



*Informal workers are a significant part of the labour force in Thailand.
Photo: Pailin Wedel*



Informal Workers in Urban Thailand: A Statistical Snapshot

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Informal employment is employment that is not covered, or is insufficiently covered, by formal arrangements through work – such as social protection, contributions to pensions and medical aid, or the right to paid sick leave or annual leave.¹

The Government of Thailand has put in place programmes that extend social security coverage to workers in the informal economy. Additional legal protections are provided to domestic workers and homeworkers through the Ministerial Regulation of Domestic Workers Protection and the Homeworker Protection Act (which applies only to home-based industrial outworkers, called homeworkers). However, not all workers are aware of these programmes and for some workers, social security plans are limited and are available only on a voluntary basis and only if they pay into the plan. As a result, informal employment continues to be an important share of the labour force in Thailand and in its cities.

While informal employment represents around 28 per cent of employment in Bangkok, it accounts for 42 per cent in urban Thailand and over half (56 per cent) of all employment in Thailand,² (table 1). There is little difference between women's and men's rates of informal employment in each geographic region. Almost all agricultural employment is informal: around 92 per cent in both Thailand and urban Thailand and 87 per cent in Bangkok. Women's rates of informal employment in agriculture are higher than men's in each geographic area, with the greatest difference in Bangkok, where

Table 1: Informal employment (agricultural and non-agricultural) as a percentage of total employment in Bangkok, urban Thailand and Thailand

	Informal Employment			Non-agricultural Informal Employment			Agricultural Informal Employment		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
Bangkok	28.4	28.0	28.8	28.6	28.2	28.9	86.9	100.0	84.8
Urban Thailand	42.1	42.4	41.9	34.0	35.2	33.0	91.7	93.9	90.2
Thailand	55.8	55.6	55.9	37.6	38.5	36.8	92.4	94.6	90.8

¹ The criteria for identifying informal employment used in this analysis follow the recommendations of the ILO: for the self-employed, work in an unincorporated and unregistered enterprise and no membership in a social security scheme; for employees, no membership in a social security scheme and either having no paid sick leave or no annual leave.

² The data presented are from the 2017 Thailand Labour Force Survey. Table 3 is based on additional labour force surveys for the designated years.

all of women’s employment in agriculture is informal compared to only 85 per cent of men’s.

Groups of Workers

The Federation of Informal Workers in Thailand (FIT) is comprised of five organizations representing five groups of informal workers. These organizations work to improve the livelihoods and working conditions of the workers they represent and to promote inclusive urban development. They are: HomeNet Thailand Association (home-based workers); The Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand (domestic workers); the Association of Motorcycle Taxi Drivers of Thailand (motorcycle taxi drivers); The Network of Thai Vendors for Sustainable Development (street vendors and market traders); and Muuban Nakila Service Cooperative (market traders). The workers in occupations whose concerns are represented by FIT are a significant part of the workforce in Bangkok, in the cities of Thailand and in the country (**table 2**). Together they comprise over 1 million workers in Bangkok, 3 million in urban Thailand and nearly 6 million

nationally. They represent around 20 per cent of total employment in Bangkok and urban Thailand and 16 per cent of total employment nationally.

Home-based workers are the largest of the five groups of workers. They represent around 12 per cent of total employment in urban Thailand and a little less in Bangkok and nationally. The five occupations considered together account for similar shares of employment for women and men in Bangkok, but in urban Thailand and nationally these occupations are a greater source of employment for women than for men. In urban Thailand, around 22 per cent of total women’s employment is in these occupations, in contrast to 18 per cent of men’s; nationally, around 19 per cent of women’s employment is in these occupations, in contrast to 13 per cent of men’s. In all geographic locations, domestic work is a more important source of employment for women than for men, while men are far more likely than women to be motorcycle taxi drivers. The other occupations – home-based work, market trade and street vending – are a greater source of employment for women than men.



Almost one in ten Thai workers are informal home-based workers like Neeramol Sutipannapong.
Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

Table 2: Occupations represented by the Federation of Informal Workers: number and per cent of total employment by sex in Bangkok, urban Thailand and Thailand

Numbers and per cent (in parentheses)	Bangkok Employment			Urban Employment			Thailand Employment		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
Domestic workers	99,177 (1.9)	70,167 (2.9)	29,011 (1.0)	170,788 (1.0)	131,629 (1.7)	39,158 (0.4)	218,723 (0.6)	167,907 (1.0)	50,816 (0.3)
Home-based workers	558,573 (10.7)	261,840 (10.7)	296,732 (10.7)	2,002,031 (11.8)	1,088,598 (13.8)	913,433 (10.1)	3,669,726 (9.7)	2,081,506 (12.1)	1,588,220 (7.7)
Motorcycle taxi drivers	154,834 (3.0)	5,912 (0.2)	148,922 (5.4)	239,238 (1.4)	10,249 (0.1)	228,988 (2.5)	307,304 (0.8)	13,265 (0.1)	294,039 (1.4)
Market traders	167,118 (3.2)	95,465 (3.9)	71,652 (2.6)	533,113 (3.1)	311,245 (3.9)	221,868 (2.4)	891,816 (2.4)	518,503 (3.0)	373,313 (1.8)
Street vendors	143,833 (2.7)	80,935 (3.3)	62,898 (2.2)	438,398 (2.6)	228,977 (2.9)	209,421 (2.3)	805,008 (2.1)	425,140 (2.5)	379,868 (1.9)
Goods & services excluding food	27,410 (0.5)	12,289 (0.5)	15,121 (0.5)	158,540 (0.9)	73,145 (0.9)	85,395 (0.9)	376,284 (1.0)	180,831 (1.1)	195,453 (1.0)
Street food sales	116,423 (2.2)	68,645 (2.8)	47,777 (1.7)	279,858 (1.6)	155,832 (2.0)	124,026 (1.4)	428,724 (1.1)	244,309 (1.4)	184,416 (0.9)
Total	1,123,535 (21.5)	514,319 (21)	609,215 (21.9)	3,383,568 (19.9)	1,770,698 (22.4)	1,612,868 (17.7)	5,892,577(15.6)	3,206,321 (18.7)	2,686,256 (13.1)

Table 3: Number of market traders and street vendors in Bangkok and urban Thailand, 2012-2018

Bangkok	2012	2015	2017	2018
Market Traders	126,601	151,633	167,118	152,144
Street Vendors	127,054	123,571	143,838	139,149
Urban Thailand	2012	2015	2017	2018
Market Traders	433,787	543,359	533,113	557,344
Street Vendors	343,729	420,323	438,473	437,642



*Street vendor at work in Bangkok, Thailand.
Photo: Pailin Wedel*

In recent years the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) has sought to reduce the number of street vendors and market traders in public spaces. However, the BMA's efforts have not resulted in a dramatic drop in the numbers of street vendors or market traders in Bangkok (**table 3**). Although the number of street vendors declined between 2012 and 2015, it increased substantially between 2015 and 2017 and then dropped somewhat by 2018. By contrast, there was a steady increase in the number of street vendors across the urban areas of Thailand until 2017. The number of market traders in Bangkok increased between 2012 and 2017 but dropped between 2017 and 2018.

Informal Employment

Over the years, Thailand has progressively extended social security plans to additional workers, with some having coverage on a compulsory basis and others only on a voluntary basis and with a financial contribution. Additional regulations give greater protection to domestic workers and homeworkers. While there are implementation problems with these initiatives and the benefits are often limited, the result is lower rates of informality for some workers (**table 4**).

Specifically, only 12 per cent of domestic workers in Bangkok are informal. Rates of informality among domestic workers outside Bangkok are somewhat higher, especially for women, but only 32 per cent of domestic workers nationally are informal. Motorcycle

taxi drivers also have relatively low rates of informality, with less than half identified as informal in all geographic areas. Rates of informality are somewhat higher for women in this occupation than for men.

Of the four groups of workers, the highest rates of informality are among street vendors. Over 90 per cent of women and men street vendors in all three geographic areas are informal. Market traders are also largely informal, with substantially higher rates of informality among women than among men – among market traders in Bangkok, 83 per cent of women and 73 per cent of men are informal.

Nearly three-quarters of home-based workers are informal. Rates of informality among women are substantially higher than among men. The majority of

Table 4: Informal non-agricultural employment as a percentage of total employment in specific jobs, by sex, in Bangkok, urban Thailand and Thailand

	Bangkok Employment			Urban Employment			Thailand Employment		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Domestic workers	16.1	2.6	12.2	31.2	9.9	26.3	37.0	15.7	32.1
Home-based workers	79.5	66.0	72.3	76.3	62.8	70.1	77.7	65.8	72.5
Motorcycle taxi drivers	41.8	39.0	39.1	48.9	44.6	44.8	46.3	47.6	47.5
Market traders	83.4	73.0	78.9	85.4	78.5	82.5	86.4	82.1	84.6
Street vendors	92.6	93.4	93.0	92.5	93.1	92.8	92.8	91.4	92.2

home-based workers in Thailand are classified as self-employed or contributing family workers and thus are not covered by the Homeworker Protection Act. This contributes to their high rates of informality.

Status in Employment

Other than domestic workers, all of whom are classified as employees, the predominant status category for workers in the five occupations is self-employed with no employees, referred to as own-account employment (table 5). In Bangkok, own-account work comprises 56 per cent of women and 57 per cent of men home-based workers; 60 per cent of women and 70 per cent of men market traders; and 69 per cent of women and 85 per cent of men street vendors.

Among the relatively few women who work as motorcycle taxi drivers, all are own account workers in comparison to 56 per cent of men. Contributing family workers are also an important status category, especially for women, accounting for about 30 per cent of women in home-based work and in street vending and 26 per cent of women in market trade. In Bangkok, work as a contributing family worker is less but still significant for men, with 16 per cent of men in home-based work and market trade and 11 per cent in street vending. With the exception of motorcycle taxi drivers with 43 per cent of men as employees, there are relatively few employees among other groups of workers: 11 per cent of women and men in home-based

work; about 14 per cent of women and men in market trade and 2 per cent in street vending. Employer is a significant status in employment category only in home-based work and only for men, accounting for 17 per cent of workers. By contrast, only 5 per cent of women home-based workers are employers.

For urban Thailand and all of Thailand, the composition of women's employment by status is similar to that in Bangkok. However there are differences among men. In the geographic areas other than Bangkok, contributing family workers comprise a somewhat higher proportion of men in home-based work, street vending and market trade: 25 to 29 per cent in contrast to around 22 per cent in Bangkok. Also, a slightly lower proportion of men in urban Thailand and all of Thailand are classified as employees.

Education

The population of Thailand has relatively high levels of education and 93 per cent literacy. However nearly one-quarter of women domestic workers in Bangkok and 19 per cent in urban Thailand have no education (table 6). Another 43 per cent of women domestic workers in Bangkok and 44 per cent in urban Thailand have only primary education. The education levels of men domestic workers are considerably higher: 72 per cent in Bangkok and 68 per cent in urban Thailand have secondary education.



Tadakorn Suttiporn, a member of HomeNet Thailand, sells crops from a community-run garden, which gives her income security and provides food. Almost all women working in agriculture in Thailand are informally employed. Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

Table 5: Composition of groups of workers by status in employment and by sex: Bangkok

Bangkok	Women				Men				Total			
	Employer	Own account	Contributing Family	Employee	Employer	Own account	Contributing Family	Employee	Employer	Own account	Contributing Family	Employee
Home-based workers	4.5	55.8	29.1	10.6	16.9	57.0	15.6	10.5	11.1	56.5	21.9	10.5
Motorcycle taxi drivers	–	100.0	–	–	–	56.1	–	43.9	–	57.7	–	42.3
Market traders	–	60.1	25.8	14.1	1.9	70.1	16.5	11.4	0.8	64.3	21.9	13.0
Street vendors	0.3	68.6	29.6	1.5	1.4	85.3	11.2	2.1	0.8	75.9	21.5	1.8

Table 6: Composition of groups of workers by highest level of education and by sex: Bangkok and urban Thailand (per cent)

Bangkok	Women				Men				Total			
	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Domestic worker	23.8	42.7	31.3	2.2	–	18.2	71.8	10.0	17.2	36.0	42.5	4.4
Home-based workers	3.1	27.5	41.6	27.8	1.1	21.7	39.4	37.8	2.0	24.2	40.4	33.4
Motorcycle taxi drivers	–	43.2	56.8	–	–	26.5	67.5	6.0	–	27.2	67.1	5.7
Market traders	1.6	31.0	37.5	29.9	1.7	21.5	52.6	24.3	1.6	26.8	44.2	27.4
Street vendors	1.9	49.8	38.7	9.6	4.3	44.8	40.6	10.3	3.0	47.5	39.6	10.0
Urban	Women				Men				Total			
	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Domestic worker	19.1	44.0	33.6	3.3	0.7	19.9	67.7	11.7	14.7	38.1	41.9	5.3
Home-based workers	3.5	26.7	43.6	26.2	1.4	20.8	44.8	33.0	2.5	23.8	44.2	29.5
Motorcycle taxi drivers	2.2	42.5	43.1	12.2	0.7	31.4	62.2	5.7	0.8	31.8	61.4	6.0
Market traders	3.5	30.8	45.0	20.6	2.0	24.3	53.9	19.7	2.9	28.0	48.9	20.2
Street vendors	2.1	44.2	42.7	11.0	3.8	39.7	46.0	10.4	3.0	42.0	44.3	10.7

Motorcycle taxi drivers have relatively high levels of education.

Street vendors in Bangkok also have low levels of education: for women, 2 per cent with no education and another 50 per cent with only primary education and for men 4 per cent with no education and 45 per cent with primary education. In urban Thailand, the percentages of women and men having no education are similar to the rates in Bangkok, but somewhat fewer have their highest level of education as primary school and more have secondary education.

A significant proportion of market traders have tertiary education: among women 30 per cent in Bangkok and 21 per cent in urban Thailand and among men 24 per cent in Bangkok and 20 per cent in urban Thailand.

Home-based workers have relatively high levels of tertiary education: among women 28 per cent in Bangkok and 26 per cent in urban Thailand; among men 38 per cent in Bangkok and 32 per cent in urban Thailand.

Nationally, the education levels of these workers are very similar to those in urban Thailand.



Rattana Chalermchai works with her husband, Mongkol, at home producing hand-made flip-flops for a resort. Home-based workers have relatively high levels of tertiary education. Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage

Hours of Work

Most workers in these occupations in the three geographic areas work more than a 40-hour week (table 7). Women tend to work as many hours as men and in some jobs even more, for example, motorcycle taxi drivers and domestic workers put in more hours in all three areas. Among home-based workers, 76 per cent of men in contrast to 65 per cent women worked more than 40 hours per week in Bangkok; in urban Thailand and nationally the hours of work for women and men were comparable. Across the five occupations, workers in Bangkok generally worked more hours than in urban Thailand, while those in the country as a whole worked the least.



*Viboonsri Wongsangiyim makes clothing at home and sells it at a local market.
Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage*

Table 7: Hours worked per week by occupations and sex in Bangkok, urban Thailand and Thailand (per cent)

Bangkok	Women			Men		
	<35 hrs.	35-40 hrs.	>40 hrs.	<35 hrs.	35-40 hrs.	>40 hrs.
Domestic workers	4.1	6.5	89.4	2.1	29.8	68.0
Home-based workers	3.1	12.2	64.7	3.6	20.6	75.8
Motorcycle taxi drivers	–	–	100.0	0.4	7.8	91.9
Market traders	6.0	12.2	81.8	0.7	17.1	83.2
Street vendors	4.7	22.4	72.9	0.8	17.6	81.6
Urban	Women			Men		
	<35 hrs.	35-40 hrs.	>40 hrs.	<35 hrs.	35-40 hrs.	>40 hrs.
Domestic workers	9.7	10.8	79.4	8.2	24.0	67.7
Home-based workers	5.8	14.6	79.6	5.2	15.8	79.0
Motorcycle taxi drivers	1.2	5.8	93.0	1.0	10.3	88.8
Market traders	9.5	18.3	72.3	7.2	19.4	73.3
Street vendors	9.5	23.2	67.34	6.9	22.0	71.1
Thailand	Women			Men		
	<35 hrs.	35-40 hrs.	>40 hrs.	<35 hrs.	35-40 hrs.	>40 hrs.
Domestic workers	13.5	11.2	75.3	11.1	23.7	65.2
Home-based workers	7.5	16.8	76.6	6.9	16.9	76.2
Motorcycle taxi drivers	6.0	5.6	88.2	1.2	11.1	87.7
Market traders	2.1	20.6	68.1	10.2	20.1	69.7
Street vendors	1.9	22.5	63.9	8.9	22.1	69.0

Age

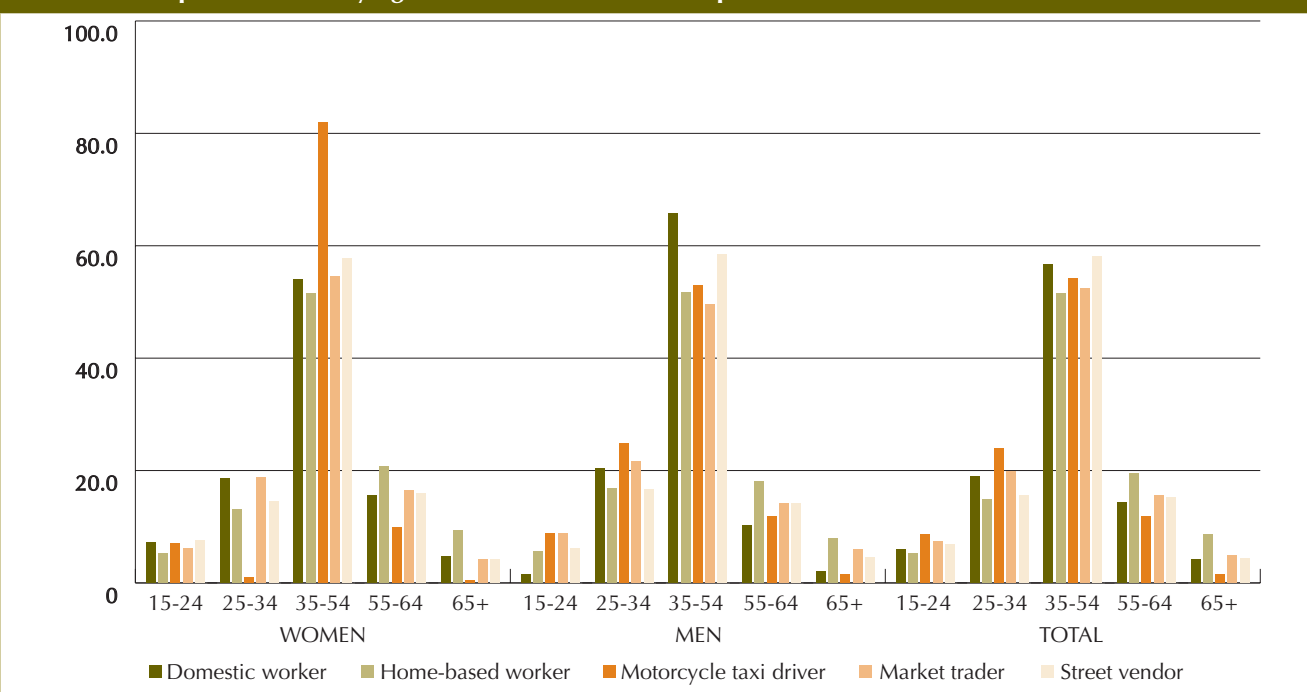
The majority of workers in each of these occupations in urban Thailand are in the peak employment ages, 35 to 54 (**chart 1**). For all of the occupations, work may begin at an early age and extend into older ages. In each job, 5 to 8 per cent of women are aged 15 to 24; 9 per cent of women home-based workers are 65 or older, as are 4 to 5 per cent in the other occupations, with the exception of motorcycle taxi drivers, almost all of whom are under 65. Among men, only 2 per cent of domestic workers are aged 15 to 24 and 6 to 9 per cent working in the other occupations are in this age bracket. At age 65 and older, few men work as domestics or motorcycle drivers, while 5 to 8 per cent of older men work in the other occupations.

The pattern of employment by age is similar in Bangkok and in Thailand as a whole..

Industry Sector

Of the occupational groups, only home-based workers are in a sector other than trade and services. In all geographic areas and for women and men, roughly 26 per cent of home-based workers are in the manufacturing sector and 74 per cent are in trade and services. Women in Thailand are the exception, with 30 per cent in manufacturing and 70 per cent in trade and services.

Chart 1: Groups of workers by age and sex: urban Thailand (per cent)



Many informal workers in Thailand begin work at an early age and continue to work after age 65.
Photo: Pailin Wedel

Work Related Injuries

Street vendors are the most likely of the occupations to report work-related injuries in Bangkok (20 per cent) and in urban Thailand (15 per cent); nationally, however, home-based workers are somewhat more likely than street vendors to report these injuries (13 per cent in contrast to 12 per cent) (**table 8**). In all types of work and all geographic locations, men are more likely to report work-related injuries than women.

The pattern of employment by age is similar in Bangkok and in national Thailand.

Table 8: Groups of workers reporting work-related injuries by sex and total in Bangkok, urban Thailand and Thailand (per cent)

	Bangkok Per cent reporting work related injuries			Urban Per cent reporting work related injuries			Thailand Per cent reporting work related injuries		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Domestic workers	6.5	7.3	6.8	5.6	7.7	6.1	5.2	6.6	5.5
Home-based workers	8.8	10.5	9.7	11.3	11.9	11.5	12.8	13.5	13.1
Motorcycle taxi drivers	-	10.2	9.9	0.9	9.4	9.0	0.7	9.1	8.7
Market traders	3.3	6.5	4.7	7.0	7.3	7.1	7.4	7.1	7.3
Street vendors	18.2	21.7	19.7	13.6	17.0	15.2	11.4	13.2	12.2



*Street vendors are the most likely of the occupations to report work-related injuries in Thailand's urban centres.
Photo: Pailin Wedel.*

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About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global network focused on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities and rights. WIEGO creates change by building capacity among informal worker organizations, expanding the knowledge base about the informal economy and influencing local, national and international policies. Visit: www.wiego.org.

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