

General Studies – 3; Topic: Employment

Domestic Workers in India

1) Introduction

- Domestic worker is a person who is employed in any household on a temporary or permanent basis to do the household work.
- In the decade after liberalisation, there was a nearly 120% rise in the number of domestic workers in India
- Women constitute over two-thirds of the workforce in this unorganised sector
- According to estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are at least four million domestic servants in India.

2) Problems faced by Domestic Workers

- India's domestic workers are overworked, underpaid and abused
- Cases of torture, beatings, sexual assault, and incarceration
- Poor bargaining power, with no provision for weekly holidays, maternity leave and health benefits.
- If anything is missing in the house, they are the first to be accused with threats, physical violence, police interrogation, conviction, and even dismissal.
- Domestic workers are commonly referred to as servants and maids which has resulted in their feelings of insecurity and inferiority.

3) Present Status

- Most of these are from vulnerable communities – Adivasis, Dalits or landless OBCs.
- Most of them are migrant workers and an overwhelming number are women.
- Many resort to domestic work because of decline of employment opportunities in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors.
- The work has no reputation and generally considered as a menial work in exchange of some amount.

4) Challenges

- Their work — cooking, cleaning, dish-washing, baby-sitting — is not recognised as work by the state.
- Domestic work as an economic activity is too vast and employs too many to remain unregulated.
- Neither the Maternity Benefits Act nor the Minimum Wages Act or any other labour laws apply to domestic work.
- Domestic workers can be hired and fired at will. The employer has no legally binding obligations.
- Organising domestic workers has been a huge challenge as the work place is inaccessible and multiple
- As a result, the demand for the better wages or working conditions through an organized union has been weak
- India is a signatory to the ILO's 189th convention, known as the Convention on Domestic Workers; but has not ratified it yet.
- Little progress has been made in passing Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act, 2010' Bill.

5) Laws for Domestic Workers

- India has only two laws. The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, (UWSSA) and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.
- Neither of these recognises domestic helps as rights-bearing workers.
- The draft National Policy for Domestic Workers calls for promoting awareness of domestic work as a legitimate labour market activity.

6) Way Forward

- Amend existing labour laws to ensure that domestic workers enjoy all the labour rights that other workers do.
- Recognition of domestic workers as workers.
- Decent working conditions, including specified working hours, leave, paid holidays, protection against harassment, social security and access to benefits
- Ensuring progressive policy and legislation while enabling better enforcement of existing legislations.
- The domestic workers should be given daily and weekly rest hours and their payment must meet the minimum wage requirement
- States must take protective measures against violence against domestic workers.
- Policymakers, legislative bodies and people need to recognize the existence of an employment relationship in domestic work.

