

Title of the Module: Workers Rights in the Informal Economy	Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Mahnkopf
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Programme: M.A. International Economics

Required Preconditions:

Learning Outcomes and Competences:

The informal economy is a worldwide phenomenon. It is not just a traditional or residual phenomenon but a permanent feature of modern capitalist development. This is particularly the case in developing countries, where the problem is mainly a lack of decent and productive work opportunities rather than outright unemployment. During the past three decades the world economy has become increasingly informal: the informal economy has gathered momentum to a much greater degree than the formal one. By some estimates more than 30 percent of the developing world's GDP and 70 percent of its workers are outside the official economy.

Certainly, the informal economy is still a topic which elicits controversies. Still there are diverging views about its definition, how to measure und how to classify the diversity of economic activities which are beyond both textbook economics as well as mainstream economies of the real world. In particular, it is highly controversial how to respond to the increasing trend towards informality.

The first part of the course will be dedicated to theoretical and conceptual discussions of the earlier concept of the 'informal sector' and the new expanded concept of the 'informal economy' which includes micro-entrepreneurs, own account operators, informal wage workers, and industrial outworkers (contractors). This will create the basis for a critical understanding of some major issues as well as some case studies to be discussed later in the course.

Content:

- An introductory seminar where students will present their own views and experiences with the informal economy.
- Various theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain the existence of informal economic activities will be discussed.
- Linkages between the formal and the informal economy in the era of globalisation will be analysed.
- Definition, measurement, size, and socio-economic characteristics of the informal economy in different regions of the world will be examined.
- The gender dimensions of the informal economy will be analysed in detail as well as various attempts to organise women working informally.
- Migration will be explored as second major features of a growing informal economy.
- Presentation of 'best practices' in organising informal labourers, based on internet and other research done by the participants of the course.
- The policy debate on the informal economy and the perspectives of an alternative 'economy of solidarity' will be explored.
- If there is some time left and students are interested: a poster presentation based on the independent research students will carry out over the course.