



## ILO Homeworking Convention

### The case for UK ratification of ILO Convention 177 on Homework

#### The ILO

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is the UN agency for labour rights. It has a tripartite structure of representatives from governments, employers and workers. The ILO sets international minimum standards for basic labour rights such as freedom of association, the right to organize, collective bargaining, abolition of forced labour, and equality of opportunity and treatment.

The ILO sets these standards through Conventions and Recommendations. A Convention is equivalent to an international treaty – it has to be ‘ratified’ by individual governments and then becomes legally binding in those countries.

#### The Convention

In 1996 the ILO adopted a Convention on Homeworking (No.177) setting international minimum standards for employment rights for homeworkers. The Convention was accompanied by Recommendations (No.184) which give practical advice on how these standards can be applied and what governments need to do in terms of policies and programmes to improve the lives of homeworkers.

This convention was deeply contested by many governments and employers organisations over many years and at the conference in 1996. This convention, for the first time recognises the rights of

homeworkers as being on a par with other workers.

The Convention specifies a range of steps governments must take including:

- Adopting a national policy on homework aimed at improving the situation of homeworkers
- Promoting equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners
- Including information on home work in the gathering of labour statistics.
- Ensuring health and safety laws take homeworking issues into account.

This convention gives rights to the many homeworkers who often lack a formal written contract and do not work on the premises of the employers (or suppliers) who are responsible for providing the work, all the component parts and paying them wages for producing a product or service.

The full text of the Convention can be found at:

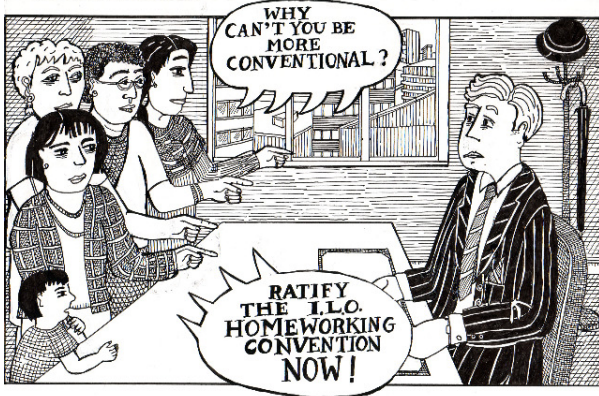
<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>

#### Ratification of the Convention

Unfortunately ratification of this Convention has been disappointingly slow. Since 1996 only five countries, Albania, Argentina, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands have ratified the Convention. Homeworkers organisations around the world are

campaigning in support of the Convention, and urging their governments to ratify.

In May 1998 the European Commission adopted a Recommendation calling on member states of EU to ratify. The EU Commission said, *'We believe this will assist in furthering the effective enforcement of equal opportunities for women and men.'*



### The UK situation

In 1997 the incoming Labour government stated its intention to ratify the Convention on Homeworking in a White Paper, but so far there has been little progress on this.

Campaigning for the ratification of the Convention continues, alongside calls for the government to at least put in place specific policies and laws outlined in the Convention and Recommendations, short of full ratification. Even where the Convention is not ratified, then, it can still be used by campaign groups and trade unions to argue for specific steps to improve the lives of homeworkers.

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