



Working Conditions, Economic Dynamics, Knowledge and Impact of Labor Laws on Workers in the Informal Economy

***Assessment conducted in Grand Cape Mount County,
Liberia***

April 2026



OCHA

LIBERIA

Reference map of Grand Cape Mount

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Data Sources:
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Map name: lib_admin1

Map format: A4

The boundaries and names shown and the
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15 km

- NATIONAL CAPITAL
- Capital of region
- Other city
- Airport
- Main road
- Secondary road
- Local road
- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
- REGION BOUNDARY
- District boundary
- River

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an assessment conducted in Grand Cape Mount County, Liberia, in November 2024, with several follow-up until the publication of this document in April 2026. The assessment examines the working conditions, economic dynamics, knowledge and impact of the labor laws on workers in the informal economy in the County. The research, including 108 sample size, was carried out across four economic zones in the County -Sinje, Robertsport City, King Jor, and Gbah. It aims to understand the level of workers' awareness of their human rights and the prevalence of violation of their rights and to identify the gaps in law and policy enforcement within the informal sector. The findings of this assessment are supported by legal and policy analysis, as well as recommendations from various engagements led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Liberia (OHCHR Liberia), including with the Minister of Justice (MoJ) on 2 and 8 October 2025, the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) on 22 October, and the Ministry of Labor (MoL) throughout the assessment process and finalization of the document.

The assessment found significant gaps in awareness of labor laws among workers in the informal economy and reported challenges in their enforcement. 72.2% of respondents were unaware of Liberia's labor laws, including the Decent Work Act, while only 27.8% knew of these legal frameworks. Moreover, 81.5% of respondents reported never having received formal training on labor rights, highlighting a major deficiency in education and outreach initiatives. This lack of awareness extended to basic rights, with just 27.8% of respondents familiar with their rights to social security and to just and favorable conditions of work, including fair wages.

Income instability and job insecurity were identified as major concerns across the informal sector. Of the 75 (69.44%) respondents who reported irregular income, 55 (50.93%) indicated a lack of job security, suggesting a strong link between income instability and precarious employment. Additionally, 75 respondents with irregular income lacked formal contracts, revealing the widespread absence of formal employment protections.

Gender distribution showed that 56% of respondents were male, and 44% were female, with notable regional variations. In Sinje, the proportion of women was higher, at 23.1%, compared to 8.3% of men, while Robertsport City had more men, at 24.1%, compared to 6.5% of women. The age demographics revealed that the largest group of respondents was in the 35-44 age range, comprising 33.3%, followed by those aged 25-34, at 28%, and 18-24, at 20.4%. The agriculture sector was the most represented, at 22.2%, followed by fisheries at 18.5%, and retail and trade at 18%. Domestic work accounted for 14%, while transportation and artisanal mining made up 12% and 15.7%, respectively.

Among the respondents who were aware of labor laws, 25 out of 36 still felt unprotected due to poor enforcement mechanisms. Of the 36 (38.88%) respondents familiar with their rights, only 10 sought legal protection, while 70 (75.6%) respondents who were unaware of their rights never pursued legal help. A total of 80 respondents reported wage violations, with 65 (70.2%) expressing dissatisfaction

with the current labor law protections. Out of 108 respondents, 88 (95.04%) lacked formal contracts, and 70 (75.6%) reported labor-related issues.

The Grand Cape Mount County's fishing communities plays a vital role in Liberia's food security and economy, with significant contributions from foreign nationals, especially Ghanaians. However, these fishermen and their families face challenges, such as restricted movement due to high resident permit fees, language barriers, fear of retaliation, and limited knowledge of legal remedies.

Based on these findings, the report recommends improving the enforcement of existing labor laws, expanding training on human rights, including labor rights education, and strengthening social protection programs. It also calls for decentralizing labor protection services to rural areas, supporting the formation and formal registration of worker associations in the informal economy, and strengthening the capacity of relevant institutions, such as labor inspectorates and regulatory bodies to effectively monitor compliance with labor standards and enforce workers' rights. Additionally, the report recommends improving access to microfinance and training programs, as well as implementing gender-sensitive policies.

These findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive legal, policy, and institutional reforms requiring a collective effort from all government institutions, civil society, workers and their organizations, and community organizations. Such multi-stakeholder involvement is essential to promote and protect the human rights of all workers in the informal economy, in Grand Cape Mount County and beyond. OHCHR Liberia will use these findings to guide its advocacy efforts and provide technical support to enhance protections for workers in the informal economy, in line with international human rights and labor standards as well as national laws.

1. Introduction and Background

This study is a focused initiative conducted under the broader framework of OHCHR Liberia’s Labor Legal Analysis Project. It aims to generate evidence-based data on the lived experiences of workers in the informal economy, particularly those in rural and underserved areas who are often excluded from the protection of formal labor laws and policies. The assessment was designed to deepen understanding of the conditions faced by these workers in the informal economy and identify gaps in realizing their human rights, including relating to labor rights awareness and access to justice. The assessment also focused on workplace conditions in the informal sector, including occupational safety and health, wages, gender dynamics, and employment relationships.

It also examines the economic role of the informal sector, the factors affecting income and productivity, and individuals in the informal sector’s awareness of their rights. Additionally, it explores how labor laws impact workers in the informal economy and the barriers they face in accessing redress in cases of violations of their rights. The findings will support the development of an inclusive mechanism to protect marginalized individual in Liberia’s informal economy.

Liberia’s workers in the informal economy are engaged in diverse activities, including agriculture, artisanal mining, domestic work, fisheries, petty trading, street vending, creative work, and small-scale manufacturing, as well as informal employment within the formal sector, lacking contracts or social protection. As of 2020, the sector accounted for 68% of total employment and contributed approximately 40% of the country’s GDP, underscoring its importance to the national economy.¹

In the absence of sufficient formal job opportunities, informal work provides a crucial source of livelihood. However, it is often characterized by low earnings, insecure jobs, and unregulated working conditions. Women are disproportionately engaged in low-wage informal jobs and face additional barriers, including limited access to credit, skills development, and formal employment opportunities as well as gender-based harassment and violence.

International human rights instruments establish States’ obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including workers’ rights. Building on this foundation, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) affirm States’ duty to protect workers’ rights and businesses’ responsibility to respect the rights guaranteed under international human rights and International Labor Organization (ILO) standards. The Gender Guidance to the UNGP Reporting Framework calls on businesses to uphold the rights of women and children, referencing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In alignment, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 and the ILO promote decent work as vital to sustainable development.

Liberia launched its first National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR) in August 2024, becoming the fourth African country to do so. Covering 2024–2028, the NAPBHR focuses on

¹ World Bank, ‘A Diagnostic of Social Protection in Liberia’, January 2012, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/27961146805334035/pdf/678730ESW0P1210C0disclosed040130120.pdf>.

labor rights, particularly for workers in the informal economy, and seeks to improve working conditions and access to justice. It was developed by the National Steering Committee on Business and Human Rights (NSCBHR), led by the MoJ, and co-led by the MoL, with support from OHCHR.

Despite the sector's critical role in Liberia's economy, workers in the informal economy face significant challenges in enjoying basic rights and protections. This reality is inconsistent with States' obligations under international human rights instruments, including the commitments enshrined in SDG8², which calls for inclusive economic growth, productive employment, and decent work for all, including the protection of labor rights and the promotion of safe working environments. SDGs are a set of 17 global goals adopted by all United Nations (UN) Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In response, the OHCHR Liberia Country Office has launched an initiative to assess Liberia's labor laws and their alignment with States' legal obligations under international human rights instruments, with a special focus on workers in the informal economy, including domestic workers. This initiative aims to assess the legal and policy framework affecting workers' rights in the informal economy in order to identify protection gaps and support evidence-based advocacy for legal reforms. It seeks to develop actionable recommendations to promote fair, inclusive, and safe working conditions in line with SDG 8 targets. The assessment team included representatives from the MoL, The Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) and OHCHR's staff.

2. Methodology

The assessment employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the situation. A structured survey was administered through face-to-face interviews with selected workers operating within the informal economy in Grand Cape Mount County. These respondents were drawn from a wide range of livelihood activities, including petty trading, agriculture, artisanal mining, domestic work, and street vending. This methodological approach enabled the assessment team to capture diverse perspectives, generate indicative data, and gain deeper insights into the working conditions, challenges, and socio-economic realities of informal economy workers across the county. Given that the sample is small in size and not statistically representative of the entire population, findings should be understood as indicative rather than statistically representative.

For this assessment, the informal sector was defined with reference to the 15th International Conference of Labor Statisticians (ICLS) guidelines.³ For the purposes of this assessment, this included enterprises with fewer than 5 employees as determined in the national context, and businesses not registered within the national regulatory and administrative framework. Informal employment was

² See United Nations' website for more information on SDG 8, https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8?utm_source.

³ https://www.ilo.org/resource/15th-international-conference-labour-statisticians?utm_source=chatgpt.com

identified where jobs lack legal protection, social security benefits, income taxation, or employment entitlements such as paid leave, sick leave, severance pay, or health insurance.

Qualitative methods were employed to complement the quantitative assessments and enrich the analysis. These included an analysis of existing national labor laws and policies to assess their alignment with international human rights standards; a desk review of relevant reports, policy documents, and previous assessments conducted by other organizations; and consultations with national and local authorities, including the Ministry of Labor (MoL), county officials, and workers' organizations, to obtain contextual insights and validate findings. In addition, validation meetings were held with key stakeholders to review preliminary findings, ensure accuracy, and incorporate feedback into the final report, thereby enhancing the assessment outcomes.

a. Survey

The survey reached 108 workers in the informal economy who are engaged in unregulated economic activities without formal labor or social protection in the County. Key areas of inquiry included: current working conditions, challenges faced by workers in the informal economy, legal protections, socioeconomic barriers (including access to social benefits and services), awareness of labor laws and rights, and the extent of policy inclusivity and equality in practice. The participants were selected using a sampling approach designed to ensure a diverse representation across age, gender, and types of informal work. Demographic and occupational criteria were established in advance to capture a broad range of perspectives.

b. Interviews

The interviews were conducted over two days, from 19- 20 April 2025. Enumerators from the MoJ, INCHR, and OHCHR carried out one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions to ensure the accuracy and reliability of data collection. The questionnaire was designed to collect both quantitative data (e.g., income stability, job security) and qualitative insights (e.g., perceptions of policy enforcement and inclusivity).

Data analysis focused on identifying protection gaps, key trends, and opportunities for legal and policy reforms. The findings will inform targeted recommendations to strengthen the legal framework and improve policy implementation, with the aim of enhancing protections for workers in the informal economy, including domestic workers, in Liberia. The study examined working conditions, legal protections, socioeconomic barriers, awareness of labor laws, and policy inclusivity.

c. Field Visits

The assessment team conducted comprehensive field visits to four key economic zones in Grand Cape Mount County, identified as critical hubs of informal economic activity. These zones were selected for their prominence as hubs in hosting diverse trades and services that many individuals rely on for their livelihoods. The local informal economy within these zones includes a wide range of occupations,

such as artisanal mining, agriculture, fisheries, motorcycle transport, petty trading, and retail, highlighting the complexity and diversity of informal labor in the region. The primary objective of the field visits was to collect qualitative and quantitative data to generate critical insights into working conditions, legal awareness, and socio-economic challenges faced by workers in the informal economy, in alignment with the assessment's stated objectives.

The field visits commenced on 18 November 2024 in the Garwula District city center, Sinje, a bustling area characterized by significant informal economic activity. The assessment team, comprising representatives from MoJ, INCHR, and OHCHR, conducted structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including the President of the Motorcyclists Union, and several union members. These discussions provided critical insights into the operational challenges faced by **motorcyclists**, such as the absence of formal contracts with employers, low wages, and limited legal protections, including laws, regulations, and policies intended to safeguard their rights and ensure fair treatment in various aspects of life, including employment, social security, and personal safety. The discussions also revealed a lack of awareness of existing labor laws and protections among motorcyclists, often rendering them vulnerable to unfair treatment and unsafe working conditions.

In addition to motorcyclists, the team engaged with **local retailers and petty traders**, whose businesses form a vital part of the area's economic fabric. Retailers reported concerns about income instability, limited access to social protection, including social insurance and basic social services, and a general absence of formal support mechanisms. Many petty traders noted that while their work is essential for daily survival, it lacked security and fair compensation structures, with most operating without any formal agreements or protections under labor laws.

A female small-scale vendor selling clothing at a local market stated: *“Our businesses are vital to the community, but we continue to face insecurity, with no job guarantees or labor protections. We’re vulnerable to unexpected rent increases and fines from authorities, and we have no insurance or legal recourse if our goods are stolen. Additionally, we have no safety net if we fall ill or need time off.”*

Following the successful completion of the assessment in Sinje, the team proceeded to Robertsport City, the capital of Grand Cape Mount County, for further data collection. Robertsport is a major hub for **fishing and trade** and hosts vibrant fishing communities that play a significant role in supporting Liberia's food security and economy. A defining feature of the fisheries sector is the strong presence of foreign nationals, particularly Ghanaians, who have long contributed to artisanal and semi-industrial fishing through traditional skills, technology, and craftsmanship. Many have settled permanently, becoming integral to the local fishing economy as fishermen, boat builders, fishmongers, and traders.

In Robertsport, the team engaged with small-scale agricultural laborers and fishery workers, including Ghanaian nationals. The assessment revealed significant gender disparities, with men dominating the fishery sector while women were more involved in small-scale trading and domestic work. Stakeholders repeatedly raised concerns about limited awareness of human rights and protections, with many workers unaware of the Decent Work Act and other legal frameworks meant to safeguard their interests. One female domestic worker stated, *“No one has ever explained the labor laws to us. We just*

do what we've always done." Similarly, another respondent noted, *"Most of us have never even heard of the Decent Work Act. We don't know what rights we have."* A Ghanaian fisher man emphasized *"Fishing is not just our work. It is our way of life. We have lived and worked in these waters for many years, contributing to the community and the economy. We only ask for fair treatment, freedom to work peacefully, and recognition of the role we play in supporting Liberia's fisheries."*⁴

The third phase of the assessment was conducted in King Jor, a settlement known for its artisanal mining activities. There, the team held discussions with **community leaders and workers engaged in informal mining. Artisanal miners** reported unsafe working conditions, lack of protective equipment, and minimal awareness of occupational safety standards. Additionally, miners shared experiences of income fluctuations and exploitation due to the absence of structured employment relationships and formal contracts.

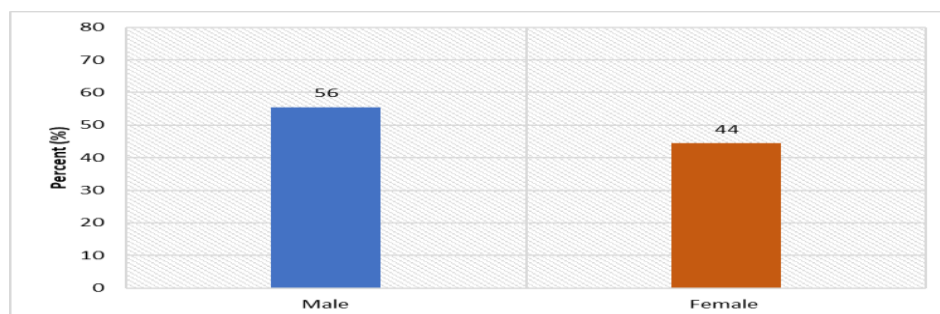
The final visit took place in Gbah, an area characterized by mixed informal economic activities, including **agriculture, domestic work, and small-scale trade**. The team conducted household surveys and informal discussions with domestic workers and agricultural laborers. Findings revealed that domestic workers, particularly women, faced challenges such as low wages, excessive working hours, and a lack of formal grievance mechanisms. Agricultural workers highlighted concerns about seasonal income instability and limited access to market linkages, which hindered their economic stability.

Across all four zones, the assessment confirmed widespread gaps in awareness of labor laws and rights. A significant majority of workers interviewed in the informal economy were unfamiliar with the Decent Work Act and lacked knowledge of basic rights, such as fair wages, social protection, and workplace safety. The absence of formal contracts, limited access to legal support, and fear of job loss were common barriers preventing workers from seeking legal recourse in cases of exploitation or unfair treatment.

3. Demographic Profile and Sector Representation

Within the surveyed sample, 56% of respondents were male, and 44% were female, as shown in **Figure 1**.

FIGURE 1: GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

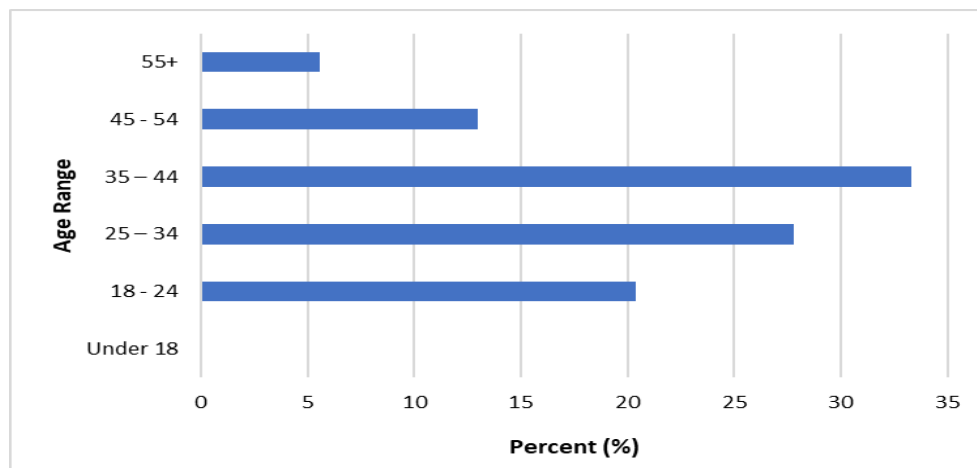


Source: Survey Data

⁴ Interview with a 38-year-old male fisher man, Buchanan, Grand Cape Mount County, Liberia, 12 August 2025.

According to **Figure 2**, the largest age group in the sample fell within the 35-44 age range, accounting for 33.3% of the respondents. This is closely followed by the 25-34 age group at 28%, and the 18-24 age group at 20.4%. The proportion of respondents aged 45-54 was lower at 13%, and there were no respondents under the age of 18.

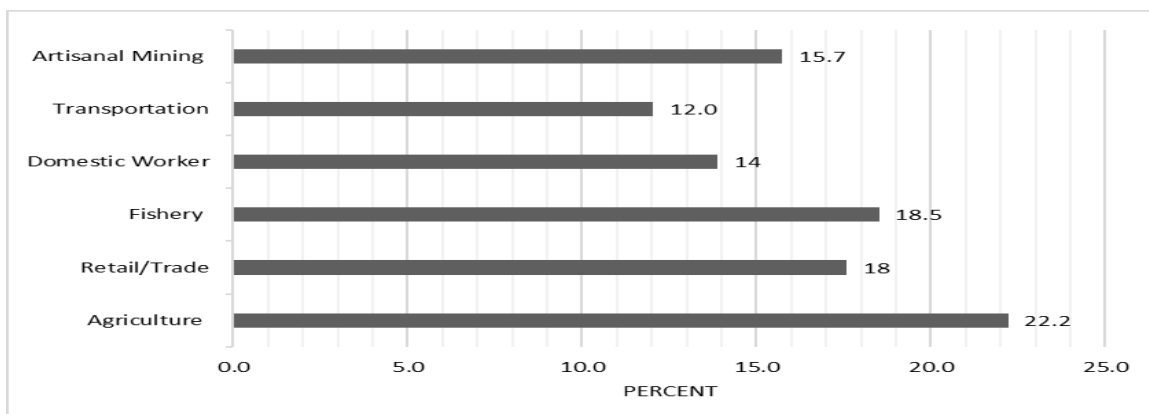
FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY AGE RANGE



Source: Survey Data.

Respondents in the assessment were engaged in a variety of sectors. Agriculture accounted for the largest share of respondents (22.2%), followed by retail and trade activities (18%) and fisheries (18.5%). Domestic work accounted for 14% of respondents. Transportation accounted for 12%. Artisanal mining accounted for 15.7%.

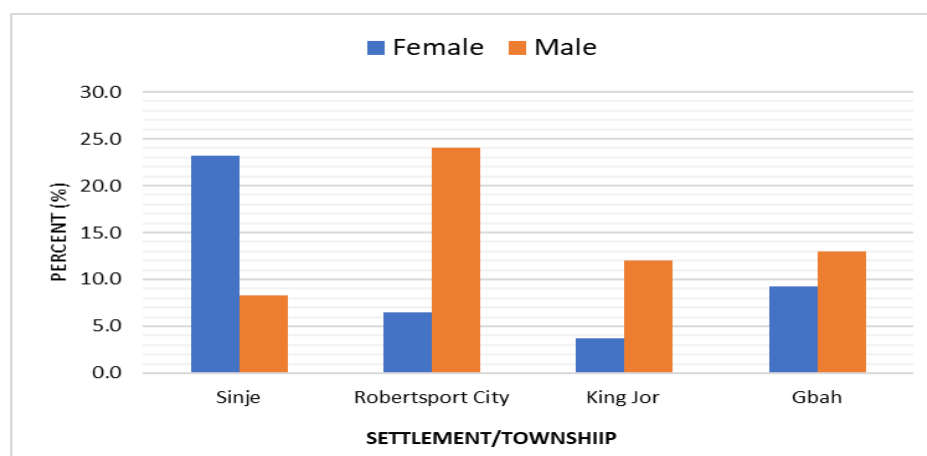
FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF SECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF RESPONDENTS IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY



Source: Survey Data.

In terms of gender distribution of respondents, male participants predominated in three locations, while women constituted the majority of respondents in Sinje. In Sinje, female respondents accounted for 23.1%, compared to 8.3% of male respondents. In Robertsport City, male respondents accounted for 24.1%, while female respondents accounted for 6.5%. In King Jor, males accounted for 12% of respondents, compared to 4% female respondents. In Gbah, the distribution was more even, with females accounting for 9.3% and males accounting for 13%.

FIGURE 4: GENDER BREAKDOWN OF SETTLEMENT AND TOWNSHIP



Source: Survey Data

4. Analysis and findings

a. Awareness of Labor Laws and Workers' Rights

The findings reveal significant gaps in awareness and understanding of labor laws and workers' rights among workers in the informal economy in Liberia. A substantial majority of respondents demonstrated limited knowledge of the legal protections available to them under national labor legislation, including the Decent Work Act. These protections include the prohibition of discrimination, freedom from forced or compulsory labor, and remedies for the infringements of fundamental rights. The data shows that only 27.8% of respondents were aware of labor laws in Liberia protecting workers in the informal economy, such as the Decent Work Act. This included female respondents, representing 8% of the total sample. In contrast, 72.2% of respondents, including women representing 36% of the total sample, reported no knowledge of these legal frameworks. This highlights a critical issue where most workers in the informal economy are operating without a clear understanding of their legal rights and protections. The low level of awareness suggests a systemic gap in information dissemination and access to labor-related resources, which could expose workers to potential exploitation and unfair labor practices.

Similarly, when respondents were asked about their familiarity with rights concerning fair wages, social protection, and safe and healthy working conditions, the results remained concerning. Only 27.8% reported being familiar with these fundamental labor rights, while 72.2% expressed a lack of

knowledge. The trend was consistent when the question was slightly rephrased, with 25.9% indicating awareness and 74.1% reporting unfamiliarity. This consistent pattern across multiple questions reinforces the observation that many workers in the informal economy lack sufficient awareness about their entitlements, which can affect their ability to advocate for better working conditions or seek justice in cases of labor rights violations. During the assessment, workers in the informal economy were also contacted for information gathering. A significant knowledge gap exists among workers in the informal economy regarding labor rights and responsibilities. Only 30.2% were aware of fair wages, social protection, and safe working conditions, while 69.8% lacked understanding. Similarly, when asked about their legal obligations, only 28.5% expressed awareness, with 71.5% unfamiliar with labor standards. This lack of knowledge may contribute to exploitative practices or unintentional abuses/violations, highlighting the need for greater awareness to promote fair employment and worker protections.

The issue of access to information and capacity building was further evident in responses regarding labor rights training. Only 18.5% of respondents had received any form of information or training related to labor rights and protections, while an overwhelming 81.5% reported never having received such training. This significant gap in education and awareness underscores the limited efforts in capacity building within the informal economy. Without proper training and education, workers in the informal economy may remain vulnerable to unfair treatment, unsafe working conditions, and wage disparities due to their lack of understanding of their basic rights.

TABLE 1: AWARENESS OF LABOR LAWS, WORKER RIGHTS AND AWARENESS

Indicator	Percentage Aware (%)	Percentage Unaware (%)
Awareness of labor laws protecting workers in the informal economy	27.8	72.2
Awareness of rights related to fair wages, social protection, and safe working conditions (initial question)	27.8	72.2
Awareness of rights related to fair wages, social protection, and safe working conditions (follow-up question)	25.9	74.1
Received information or training on labor rights and protections	18.5	81.5

Source: Survey Data, 2024

The limited awareness of labor laws and workers’ rights presents significant implications for workers in the informal economy. Without a clear understanding of their rights, workers face a higher risk of exploitation, including unfair wages, unsafe working conditions, and a lack of social security. Additionally, the absence of labor rights education prevents workers from seeking recourse in cases of unfair treatment or advocating for better working conditions.

b. Legal Protection and Policy Gaps

The assessment also investigated the extent to which workers in the informal economy in Grand Cape Mount County feel protected by existing labor laws and whether the laws effectively protect their rights. Despite the existence of the Decent Work Act (2015) and other legal frameworks aimed at safeguarding workers' rights, the findings suggest critical gaps in both the implementation and accessibility of these protections.

Regarding the perceived adequacy of protection, out of 36 respondents who are aware of labor laws, 25 (69.4%) feel unprotected. This perception persists despite protections under the law, such as their rights to just and favorable conditions of work (including safe and healthy working environments) and freedom of association, and protections for pregnant and nursing workers, largely due to weak enforcement mechanisms. This finding underscores that labor legislation itself does not provide adequate protection for workers unless it is effectively enforced.

Regarding access to legal protection, the data showed that 70 (75.6%) respondents who were unaware of labor laws never sought protection. Of the 36 respondents who were aware of labor laws and the rights to legal protection, only a small fraction of 10 (10.8%) actively pursued legal help. This suggests that awareness of labor laws does not necessarily translate into action, due to barriers such as cost, accessibility, lack of trust in the system, or fear of retaliation. The contrast between perceived adequacy of protection and the continued reporting of rights violations highlights critical issues, including gaps between perception and lived experience: while people believe legal protections are adequate, rights violations persist. Among the respondents, 80 (86.4%) experienced wage violations, and 65 (70.2%) also expressed dissatisfaction with the adequacy of protection under current labor laws. This finding suggests that gaps in policy enforcement are linked to the prevalence of rights violations experienced by workers in the informal economy.

The analysis also examined the relationship between the presence of formal contracts and reported labor rights violations. Out of 108 respondents, 88 reported having no formal employment contracts, while 70 of them also reported labor-related issues. This pattern underscores the association between the absence of formal employment arrangements and a higher exposure to exploitation and labor rights abuses/violations in the informal economy.

The analysis further examined reasons why workers do not seek legal protection. Among the 70 (75.6%) respondents who were unaware of existing labor laws, 50 (46.30%) reported that they had not sought legal protection as they did not know their fundamental rights. Among the 36 respondents who were aware of labor laws, 20 (18.52%) reported that they had not pursued legal protection primarily due to fear of job loss and the financial burden of pursuing legal action.

Overall, the findings indicate that awareness of labor laws alone does not necessarily lead to the pursuit of legal remedies. Respondents commonly identified barriers, such as limited knowledge of legal mechanisms, fear of retaliation or job loss, lack of trust in the justice system, and the cost and complexity of legal procedures.

These barriers are illustrated by the experiences of two street vendors, who reported that their goods were confiscated by local authorities. One female vendor in Robertssport explained that she had been extorted multiple times by a city inspector but delayed filing a complaint due to fear of losing her vending spot and limited confidence in the justice system. When she eventually reported the issue, her complaint was dismissed by the market chairperson because other vendors were afraid to testify. She also described the process as lengthy and costly. This experience reinforced her belief that seeking formal redress was too difficult and unlikely to succeed, a view shared by many informal workers who see the justice system as inaccessible and unsupportive.

The data revealed significant challenges in the enforcement of labor laws. Many workers reported clear violations of their rights, such as unfair wages and unsafe working conditions. However, the assessment found that only a small number of workers formally reported these violations to the market chairperson, the Labor Inspectorate, or other relevant authorities. In the limited cases where complaints were lodged, no meaningful action was taken. Complaints were often stalled due to delays in processing, complainants were encouraged to pursue informal dispute resolution, and witnesses were reluctant to testify for fear of retaliation. Taking together, these factors reflected weak and ineffective enforcement mechanisms.

Furthermore, the absence of formal contracts and employment documentation among workers in the informal economy significantly hinders the enforcement of labor laws.

Overall, the findings indicate that while the legal frameworks exist on paper, they are often not effectively implemented or enforced to protect the rights of workers in the informal economy. Policy gaps persist, particularly in extending protections to workers without formal contracts and improving access to justice mechanisms for marginalized groups within the informal economy.

c. Income Stability and Job Security

Income stability and job security are key components of decent work. The analysis examined these elements in relation to access to formal contracts. Among the respondents, 75 (69.44%) reported having irregular income and 55 (50.95%) of them also indicated a lack of job security. This pattern points to a close association between income instability and job insecurity. It implies that individuals with unstable income are often in precarious employment situations, where their job security is either minimal or nonexistent.

Further analysis comparing income stability and access to formal contracts revealed that all 75 respondents who reported having irregular income also lacked formal contracts. This finding suggests that workers with unstable income are more likely to be engaged in informal or non-permanent job arrangements, where formal contracts are absent or not effectively enforced. The absence of formal contracts is associated with both income instability and reduced job security, reinforcing precarious working conditions within the informal economy.

The analysis of job security and formal contracts further emphasizes the challenges faced by individuals in unstable employment. Among the 60 (55.56%) respondents who reported no job security, 50

(46.30%) also indicated that they lacked formal employment contracts and job insecurity. Without formal contracts, workers often lack legal protection, employment-related benefits, and safeguard against arbitrary dismissal, contributing to overall employment insecurity. See **Table 2** for more details:

TABLE 2: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INCOME STABILITY AND JOB SECURITY

Variable Comparison	Results Summary	Key Findings
Income Stability vs. Job Security	75 respondents reported irregular income; of these, 55 also reported no job security.	Irregular income is associated with poor job security.
Income Stability vs. Access to Formal Contracts	75 respondents with irregular income lacked formal contracts.	Irregular income often coincides with a lack of formal contracts.
Job Security vs. Formal Contracts	Of 60 respondents with no job security, 50 lacked formal contracts.	The absence of formal contracts is associated with limited job security.

Source: Survey Data, 2024

d. Working Conditions and Labor Exploitation

The assessment revealed significant challenges in working conditions and exploitation among workers in the informal economy in Grand Cape Mount County. Overall, 75% of respondents reported experiencing various forms of exploitation, ranging from unfair wages to unsafe working conditions. Many workers in the informal economy, particularly those engaged in domestic work, agriculture, and retail trade, reported earning wages they considered inadequate for the labor performed.

Unsafe working environments were frequently cited, notably the lack of protective equipment in sectors such as artisanal mining and transportation. Respondents also reported verbal mistreatment and limited access to social protection, including health insurance, and job security. The findings suggest that the lack of formal contracts and effective oversight and accountability mechanisms undermine the effective enjoyment of labor rights. Many workers reported being unable to challenge unfair treatment due to fear of job loss or the perception that accessible, effective, and trusted grievance mechanisms were not available.

The data points to a pressing need for stronger workplace protection, including mechanisms to address unfair wages and unsafe working conditions. The lack of accountability for employers engaging in exploitative practices highlights the urgent need for policy reforms that extend legal protection to workers in the informal economy and ensure their effective implementation and enforcement.

e. Policy Improvement Priorities

Respondents identified several key priorities for improving working conditions in the informal economy of Grand Cape Mount County.

Foremost among these was the call for better enforcement of existing labor laws, particularly the Decent Work Act, which many workers in the informal economy considered as inadequately enforced. Respondents consistently emphasized the need for enhanced government oversight, including more frequent and targeted inspections and the application of penalties for human rights violations in the informal economy.

Expanded access to social protection benefits emerged as another top priority. Workers emphasized the need for health insurance, maternity benefits, and pension schemes that are accessible to those in informal employment. Many noted that existing frameworks were overly complex and effectively excluded workers in the informal economy, underscoring the need for simplified and inclusive mechanisms.

Increased access to legal support was also identified as a priority. Respondents reported limited availability of affordable and accessible legal assistance when facing workplace disputes. Suggested measures included the establishment of community-based legal aid services and mobile labor rights units to raise awareness of rights and provide support with dispute resolution.

Finally, education and awareness campaigns were also recognized as essential for achieving long-term sustainable improvements in employment and working conditions. Respondents stressed the importance of strengthening outreach and training efforts to inform workers in the informal economy about their rights and the available mechanisms for seeking justice and remedy in cases of exploitation.

f. Institutional Effectiveness and Support Access

The assessment further explored the perceived effectiveness of national institutions in supporting workers in the informal economy and ensuring labor protections. Most respondents expressed limited trust in institutions such as the MoL and local human rights organizations, citing inadequate intervention in labor disputes and a lack of visibility in their communities. Many felt that these institutions were more focused on formal economy sectors, leaving workers in the informal economy marginalized in terms of protection and advocacy.

A recurring challenge identified by respondents was limited access to institutional support, particularly for workers in rural areas like Grand Cape Mount County. Limited outreach, resource constraints, and perceived bias against workers in the informal economy were noted as barriers. Some respondents, particularly domestic workers and female traders, also reported that they had experienced discrimination when seeking help. To strengthen institutional support, respondents recommended decentralizing labor protection services to rural areas, enhancing collaboration between government agencies and grassroots organizations, and building the capacity of the relevant institutions to effectively address labor issues facing workers in the informal economy.

5. Findings and Policy Implications

The data collected from this assessment suggests several significant findings with policy implications.

First, the finding reveals the heightened exposure of workers in the informal economy to abuses and violations of human rights, largely driven by limited awareness of labor rights and available protections. This gap makes workers more susceptible to exploitation, income instability, and unsafe working conditions. The absence of formal employment contracts and limited access to grievance mechanisms further exacerbates these challenges.

Second, gender disparities were evident across sectors in the informal economy. Women are disproportionately concentrated in domestic work and retail trade sectors, where instances of discrimination and unfair treatment were frequently reported. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions that focus on empowering women in the informal economy and addressing the specific barriers they face.

Third, this assessment identified critical gaps in law and policy enforcement gaps. Many respondents reported poor implementation of existing labor laws and limited government intervention in labor disputes in the informal economy. Strengthening the capacity of labor enforcement agencies and ensuring broader coverage in rural areas are essential to addressing this challenge.

Fourth, respondents repeatedly emphasized the need for capacity-building initiatives, particularly labor rights education and awareness campaigns. Expanding educational outreach and offering simplified accessible information on labor rights and complaint/accountability mechanisms would empower workers to advocate for themselves more effectively and seek remedies in the event of human rights violations.

Fifth, institutional weaknesses, including limited trust in justice systems and state institutions, were also prominent. Prohibiting and addressing discrimination, enhancing institutional capacity, improving outreach, and ensuring impartiality in labor dispute resolution are key to restoring confidence among workers in the informal economy.

6. Conclusion

The assessment highlights the urgent need for legal reforms and targeted policy measures to address the challenges faced by workers in the informal economy in Liberia. Extending legal protection, strengthening institutional capacity, and addressing socioeconomic barriers are essential steps toward advancing decent work, income stability, and social justice for informal workers. The findings further reveal that many workers in the informal economy struggled with access to credit, markets for their products, and mechanisms to sustain their businesses.

The integration and protection of workers in the informal economy, including domestic workers, Ghanaians, and other foreign fishermen⁵ in Grand Cape Mount County, are essential for fostering peaceful coexistence, upholding human dignity, and promoting sustainable development in Liberia's coastal areas. Recognizing and safeguarding their rights, in accordance with both international human rights law and Liberia's national legislation, is critical to ensuring a fair and inclusive sector that benefits all members of the community.

OHCHR Liberia, in collaboration with key stakeholders including the MoL and the INCHR, will utilize the findings of this report to advocate for reforms and provide technical support to enhance protections for workers in the informal economy in line with international labor and human rights standards.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, the recommendations are as follows:

- 1) Strengthen the legal and policy framework to promote and protect the rights of workers in the informal economy, in particular:
 - a) Amend the Decent Work Act to include specific protections for these workers in the informal economy in relation to minimum wage, working hours, work-related social security benefits, including maternity leave and health benefits.
 - b) Adopt regulations governing employment and working conditions in the informal economy, as mandated by the Decent Work Act.
- 2) Take all necessary measures, including developing a model employment contract, to ensure that all workers in the informal economy are provided with a formal employment contract.
- 3) Provide education programs for workers in the informal economy on labor laws and regulations related to their work or economic activities, with a view to enabling them to understand and advocate for their rights and responsibilities and to seek remedies when their rights are abused or violated. Strengthen the effectiveness of grievance and accountability mechanisms, which are easily accessible to workers in the informal economy.
- 4) Take all necessary measures to prohibit and address the discrimination and unfair treatment faced by women workers in the informal economy and to ensure all the measures legal, policy and other - are gender-sensitive.

⁵ In a separate engagement in April 2024, attention was drawn to the presence of approximately 2,000 Ghanaian fishermen in the community, who face challenges related to free movement due to high immigration fees, with an annual charge of USD 150 for resident permits. It was further noted that this influx has been associated with concerns about child trafficking, prompting authorities to implement measures to monitor all boats traveling from Ghana to Robertsport. Additional challenges include historical conflicts between the Kru and other communities, although mediation efforts have largely restored harmony. However, the rising trend of children leaving school to engage in fishing activities remains a significant concern, requiring urgent government intervention to address the issue effectively.

- 5) Enhance the capacity of the MoL to enforce labor laws and regulations and to monitor the compliance of employers with them across all informal sectors.
- 6) Take all necessary measures to enhance institutional capacity and address discrimination within justice system and state institutions, with a view to ensuring impartial and transparent labor dispute resolution mechanisms and restoring trust among workers in the informal economy.
- 7) Recognize associations of workers in the informal economy and support their engagement in collective bargaining and advocacy.
- 8) Provide workers in the informal economy, particularly women, with access to credit and microfinance, as well as vocational education and training to upgrade skills and to strengthen business management capacities, including financial literacy, crisis decision-making, and strategic planning.
- 9) Take all necessary measures to expand the coverage of social security schemes to workers in the informal economy, including health insurance, pensions, and employment-related schemes.
- 10) Ratify and implement relevant international human rights and labor conventions, in particular:
 - a) Ratify ILO Convention No.189 on domestic workers, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and the Members of Their Families and strengthen compliance of domestic legal framework with international human rights labor standards.
 - b) Implement the relevant international human rights and labor conventions and report to the relevant monitoring bodies thereon.

The implementation of the above recommendations targets a range of state and non-state actors, including:

Government and State Institutions (Primary duty bearers)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ministry of Labor: <i>The Ministry of Labor serves as the lead institution responsible for advancing legal and policy reforms, developing and enforcing labor standards, promoting formalization through model contracts, and delivering education and accessible grievance mechanisms for workers in the informal economy.</i> b) National Legislature: <i>The National Legislature provides the legal foundation for protecting informal economy workers by enacting and amending labor laws, approving budgets,</i> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>ratifying international standards, and exercising oversight to ensure effective implementation and accountability.</i> c) Ministry of Justice: <i>The Ministry of Justice supports the implementation of these recommendations by providing legal drafting and review, ensuring harmonization with national and international standards, strengthening enforceability of labor protections, and supporting access to justice and accountability mechanisms.</i> a) Civil Service Agency: <i>The Civil Service Agency Liberia supports these</i> |
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recommendations by aligning labour reforms with public sector standards, strengthening institutional capacity, and promoting coordination to enhance the protection and formalization of workers in the informal economy.

- b) Local Government authorities and municipalities: *Local government authorities and municipalities implement these recommendations by enforcing labor standards at the community level, promoting formalization, delivering awareness programmes, facilitating access to grievance mechanisms, and coordinating local-level responses to protect workers in the informal economy.*
- c) Judiciary and quasi-judicial bodies including labor courts and dispute

Supporting Actors

- a) National Human Rights Commission
- b) International Labor Organization
- c) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- d) United Nations Development Programme
- e) Workers in the informal economy
- f) Microfinance institutions,

resolution mechanisms: Judiciary and quasi-judicial bodies implement these recommendations by interpreting and enforcing labor laws, adjudicating disputes, ensuring access to justice, and providing effective remedies to uphold the rights of workers in the informal economy.

- d) The National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (NASSCORP): *It implements these recommendations by extending inclusive social protection schemes, facilitating registration and formalization, raising awareness, and ensuring that informal workers can access social security benefits in line with labor law reforms.*

- g) Non-Government Organizations
- h) Training institutions
- i) Development partners
- j) Labor Congress (LLC),
- k) Civil Society Organizations
- l) Trade Unions,