connect workers with job opportunities, advocate on behalf of immigrant workers, and in some cases have aligned with unions to push for unionization of members. Worker centers struggle to overcome a variety of obstacles including a lack of resources, instability in membership, and dependence on external funding, but their numbers are growing and worker centers are also connecting to form broad sectoral networks, including ROC (Restaurant Opportunities Center) and NDLO (National Day Labor Organizing Network).

The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) was founded as another one of these networks, seeking to connect smaller affiliate groups of domestic worker organizations (such

as New York's Domestic Workers United) as well as create policy change on a national level. Domestic workers are a unique case in the US because they are excluded from the majority of labor protections, but New York, California, and Hawaii have successfully passed state legislation in the form of 'Bills of Rights.' Additionally, NDWA and its affiliates have been highly effective in raising awareness around domestic worker exploitation, winning back pay, and starting the Caring Across Generations campaign which advocates for immigration reform for home care workers. Major US unions included the Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees as well as the AFL-CIO have embarked upon this campaign together.

New York City is home to three different street vendor organizations. The 500-member group called VAMOS Unidos (*Vendedoras Ambulantes Movilizando y Organizando en Solidaridad*) represents a majority female and largely undocumented Latino/a population of vendors based in the Bronx. These vendors have limited access to the various licenses and permits that are required by law and yet they manage to eke out an existence selling food on the edges of the city. Many of the Manhattan vendors are organized into the Street Vendor Project (SVP), which has about 1300 members. Recently, an even more elite segment of the industry has emerged, made up of food trucks that are organized under the auspices of the New York City Food Truck Association (NYCFTA). This group includes trucks owned by restaurants that generate additional revenue and brand visibility for their brick-and-mortar operations via the trucks; thus, they are basically business owners and not informal sector workers. In contrast the vendors who SVP and VAMOS organize are mostly informal workers; both include a mix of self-employed vendors and subcontractors. **These street vendors' organizations also offer training workshops for their members on a variety of topics designed to increase economic self-sufficiency, and provide leadership development programs as well. VAMOS also is directly engaged in the immigrant rights movement on behalf of its largely undocumented membership, and participates in marches and protests with that movement.**

There are 19 taxi worker organizations across the US. In 2011 the New York Taxi Workers' Alliance (NYTWA), which has some 15,000 members (out of 50,000 drivers in NYC) obtained a union organizing charter from the AFL-CIO to found a national taxi workers' union. Currently, most taxi workers are legal immigrants (in part because of the requirement to have a driver's license) and they are still an overwhelmingly male group, although the NYTWA has a dynamic female leader, Bhairavi Desai. They are immigrants from many countries but a large proportion is from South Asia, Africa, Central Europe and Latin America. Taxi workers have nonetheless managed to organize effectively in some key cities, launching strikes (most recently in 2007 in NYC) at times and employing a variety of other pressure tactics to win concessions from the various regulatory agencies that govern their industry. Unlike many other "informal workers" because they constitute a vital component of the transportation system in many cities (especially New York) they have significant leverage, and the fact that their industry remains highly regulated means also that there are parties with whom negotiations can be conducted –both government functionaries in the agencies that regulate the industry, and employers associations (where those exists). The NYTWA, in this way, "acts like a union" even though it has no legal status as such. In New York in particular the NYTWA has been able to extract economic concessions from the Bloomberg administration in recent years and is on the verge of establishing a fund, drawn from the most recent fare increase, to create a health care and disability fund for taxi drivers. The NYTWA and other such taxi workers' associations emphatically do *not* seek to convert taxi drivers back into traditional employees; on the contrary, **the leaders recognize the appeal of the autonomy that**

attracts so many immigrants to the occupation, the dream of being “my own boss.” Instead they focus their efforts on trying to build an internally democratic structure that offers taxi workers a real voice, and on building enough organization and power externally to improve the incomes of drivers as well as their working conditions.

The garment industry in the US used to be unionized but is no longer, now characterized by layers of subcontracting, small and unstable shops, and piece rate pay for the mostly immigrant women in the industry. The Los Angeles-based Garment Worker Center is the best known worker center for the garment industry, which launched a series of successful campaigns in the 1990s and early 2000s that called public attention to sweatshop conditions in the industry by targeting well-known brand names like Forever 21 and exposing the substandard pay and conditions of the contractors who made the clothes they sold. The organization also worked with a coalition of other groups to pass groundbreaking legislation, Assembly Bill 633, which established a “wage guarantee,” under which garment manufacturers are now liable for guaranteeing payment of minimum wages and overtime compensation to employees of their contractors. **GWC was also instrumental in bringing joint employer cases, like the Wet Seal case, that were the first in the nation to successfully hold retailers and manufacturers jointly liable for unpaid wages by subcontractors. By linking up with anti-sweatshop organizations on college campuses and other progressive allies, such as religious leaders in the larger community, and through recruitment and organization of workers in the garment shops, these campaigns made visible industry abuse and improved the situation, most notably through stronger legislation around wage and hour laws for the garment industry of California.**

Another change from a previously unionized industry to one fraught with independent contractors and a largely immigrant workforce in the US is trucking. This central industry to the US retail trade has had several strikes in its attempts to unionize, most recently by the Teamsters in Los Angeles and Newark. Truckers’ organizing efforts have most recently tied the working conditions of truckers to environmental issues in the communities near the ports, which has been effective in Southern California to raise public awareness of the truckers’ plight and lead to growing support for re-regulation of the industry. **Warehouse Workers United is actively recruiting and organizing workers in the industry, targeting especially those in Wal-Mart’s warehouses, with some success in launching strikes, filing legal complaints about abuses, and winning support from community and faith-based organizations. In 2012, Warehouse Workers United held simultaneous gatherings of warehouse workers in California, Chicago and New Jersey that were jointly televised so that the workers could “see” each other and feel a part of a larger movement of workers. Another organizing strategy again depended upon surveys and data-gathering; in New Jersey, New Labor worked with a researcher from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government to survey more than 300 warehouse workers and document their conditions of work as well as wages, overtime and training.** The organization has been building a leadership group of warehouse workers and has conducted safety and health workshops to begin to establish a network in the central NJ warehouses.

Construction is formerly one of the most unionized sectors of the US, with a specific organizational structure unlike any other. The institutional paradigm of the building trades includes recruitment and training through union-based apprenticeship programs, union administration of a referral system through hiring halls, wages established through master agreements with contractors’ associations and provision of health insurance and retirement benefits through jointly-administered Taft-Hartley health and welfare plans that are mobile as union members move between employers.

That institutional framework continues, and since by its nature construction requires that workers move from employer to employer, members have always maintained their most consistent connection to their union, which represents them as they move from job to job and whether or not they are employed. However, unionized numbers of construction workers have dropped while workers themselves are increasing, and thus the percentage of unionized workers in the construction industry is now below 14%. The majority of that workforce is increasingly Latino and undocumented, requiring the building trades to shift away from long-time exclusion of non-English-speaking members.

NDLON was founded in 2001 as an alliance of 12 community-based organizations and worker centers and has since grown to 40 membership affiliates of groups that organize the day laborer community. NDLON focuses on migrant rights, health and safety, wage theft, street corners, and worker centers, while coordinating research, training, and solidarity-building around issues facing the immigrant and day labor community, and has been very successful since its founding at the first national gathering of day laborers.

Several recent campaigns have been launched to organize the growing number of Latino construction workers, including drywall workers in Southern California in the early 1990's through the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, roofers in the southwest including Nevada during roughly the same period through the Roofers Union and a building trades organizing collaborative in Nevada, asbestos workers in New York and New Jersey in the late 1990's and residential construction workers in the Arizona, Nevada and California between 2005-2010 and most recently in New York, New Jersey and Texas through the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA). However, LIUNA has struggled with dropping numbers, a tough housing market and a weakened membership. Additionally, it is highly decentralized and thus dependent upon local organizational culture, which can sometimes mean that organizations may not actually be very 'pro-immigrant', though the recent partnership with NDLON has garnered more awareness of and support for day laborers.