

Overlooked, underpaid female home workers have no rights, says advocacy group

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The palms of Mawar (not her real name) always itch after peeling cashews because the sap causes skin irritations.

The 35-year-old woman from Pangkajene Islands regency in South Sulawesi works from home peeling cashews.

To cure the irritation, she buys a bottle of rubbing oil that costs Rp 5,000 (36 US cents), which is double the amount she gets paid for a kilogram of cashews.

Wages were cut by Rp 1,000 per kg in 2014, but she took the job to support her family.

The mother of two usually peels up to 20 kg of cashews in three days for a local seller who then sells it in Makassar.

She has been doing this job for the past five years.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines home workers as people who work from home or from other premises for payment.

Mawar was among the home workers included in the study conducted by the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (MAMPU) and the SMERU research institute.

The longitudinal study, started

in 2014, aimed to portray women's empowerment in five regencies in the country, with one of the focuses being home workers.

According to the Jakarta-based workers advocacy group, Trade Union Rights Center (TURC), there were an estimated 19 million male and female home workers in Indonesia.

TURC executive director Andriko Otang said low job growth contributed to the existence of home workers.

"The industry has been seizing the need-for-job situation to create informal workers," he added.

Female home workers, who work in informal sectors, are of-

ten neglected and overlooked.

"If we look at their jobs as second-class work, we normalize these unfair conditions," Dinar Dwi Prasetyo, one of the study's researchers from SMERU, told *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday.

There are three major problems facing female home workers — low wages, unlimited working hours and no health insurance.

Because of a lack of awareness, they are uninformed about their power to bargain for better wages and rights.

In 2014, MAMPU provided training to a group of female home workers in Deli Serdang

regency, North Sumatra, who worked as tailors.

The training included disseminating information about their rights and how to establish an association.

"Since then, they have voiced their aspirations for a fair wage and other rights to the local legislative council and of course their employers," Dinar said, adding that their monthly wage had been raised to Rp 800,000 per person from Rp 100,000.

Besides increasing capacity building for home workers, acknowledging them is also key to their betterment.

Dinar urged the Manpower

Ministry to raise awareness about these informal workers and to grant them their rights.

Currently, there is no regulation on home workers even though the ILO issued a 1996 compact acknowledging their existence.

"Ratification will strengthen the bargaining power of female home workers and also regulate employers," Dinar added.

The ministry's industrial relations, disputes and social security secretary, Ending Khairudin, said on Thursday he had never heard of any program related to home workers. "We have yet to reach them." (srs)