

Conference Paper

**Mobilisations of Domestic Workers in India:**

*Understanding Claims Making and Policy Change on Domestic Work[[1]](#footnote-2)*

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# Abstract/Summary

# Introduction

Domestic work in India is a highly feminised sector of work, with the sector seeing a phenomenal increase in the numbers and proportion of women over the decades, but particularly since the late 1990s (Neetha N 2011). Domestic work is also one of the largest sectors of work in urban areas (Task Force on Domestic Work, 2011, Neetha and Palriwala, 2010). The socio-demographic profiles of domestic workers indicate that the majority are ‘illiterate’, and that *dalits* and migrant communities form a large proportion of these workers (Neetha and Palriwala, 2010, Neetha 2013). Domestic work in India, as elsewhere, is characterized by poor working conditions, precarity of employment, poor or non-existent work benefits, lack of social protection, and caste, class and gendered discrimination (ILO 2013, Bhattacharya and Sinha 2009, Neetha and Palriwala 2010). Moreover, its performance by women, and the hegemonic perception that domestic work relates to women’s ‘natural roles’ has contributed to the invisibilisation and devaluation of domestic work (Srinivas 1995, Parliwala and Neetha 2009, Bhattacharya and Sinha 2010, Gothoskar 2013, Nimushakavi 2011, Raghuram 2001, Ray and Qayum 2009).

Since the 1980s, domestic worker groups have mobilised to politicise and contest hegemonic discourses that construct domestic work as unskilled and valueless work and to reinterpret domestic work as necessary and skilled work. They have sought to shape public discourse and make claims on the State and society for the recognition of domestic work as work, and for their attendant rights as workers. They have also mobilised to negotiate better working conditions with their employers. However, in the 1980s, these mobilisations remained sporadic and scattered. Unlike with the women’s movement and other workers’ rights movements, these were neither co-ordinated efforts nor widespread. This picture was to change gradually with the growth in domestic worker groups, particularly since the late 1990s. There have also been slow, sporadic, uneven but significant law reforms that have sought to regulate domestic work, particularly since the early 2000s. More recently, there has been an increased impetus to co-ordinate mobilisation efforts across the country through the formation of the networks of domestic worker groups: the National Platform for Domestic Workers and the Domestic Workers’ Rights Campaign. Domestic workers’ voices have been getting louder and stronger, particularly coalescing around claims for a national law on domestic work.

In this paper, we are interested in briefly mapping the history of domestic worker mobilisations in order to locate key moments in the mobilisations of domestic workers as well as the gains made through important, if disparate laws to regulate the conditions of domestic work. The purpose of this section is to locate some of the challenges and the arduous and uphill struggle that domestic worker groups have faced in establishing the status of domestic work as a subject of legitimate political concern (qua Fraser 1989). This task is all the more arduous because of the complex federal structure in India which means that gains made in one state may not be replicated in another[[2]](#footnote-3).

This paper is also interested in analysing in detail some of the claims making by domestic worker groups as they seek to interpret the needs of domestic workers (Fraser, 1989). Although there is a wide gamut of claims making around which domestic workers mobilise, including the recognition of domestic work as work, social security benefits, etc., for the purposes of this paper, we focus in particular on three sets of claims- making. We examine the claims by domestic workers on wages, caste and sexual discrimination and skill training and development. We examine the claims around wages, particularly focusing on complex claims and counter-claims on how best to obtain better wages for domestic workers. We locate the struggle for inclusion of domestic workers in minimum wage notifications along with the difficulty of the criteria to use for such inclusion when domestic work is characterised by multiplicity of employers, and can be both piece-rated and time-rated. We also locate how domestic worker groups use minimum wage notifications, critique the inadequacy of minimum wages through an understanding of living wage, and focus their energies at direct negotiations with employers for better wages. We also examine the claims on caste and sexual discrimination by domestic workers, and whether the attention that groups pay to these claims is based on their ethos as workers groups, women’s groups, caste groups or a combination. The third set of claims that we examine are those centred on the place of skills training and development in the broader framework of workers’ rights. We locate the various interpretations of skills training as providing ‘better workers’ to the importance of ‘professionalization’ for the recognition of the skills required to perform domestic work.

While drawing on an extensive review of literature on domestic work in India, as well as interviews with key actors working in Delhi, in particular we focus on our interviews with domestic worker groups in the states of Karnataka and Gujarat[[3]](#footnote-4). These two states were chosen as sites of research as they offer interesting insights into the relationship between claims making and mobilisations by workers and policy change. Karnataka has had a strong history of mobilisations of domestic worker groups since the establishment of the first domestic worker union in Bangalore in 1987. More recently, there has been a proliferation of domestic worker *unions* in the state, marking a more methodical form of collectivisation, indicating both intensive mobilisation efforts and a more open state response, at least at the level of the recognition of domestic work as work. Gujarat, on the other hand, while having one of the oldest trade unions working with unorganised women workers (the Self Employed Women’s Association established in Ahmedabad in the 1970s), has hardly any groups that focus their energies on domestic workers’ rights, until recently. In Karnataka, domestic worker groups have managed to make domestic work a subject of legitimate political concern by wresting limited but significant gains through the inclusion of domestic work in the list of scheduled employments for minimum wages in the state. The struggle in Gujarat has a far more arduous battle ahead in pushing for domestic work as an issue of legitimate political concern.

# Part A: History of Domestic Worker Mobilisations in India: Key Moments of Mobilisations and Policy Change

In this section, we briefly locate some of the key moments in the history of mobilisation of domestic workers in India, focusing on the trajectory of the growth of domestic worker organisations. While the initial years focused more at sub-national mobilisations, there seems to have been a shift in recent years with groups also training their efforts at networking and co-ordinating their efforts at a national level. The sporadic nature of domestic worker mobilisations until recently has meant that the gains made by domestic worker groups were also sporadic and uneven, especially given the federal structure of the Indian state in the context of labour laws. In recent years, particularly around mobilisations for a national level law, as well as around the initiation of the standard setting process, there have been more efforts to coalesce domestic workers’ claims making.

## Contextualising Domestic Worker Groups

Mobilisation and collectivisation of domestic workers is no easy task given that domestic work is characterised by invisibility, fragmentation, a multiplicity of employers and relationships of patronage (Neetha and Palriwala, 2010: 108). Participation in mobilisation activities is further hampered by the sporadic hours of domestic work, coupled with the double burdens of work that domestic workers bear (Moghe 2013, Menon 2010, Palriwala and Neetha 2011).

Although there have been a few collective actions on domestic work since the 1950s (Neetha 2013; also see John 2013), it was only from the early 1980s onwards that the collectivisation efforts of domestic workers became more targeted with the formation of groups working on domestic workers.

From the early years, the groups mobilising domestic workers included those mobilising only domestic workers and those also mobilising other unorganised women workers. For instance, the Maharashtra based Vidharbha Molarkin Sangha (set up in 1980) and the Pune District Molarkin Sanghatana were both focused only on collectivising domestic workers (Kulkarni 2010, Thatte 2010). However, others such as the All India Domestic Workers’ Association (AIDWA), a mass based women’s federation affiliated to the Community Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), a trade union working with women in the unorganised sector, also began to mobilise domestic workers in Maharashtra and Kerala respectively (Interviews with Archana Prasad, AIDWA 16 July 2014, Nalini Nayak, SEWA 4 September 2014). Similarly, Women’s Voice, an organisation working with dalit women in the unorganised sector in Bangalore also began to collectivise domestic workers in the 1980s.

Apart from organisations such as SEWA, AIDWA and Women’s Voice, which came from an ideological framework of women’s economic empowerment, other early collectivisation efforts came from individuals affiliated with the Catholic Church. In 1985, Sr Jeanne Devos, a member of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, established the National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM) in Mumbai, which now has a presence in 17 states.

What is also interesting to note about these early mobilisations of domestic workers is that groups such as AIDWA and SEWA were part of the women’s movement since the early years of the 1970s and 1980s. Women’s Voice too, given its founder’s links with the dalit feminist movement in India, was also part of the women’s movement, albeit at the margins (Interview, Ruth Manorama date).

From the 1990s onwards, and particularly through the latter part of the decade, coinciding with the increase in the numbers of domestic workers, the number of groups working on domestic work also increased. While there are some organisations, who like AIDWA and SEWA, work with other unorganised women workers (for instance the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee who work with sex workers in Kolkata), there are others that have begun mobilising domestic workers after years of working more broadly on women’s issues (Parichiti, Kolkata and Jagori, Delhi). There are also those that have begun mobilising domestic workers, after working more broadly with the unorganised sector (Nirmana). Further, there are many organisations that have begun mobilising domestic workers after long years of community work (for instance, the ISST-SAATHI centre in Delhi, the Delhi Shramik Sangathan, YUVA in Mumbai). Similar to the NDWM, there are also other domestic worker organisations affiliated to the Catholic church (Domestic Workers Forum, associated with Chetanalaya). Central trade unions, such as the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (affiliated to the Bharatiya Janata Party), the Indian National Trade Union Congress (to the Indian National Congress), and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (affiliated to the Communist Party of India- Marxist), too have begun organising domestic workers, apart from others (Gothoskar date, Shamim 2010, interview with Archana Prasad, AIDWA, 16 July 2014).

If we examine the groups working in Karnataka through this lens of categorisation, Karnataka has six domestic worker unions that are sector-specific unions and two domestic worker unions affiliated with central trade unions (INTUC and CITU).[[4]](#footnote-5) Although the form that the mobilisations have taken has been unionisation across the board, two of the unions have been formed through the facilitation of women’s groups working in the unorganised sector (the Karnataka Griha Karmikara Sangha, affiliated with Women’s Voice, and the Domestic Workers’ Rights Union, affiliated with Stree Jagriti Samithi). Two others have come out of mobilisations by the National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM), one as a break away from the NDWM before NDWM was open to unionisation (the Karnataka Domestic Workers Union- KDWU), and the other after most NDWM branches across the country began to seek unionisation as the preferred form of collectivisation (Akila Karnataka Domestic Workers Union). Two other unions were formed by community based organisations, FEDINA (Mane Kelasa Karmikara Union) and APSA (Bruhat Bangalore Domestic Workers Union).

In Gujarat, apart from SEWA, the other organisation that has been working with domestic workers is a community-based organisation, SAATH, which works with an entrepreneurship model.

Analysing the organisations of domestic workers in recent decades, feminist scholar Neetha N notes that although organisations with varied perspectives have now sought to mobilise domestic workers, ‘the current phase of collective associations is marked by the presence of the women’s movement or by unions with a feminist politics’ (Neetha 2013: 37). While there are indeed more organisations with a feminist politics engaged in mobilising domestic workers, the picture seems to be a bit more variegated as there are also many organisations mobilising domestic workers that come from an ethos of mobilising unorganised workers more broadly, or even working on community level mobilisations, with or without a strong feminist ethos. In this context, the challenge for domestic worker groups is whether they are able to account for an intersectional analysis of caste, class and gender in addressing a range of claims making by domestic workers. We examine some of these issues in the next part of the paper.

Further, in terms of the relationship of a feminist politics with domestic worker mobilisations, there is a sense especially amongst activists with roots in the women’s movement, and with long years of mobilising domestic workers, that domestic work has in fact fallen through the cracks of both the labour movement and the women’s movement (Nalini Nayak, SEWA Interview 4 Sep 2014, Meena Patel, Domestic Workers Rights Campaign, Interview 2 April 2014). The consequence of this is that in places such as Gujarat where there are unions mobilising male domestic workers, there are barely a handful of groups mobilising women domestic workers in spite of the numbers of women engaged in domestic work (Meena Patel, Interview, 2 April 2014). Moreover, this falling through the cracks has meant that domestic work has not received the attention in public discourse that it deserves (Nalini Nayak, Interview, 4 September 2014).

## State Level Mobilisations and Gains

Apart from the nature and ethos of the groups mobilising domestic workers, the strength of collectivisation efforts are also varied across the country, with some states such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra , Rajasthan and West Bengal seeing strong mobilisations of domestic workers (ISST Report 2013, Madhav 2010, Neetha N 2013). There are other states such as Punjab, where domestic worker mobilisations are non-existent. Given the federal structure that underpins labour laws, as well as disparate mobilisation efforts, what this has meant is that where there have been changes to the laws, these have been uneven across the states.

Since the early 2000s, at some sub-national levels, the state began to regulate domestic work in two aspects: the inclusion of domestic workers in the list of scheduled employment under the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 (followed by a notification setting minimum wages for domestic workers); and the enactment of legislation setting up domestic worker welfare boards to avail of social security provisions. The inclusion of domestic work in the schedule of employment for minimum wages in particular, is a truly radical intervention, as it recognises private households as workplaces (see Neetha N 2013c). One of the main reasons for keeping domestic workers out of the purview of labour laws is that the workplace of domestic workers is the employer’s home and governments are loathe to recognise the home as an ‘industry’ or an ‘industrial workplace’, to which labour laws apply (Nimushakavi 2011). This idea of the inviolability of the private sphere of the home, which cannot be sullied by outside interference, and as such ought to be outside the scrutiny of politics, has been one of the main hegemonic interpretations that domestic workers have had to contend with in their claims for the regulation of domestic work.

Domestic work has been included in the list of scheduled employment for minimum wages in several states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Assam. However, not all states have fixed minimum wage rates for domestic workers (see Neetha N 2013c). Karnataka was the first state to notify the wage rates for domestic workers in 2004, and the rest followed in the years after[[5]](#footnote-6). What is interesting to note is that some of the inclusions in the schedules of employment came on the back of fierce mobilisations by domestic worker groups (Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala) whereas the ‘in Bihar and Rajasthan, it was a direction from the Union Ministry of Labour that initiated the process of fixing minimum wages’ (Ibid 78).

There are issues with the minimum wage notifications in the ways in which the wages are calculated, the kinds of gendered and caste based assumptions that are made in fixing tasks, etc (on which more below). Even so, the inclusion of domestic workers in the schedule of employment is an important first step in the claims making by domestic worker groups because the state recognises them as workers, even as it constructs domestic work in hegemonic, gendered and caste terms.

Other interventions by the state have been through the enactment of legislation setting up domestic worker welfare boards to avail of social security provisions: Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu are the three states where welfare boards targeting domestic workers alone have been set up (John 2013, Madhav 2010). However, here too there are problems. As John argues, ‘the gaps between the existence of a law or welfare programme, knowledge of it among potential beneficiaries, and the actual operation and coverage have to be noted’ (John 2013). Rupa Kulkarni locates the long history of struggle that led to the Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board Act which was passed in 2008 (Bavadam 2009, Pai 2010). However, Moghe too is critical of the legislation as there is no clear source of funds for this welfare board and it is entirely dependent on the state’s funding. Moreover, she says, ‘its biggest flaw is that it has no provision to regulate the working conditions of paid domestic workers and does not mention any legislation for minimum wages and other worker rights’ (Moghe, 2013: 67).

The picture of mobilisations across states shows a disparate situation with both uneven mobilisations and uneven gains. Therefore, the state of Maharashtra, which has a strong ethos of domestic worker mobilisations from the early days of the molkarin sanghas, and the NDWM has passed legislation for the setting up of a domestic worker welfare board, but has not included domestic workers in their minimum wage notifications. The states of Karnataka and Rajasthan on the other hand have notified minimum wages for domestic workers but do not have domestic worker welfare boards. Kerala and Tamil Nadu are two states that have set up domestic worker welfare boards *and* notified minimum wages for domestic workers.

## Collectivising Mobilisations at a National Level

In this inconsistent and differentiated context, in recent times, and especially since the mid-2000s, there have been concerted efforts to co-ordinate the mobilisations of domestic workers across states through consultations and the formation of networks and national platforms for claims making by domestic workers. This does not mean that there has been no effort to regulate the sector since independence. There in fact have been many attempts to regulate the sector with two Bills introduced in 1959 and a further two in the 1970s Moreover, there was a recommendation proposed by the Committee on the Status of Women in 1974 and a further Bill proposed in 1989 (Neetha and Palriwala 2011: 98-99). The first lot of Bills sought to regulate domestic work through the inclusion of ‘minimum wages, maximum hours of work, a weekly day of rest, fifteen days paid annual leave, casual leave and a maintenance of a register of domestic workers by the local police’. The Bills of the 1970s sought to bring domestic workers under the purview of the Industrial Disputes Act. There were other recommendations (by the Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974) to introduce ‘a system of registration of domestic workers, a minimum wage, and a legislation to regulate conditions of employment, social security and security of employment’. A further Bill, The House Workers (Conditions of Service) Bill 1989 which envisaged ‘every employer would have to contribute to a House Workers’ Welfare Fund’ (Neetha and Palriwala 2011: 98-99). While none of these recommendations and Bills saw the light of day, the issues that these Bills brought out in terms of how to regulate domestic work, continue to inform claims making by domestic workers.

Roopa Madhav in her analysis of the existing laws that extend legal protection to domestic workers points to the Child Law (Prohibition and Regulation Act) 1986, which was amended in 2006 to ban children below the age of 14 years from being employed as domestic workers (Madhav 2010). As one of the first legislations to deal with domestic work at a national level, domestic worker groups saw this moment as significant victory across the country, particularly those that had been mobilising on this issue for a while. Sr. Jeanne Devos of NDWM recounts that in 2004, the NDWM started to concentrate their efforts on child domestic workers, given their abysmal conditions. The death of a child domestic worker in 2006, she argues, propelled the initiation and enactment of the amendment. After the media related publicity events, the NDWM also galvanized its membership in the 14 states where it had a presence at the time asking for state units to mobilise on the amendment to bring domestic work into the purview of child labour legislation. The Amendment came on the back of mobilisations by domestic workers groups. As Sr Devos says,

So, all over India, they went to see politicians to bring it into the assembly and within three days the bill that we had presented, not worked on, was just floated - Ban on child labour in domestic work, in houses, hotels … that was the bill of 10 October 2006 (Interview, 25 July 2014)

The effects of the amendment were to galvanise the efforts of other domestic worker groups. Subhash Bhatnagar of Nirmana recalls,

In 2006, on 10th October, they amended the Child Labour Act and domestic work was included as a hazardous industry […] That was the day we called our first meeting. A public meeting to celebrate it. [However, we also recognised that this ban on child labour in domestic work] will not be sufficient. We will have to regulate the entire sector (Interview, 15 May 2014).

An impetus that the entire sector needs regulation was to find resonance with the initiation by the National Commission for Women (NCW) of a consultative process to draw up a Draft Bill on Domestic Work. Domestic worker groups came together over a two-year period. Although a Bill was proposed by the NCW with the efforts of some domestic worker groups, there were differences within the domestic worker groups over the role of placement agencies in mobilisations of domestic work. Moreover, there were also differences on how welfare boards for domestic workers would be set up and the role that they would play (Interviews, Meena Patel, date, Geeta Menon, SJS, date). This eventually led to the formation of the Domestic Workers Rights Campaign Group (DWRC) (Interview, Meena Patel, 2 April 2014).

From another quarter, the spurt of consultations initiated by WIEGO and the ILO in the context of the initiation of the standard setting process by the ILO in 2008 (for the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers 2011) helped to crystallise and synthesise the claims making by domestic workers across the country. The ILO Convention process was also behind the setting up of the Task Force on Domestic Work, which eventually produced a draft policy in 2011. Although the Draft Policy remained a Draft, it served as useful talking point for groups to intervene and interpret various claims, to understand ‘how needs were defined and sought to be achieved’ (Fraser, 1989). Globally too, through the work of IRENE, WIEGO and international labour organisations, momentum gathered to bring together domestic worker groups for the ILO conferences. After the ILO Convention was signed in 2011, domestic worker groups, energised by the Convention got together to develop strategies to get the Convention ratified by the Government of India. At a meeting convened by SEWA, the need for a comprehensive legislation for domestic workers was also expressed. This led to a series of meetings with 48 domestic worker groups across the country under the aegis of the National Platform for Domestic Workers, with a petition proposing a national law for domestic workers handed over to Ministry in July 2013 (Nalini Nayak, Interview, 4 September 2014).

Since then, state level platforms have been engaged in a consultative process to feed into renewed campaigns for a national law on domestic work.

# Part B: Claims-making by Domestic Workers: Unravelling Complexities

In this section, we examine the claims making process as well as the contours of the claims and counter claims by domestic workers on wages, caste and sexual discrimination and skill training and development. The idea of examining these claims is to locate the discursive underpinnings of claims making by domestic worker groups. We examine the claims around wages, particularly focusing on complex claims and counter-claims on how best to obtain better wages for domestic workers. We locate the struggle for inclusion of domestic workers in minimum wage notifications along with the difficulty of the criteria to use for such inclusion when domestic work is characterised by multiplicity of employers, and can be both piece-rated and time-rated. We also locate how domestic worker groups use minimum wage notifications, critique the inadequacy of minimum wages through an understanding of living wage, and focus their energies at direct negotiations with employers for better wages. We also examine the claims on caste and sexual discrimination by domestic workers, and whether the attention that groups pay to these claims is based on their ethos as workers groups, women’s groups, caste groups or a combination. The third set of claims that we examine are those centred on the place of skills training and development in the broader framework of workers’ rights. We locate the various interpretations of skills training as providing ‘better workers’ to the importance of ‘professionalization’ for the recognition of the skills required to perform domestic work.

## Negotiating Wages

Along with the claims for the recognition of domestic work as work, claims on improving the conditions of work, particularly wages, are at the heart of domestic worker mobilisations. However, given the lack of value owing to its characterisation as unskilled work exacerbated by its performance by women, negotiating wages is one of the most acute problems faced by domestic workers. Moreover, because domestic worker relations are usually steeped in relationships of patronage (with employers often being the main source of interest-free credit for the domestic worker), her bargaining position to negotiate a higher wage is weakened further (Neetha 2004, 2009, Sengupta and Sen 2013). Further, there are differences between workers performing different tasks. The reason for the difference is based on caste conceptions of domestic work, as Sengupta and Sen put it, the ‘perception of skills and the social dynamics of caste’. Although over time, the overall growth in the sector has weakened caste preferences, nonetheless, cooking continues to demand a higher wage as it is still considered more skilled work than other kinds of domestic work such as cleaning (Sengupta and Sen, 2013: 56). Further, it is not easy for domestic workers to navigate between these task-based divisions. A domestic worker under the category of ‘cleaner’ may only perform house cleaning or can take up other cleaning jobs such as washing clothes, etc. A cleaner cannot usually take up the task of a cook, for which the wages are higher (Neetha, 2004; Palriwala and Neetha, 2009, Tandon, 2012, Sengupta and Sen, 2013).

In such a scenario, almost all of our interviewees recounted the difficult process of tediously negotiating wages in each locality based on context and a set of agreed norms. There are fierce on-going debates over the norms for setting wages. WIEGO encapsulates the several tricky issues of ‘whether the wage ought to be time rated or piece rated, in kind, hourly or weekly, part-time or full time; based on house size or persons per household, over time; adjusted for boarding, include medical care and other necessities and multiplicity of employers’ (WIEGO website, also see Bhattacharya and Sinha, 2009 and Neetha 2013b).

Amongst domestic worker groups, a task-based wage system along with the size of the household of the employer seemed to be the preferred norm for negotiating pay with employers (with rates varying across location). This helps them control the workload they can expect from a household to some extent. While this form of negotiated wages work better for ‘part-time’, live-out domestic workers with multiple employers, the context of live-in domestic workers whose work is usually not defined by tasks alone, and who spends far more *time* on work than an eight-hour work day, is not easily captured by a task based definition. The clash of time rated vs piece rated is also therefore one about the type of worker performing the work. Although characterising domestic workers as ‘part-time’ is a misnomer because for the domestic worker, the work maybe fulltime, it has been used to distinguish between domestic workers with one employer and those with a multiplicity of employers. Moreover, the problems that are identified above, viz., on the criteria to be used, are also problems of generalizability, accounting for wage setting for a diversity of contexts and a diversity of purposes. Overall, these issues circulate in claims targeting the state for minimum wage fixation.

### Claims Making on Minimum Wages

As we have already seen, claims making around the inclusion of domestic work in the list of scheduled employments under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 has been a key area of claims making across several states. Although there are a few states (among the ten) that have included domestic work in the list of employment for minimum wages through the initiative taken by the Labour department, many such inclusions have come on the back of fierce mobilisations by domestic worker groups (Neetha N 2013c). Karnataka was the first state to notify the wage rates for domestic workers in 2004, though as we shall see, the inclusion came after long years of mobilisation.

#### The Struggle for Minimum Wages in Karnataka

In January 1992, in a historic move, the Government of Karnataka included domestic work in the list of scheduled employments under the Minimum Wages Act (see Labour file, 02 June 2005; also Chamaraj, 2007). This minimum wage notification came on the back of campaigns by Women’s Voice and the Karnataka Gruha Karmikara Sangha. Ruth Manorama, the founder of Women’s Voice, talks of the process through which the notification came about. Very early on in the mobilisations by Women’s Voice with domestic workers, given the lack of recognition of domestic work as work in public discourse, they were interested in processes that would recognise domestic workers as *workers* in state records. The registration of the domestic workers union with the Labour department was one of the first ways in which Women’s Voice secured the recognition of domestic work as work. In relation to the inclusion of domestic work in the list of scheduled employments notified by the state for minimum wages, her involvement with the mobilisations by construction workers’ in the state helped her to understand the process through which minimum wages were notified. She says that she realised early on that in order to have a say on whether or not domestic work could be included in the schedule, she needed to get on the Board, which she managed through her networks in the unorganised sector. At the Board however, as she puts it, she was met with surprise at the idea of seeking minimum wages for domestic workers. She did not get much support from the other central trade unions. She recounts that ‘at that time, the BJP union [Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh] were [the only ones] keen to support us’. Eventually, with the support of BMS and through the continued efforts of the domestic worker union, the notification was finally issued (Interview, 19 June 2014).

However, the notification was not to stay on the record books for long. Domestic work was arbitrarily removed from the list of scheduled employments a year after in 1993, and it was to take a further 8 years for it to get back on the statute books and another 3 years for the Board to actually set minimum wages for domestic workers (see Labour file, 02 June 2005; also Chamaraj, 2007). Ruth Manorama recalls, ‘that was a very sad process. I asked them what is the reason for descheduling, and they said that since no women came and registered case with us, we felt that […] no problems exist, so we descheduled. We protested. I told them just because there is no case, how can you deschedule? Scheduling or descheduling is a process [through which] women are going to get the benefit or not’ (Interview, 19 June 2014). The specious argument that because there were no complaints received by the Minimum Wages Board, there were no problems with the wages that domestic workers received is indicative of how little domestic work is understood, as well as how devalued it is in public discourse.

The struggle for inclusion of domestic work in the minimum wage notification was renewed with the redoubled efforts of the NDWM chapter in Karnataka (which became the breakaway KDWU). Sr Celia the then co-ordinator of NDWM in Karnataka and founder of the KDWU recalls, ‘of course [it was a huge struggle]. Every woman’s day, every worker’s day, we were on the streets’. She says that apart from the efforts of groups such as hers, the Labour Commissioner of the time, a dalit commissioner, was sympathetic to the demands of domestic workers. He called a meeting of all the domestic worker groups, and Sr Celia was made part of a committee to study and report on minimum wages for domestic workers. This committee had other trade union members who were however not as supportive, replicating the experience that Ruth Manorama had early on. The question they repeatedly asked her was, ‘who is the employer of domestic workers- wife, mother, grandmother, grandfather’? But the Labour Commissioner, she says, was instrumental in passing the notification. The notification was eventually issued in 2001, although the wages were only set in 2004 (Chamaraj, 2007, Interview, Sr Celia 12 August 2014). The logic that because the nature of the employment was difficult to fit into the official categories of who is an employer – employee, that domestic workers should then not receive the benefits of minimum wages is illustrative of how difficult it is to shift hegemonic discourses on domestic work. Moreover, that there was a three year gap between the inclusion of domestic workers in the schedule of employment and the fixation of wages illustrate the continuous and arduous nature of the politics of claims making. Apart from the struggle to have the claim recognised as an issue of legitimate political concern, there are further struggles in how to implement the claim and finally securing the provision of the claim (Fraser, 1989).

### Evaluating Minimum Wages: Criteria for fixing wages, and its effects

In her critical evaluation of minimum wage notifications across 5 states, Neetha argues that there is a fundamental problem with the ways in which minimum wages are conceptualised for domestic workers, as domestic work is not defined as an ‘occupation in terms of an employment relationship or as employment within private households’. Rather, all of them define domestic work in terms of the tasks undertaken, viz., cleaning, cooking, childcare, etc. The problem with the lists actually on offer, Neetha suggests are twofold: there is a risk of tasks not listed falling outside the purview of minimum wages. Second, and more critically, Neetha notes that this task based listing is deeply gendered, relying on a social understanding of household work, rather than an employment relationship of domestic work. She argues,

Paid domestic work is understood in terms of the tasks that women perform customarily at home without pay. There are reservations among policymakers, unions, and organisations working among domestic workers on the inclusion of specialised care tasks, and tasks such as gardening, ironing, driving, and so on, in the minimum wage notification for domestic work. These reservations, more than any purported practical difficulties (given the gendered segregation across tasks) of a broader definition, clearly emanate from a social understanding of domestic work. Domestic work is quite simply a non-technical and unskilled occupation, a view shared by all the stakeholders. Surprisingly, many unions or organisations working among domestic workers, though they advocate recognising domestic work as skilled work, also argue for such divisions (Neetha N, 2013c: 79).

Moreover, there are problems with the durations for which minimum wages are fixed, viz., whether this is done on an hourly, daily or monthly basis. Against the general norm, for fixing wages on a monthly basis, wages are fixed on an hourly or daily basis. Although this may reflect the ‘part-time’ nature of the work, in fact it this basis of fixing wages is quite regressive as it ‘allows employers to pay workers on an hourly basis, leading to increased work intensity’, increasing ‘the risk of both self-exploitation and exploitation by their employers’. Further, this could lead to the denial of weekly rest days. Moreover, by restricting daily rates to an eight hour work period, this mode of wage fixation does not reflect the realities of live-in workers (see Neetha N, 2013: 79. Further, the compliance regimes of registers and inspections are either deliberately excluded for domestic workers or implicitly done (Ibid).

Apart from issues of how wages are arrived at, the actual wages set are below all other sectors, indicating how devalued domestic work is. Moreover, often the minimum wage adopted by the states does not guarantee workers’ basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and amenities (Chamaraj 2006). A scathing critique of minimum wages have come from groups arguing that the minimum wages set do not reflect living wages required by domestic workers (Interview, Geeta Menon, SJS, date). As Anita Juneja of DSS-DGKS suggests, domestic workers’ groups believe efforts have to be concentrated not just to achieve minimum wages but ‘a decent standard of minimum wages for domestic workers’ (translated from original) (Interview, 4 June 2014). Thirdly, in many instances, the minimum wages set are below the rates negotiated by the domestic workers themselves (i.e., Rajasthan).

Consequently, some organisations such as Stree Jagriti Samithi in Bangalore have stopped mobilising domestic workers around minimum wages (Interview with Geeta Menon 17 June 2014). However, even in Karnataka, there are organisations such as CITU and the NDWM that continue to mobilise on minimum wages, as in some pockets in Bangalore and especially in other parts of Karnataka, wages are still abysmally low. (Sr Nisha Mathew, NDWM, 17 June 2014).

The issue of wage negotiations, whether through minimum wages or through bargaining with employers are also dwarfed by the difficulties of maintaining solidarities amongst domestic workers in fixing wages. As Archana Prasad of AIDWA puts it,

In a situation where one woman can be replaced by five others, you obviously would have depressed wages. This is what we call the reserve army of labour that it is almost being treated like an unskilled casual labour [...]. The average hourly wage was something like Rs. 18 in Uttar Pradesh, as there are more and more women who are ready to work. [It is] simple demand and supply logic (Archana Prasad, AIDWA Delhi, Interview, 16 July 2014).

Apart from the challenge to negotiate wages, domestic workers also suffer from arbitrary cuts in wages, and inadequate recognition and remuneration for additional work and/or for heavy, arduous and never-ending workloads (Gothoskar 2013). The fact that unions and organisations mobilising domestic workers consider a day’s paid leave per week or a bonus arrangement as an achievement speaks of the difficult terrain of mobilisations that domestic worker groups tread.

## Claims against Discrimination of Domestic Workers: Secondary claims?

Incidents of violence against women are by no means infrequent with numerous instances of domestic workers being verbally abused, beaten and sexually assaulted and even murdered (Gothoskar 2013, Tandon 2012). However, violence against domestic workers is invisibilised owing to the performance of domestic work in a ‘private’ sphere (Gothoskar 2013, Santhi 2006 and Bose 2003). Unlike the issue of wages, the question of some forms of violence and discrimination such as sexual harassment and caste discrimination that domestic workers face, do not animate all domestic worker groups to the same extent. However, there are other forms of harassment, such as allegations of theft that domestic worker groups do rally against. In this section, we briefly locate some of the ways in which some domestic worker groups articulate claims around violence and discrimination.

### Conceptualising Violence: Class and Gender

One of the interesting discursive strains in discussions of violence, particularly by groups that have had long years of working with both class and gender issues is the question of how violence is conceptualised. The understanding of violence that organisations such as AIDWA bring to the table is both feminist and class-based:

Since we are a class-based organisation, a self-confessed leftist organisation, we are looking at women’s issues not only from the feminist perspective but from the perspective of working classes. […] So in our perspective, violence is related to the labour issue because working class women face different forms of violence and for them it is not only a question of honour and inheritance and all, it is a question of livelihood also. So though one part of our work was on that, I think very early on we realised that we have to look at the basic necessities that are important for all working class families if you want to meet the needs of these working class women (Archana Prasad, AIDWA, interview, 16 July 2014).

The argument that organisations such as AIDWA make is that it is important to analyse the links between women’s economic contexts and the various forms of violence that they face:

We find that violence is the other side of the labour issue actually. So it is also the new way in which we have started looking at the relationship between neoliberalism and violence that has got us to this. […] So we do not look at violence as something that is basically something generic to being a subordinate to a male patriarchal system. The forms of violence differ with the kind of work that you do and therefore you have to take into account the work even if you want to treat the violence (Ibid).

This broader understanding of violence based on class relations informs the work of other domestic workers’ groups such as Stree Jagruti Samiti (Geeta Menon, Interview, 17 June 2014) and Women’s Voice. Moreover, some organisations focusing on sexual violence such as Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS) also adopt this understanding of violence (Kalyani Menon-Sen, Interview, 31 July 2014). Such understanding allows organisations to focus on issues of not just forms of sexual violence, but also the underlying reasons for women’s vulnerability to sexual violence. For instance, the fact that there is no housing policy for migrant construction workers makes them dependent on and vulnerable to builder contractors and landlords (Interview, Kalyani Menon-Sen, WSS, date). Similarly, the lack of structural support through the provision of social security for domestic workers, for instance, make them acutely vulnerable to relationships of patronage and dependence of their employers.

### Mobilising against Sexual Harassment

Recent mobilisations by some domestic workers, particularly organisations such as the NDWM, Jagori, SEWA, AIDWA, Women’s Voice, SJS, FEDINA, who come from a feminist ethos, have directed their attentions towards lobbying for the inclusion of domestic workers in the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, 2013. Again, as with other regulations targeting labour relations, domestic work was initially excluded from the purview of the proposed Bill as the ‘home’ was not considered as a ‘workplace’, completing obfuscating the fact that for domestic workers these are workplaces.

Groups were engaged at various levels of mobilisation, with organisations such as FEDINA and KDWU engaged more in the state level mobilisations through representations to the labour department asking for the government to form sexual harassment committees and to send inspectors to inspect homes (Interview, Usha Ravikumar, FEDINA, 24 July 2014). Similarly, they and others were involved in sending representation to the central government on seeking the enactment of the Sexual Harassment Bill at the national level through a postcard campaign (Interview, Sr Nisha Mathew, 17 July 2014). Others such as Ruth Manorama of Women’s Voice were involved in the national committee that recommended the inclusion of domestic workers in the Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 (Interview, 19 June 2014).

However, although domestic worker groups do take up cases of sexual harassment against employers, this is no easy issue to contend with. First of all, many women do not come forward to report sexual violence because of the discourses of shame and honour associated with such violence. Moreover, even when cases are reported, especially for the newer unions, the action seems to be limited to the level of negotiation with the employer through warnings rather than through the legal mechanism (see interviews with Geeta Menon 17 June 2014, FEDINA, 25 July 2014, CITU, 11 August 2014).

On the back of domestic worker mobilisations, eventually the government included domestic workers in the sexual harassment law, recognising that they too are vulnerable behind the closed doors of employers’ homes.

### Caste-Based Discrimination

The relationship between caste and domestic work is complex. Social relations of caste continue to inform the work that women from various communities perform. In this sense, while domestic work is perceived as an extension of women’s work, some forms of domestic work are perceived as an extension of *dalit* women’s work. As Ruth Manorama argues, ‘a division of labour, a hierarchy of labour is [maintained within domestic work]. So [dalit women perform] cleaning, bathroom washing’ (Interview, 19 June 2014). This is echoed by other commentators such as Moghe who suggests that ‘cleaning toilets is largely done by dalit women, while cooking appears to be the preserve of upper-caste women’ (Moghe 2013:66). Further, the vestiges of pollution and purity, which inform caste-based discrimination, continue to operate in the context of domestic work – of serving food and drink in separate utensils, of seating ‘servants’ on the floor, of not allowing them the use of toilets, etc. (Srinivas 1995, also see interview with Ruth Manorama, Women’s Voice, 19 June 2014).

Even though the social composition of domestic workers has been shifting over the years (Neetha 2013; ISST study 2009), what remains is the association of certain forms of domestic work with caste. In that sense, the social relations of caste continue to inform discriminatory practices where even if the domestic workers are not dalit, the low *status* associated with domestic work has resulted in discriminations based on notions of pollution and purity. In a survey with live-out domestic workers in Delhi for instance, irrespective of caste, domestic workers cited facing acute discriminations, including not being allowed to drink water or use toilets at their employer’s home (ISST 2009). This experience, of not being allowed the use of basic amenities accorded to most workers at their sites of work, is an ubiquitous experience of domestic workers. As Anita Juneja of Delhi Shramik Sanghathan says,

Even now domestic workers are forbidden from using toilets at the homes in which they work. There is no place for them to rest or to eat their food. They do they have any access to proper toilets or safe drinking water. They have to rely on the mercy of their employers for all these facilities’ (translated from original) (Interview, 4 June 2014).

There are voices being raised against these discriminatory practices by some domestic worker groups. Sr. Jeanne Devos (NDWM) argues that the ability of using toilets is a question of ‘dignity and rights’ (Interview, 25 July 2014). Increasingly, groups like Parichiti in Kolkata are working with Residential Welfare Associations (RWAs) for providing domestic workers a space where to rest, eating food and also where to conduct union meetings (SDTT partners meeting, 2013, also see interview with Nalini Nayak, NPDW, date).

Amongst a wider set of domestic worker groups too, such as FEDINA in Bangalore, members are beginning to recognise the various forms of caste based discrimination that domestic workers face. Nirmala of Makaayu (union associated with FEDINA) recounts, ‘Someone asked me to come to work, but she said that she won’t let me into the kitchen. When I asked for the pay, she asked me what is my caste?’ Similarly, Selvi argues that ‘they don’t let us enter through the entrance, won’t let us come in when there are guests. They sprinkle water over cleaned vessels’ (Interview, FEDINA 24 July 2014).

However, unlike the mobilisations on wage negotiations, leave, social security, etc., caste discrimination does not animate the mobilisations of many domestic worker groups. As Usha Ravikumar of FEDINA puts it, ‘we do not take up dalit issues and agitate. But we support them for their cause’ (Interview, 24 July 2014).

### Allegations of Theft

An acute form of harassment that domestic workers face is allegations and false complaints of theft (Hamid 2006). The use of false accusations of theft for removal of service, non-payment of wages, etc. is a common practice pointed out by all interviewees of the study across Gujarat, Karnataka and Delhi. Mobilising against these false complaints is also a part of the work that domestic workers’ unions and organisations perform for their members[[6]](#footnote-7). A couple of the interviewees indicated that some of the cases of theft against their members have also been in response to allegations of sexual harassment or for demand for payment of wages, or other rights (interviews with Nirmala, FEDINA 24 July 2014 and Selvi, CITU, 11 August 2014). The ways in which domestic worker groups handle these cases is to mobilise as a group and confront the employers to withdraw the cases of theft. However, in some instances, domestic worker groups have also had to file counter cases of non-payment of wages, etc.

Nirmala of Makaayu recounts an interesting method with which they countered an allegation of theft. She says that she had taken leave of 2 days because her daughter had had an operation. Upon her return, her employer accused her of stealing a pair of sandals. How could she have done so, she countered, ‘when you follow me everywhere’? The employer cut her pay based on the cost of the sandals and removed her from employment. The union mobilised a group of women and with FEDINA’s support, they took old sandals to the house to donate to the employer. Based on the agitation, the employer paid the balance but did not pay severance pay of 3 months as demanded. The union applied to the labour court and won the case. But as Nirmala says, this was ‘after agitating for so long. This is everywhere. Theft, theft, theft’ (Interview, 24 July 2014).

## Professionalising Domestic Work: Skills Training and/or Workers’ Rights

One of the ways in which domestic worker organisations have sought to improve the conditions of domestic workers since the early days of the mobilisation of domestic workers in the 1980s has been through skill development. SEWA Kerala saw the advantages of skills training for their workers early on, pegging training with improved wages (Interview, Nalini Nayak, 4 September 2014). Similarly, other organisations such as YUVA in Mumbai, CWDR in Chennai, as well as ISST-SAATHI centre in Delhi have focused on skill provision for domestic workers either through skill enhancement within the domestic worker sector or through skill development in other sectors of employment (ISST- SDTT Partners workshop report, 2013).

Some of the organisations working on skill development with domestic workers come from an ethos of building entrepreneurial skills amongst domestic workers and professionalising domestic work. Aiming for the creation of ‘home managers’, SAATH in Gujarat provides skills training to domestic workers. It also provides placement services for their home managers based on the requirements of the employees. It is through this function, that they negotiate wages and working conditions for the workers (Interview with Chinamyi, SAATH).

The question of skill training and development is a contentious issue amongst domestic worker groups, especially when it is linked to placement agencies. The first is the understanding that skills training and development, without a simultaneous critique of the relationships of power that domestic workers are embedded in, especially through programmes such as SAATH’s would result in the creation of ‘better workers’ rather than ‘better workers’ rights’. Moreover, especially when combined with placement services, it poses serious concerns about the dilution of the function of domestic worker groups to mobilise domestic workers, it also poses issues about the function that an organisation serves. As Geeta Menon, SJS explains, through her own failed attempts to provide placement services for domestic workers,

I realised that after a year of trying to do this matching between the employer through a contract - I realised that one cannot do it as a social work organisation. If you have to do a placement service, you have to set it up as an economic unit. It has to be properly run like a business unit (Interview, date).

Even so, although skill development for domestic workers has not animated the mobilisations of many domestic worker groups, skill development is not without its support amongst domestic worker groups. Anita Juneja of DSS for instance argues that ‘skills development for domestic workers is important and necessary. Most domestic workers are migrants and they are unable to operate electrical gadgets or make good food. Skills training will help them in boosting their confidence and in turn they will be able to demand better wages’ (translated from original) (Interview, 4 June 2014).

Moreover, organisations that have focused on women’s livelihoods, such as SEWA have been at the forefront of linking skill development with improvement in wages. SEWA Kerala’s engagement with domestic workers is based on specialized skill trainings and professionalization of the work. Nalini Nayak also locates the importance of skill development and professionalization in breaking down the traditional hierarchies associated with domestic work,

Demand for better services has allowed our women to demand better wages […]. We in Kerala have been able to break the caste barriers associated with domestic work. We all clean toilets because we are proud of our work and that is what we do. We want our rights for wages and we do not make distinction. Like for instance, the same woman who cleans the toilet cooks the food in our unit and there is no problem about this. If any employer comes looking for a worker of a certain caste, we turn them away. However, there is such a demand for our professional workers, the caste distinction falls apart. (Interview, 4 September 2014).

Similarly, Chinmayi Shah (SAATH) says,

Professionalization of domestic work lends dignity to the woman performing the tasks; a professional relationship develops between the employer and the employee thereby resulting in better working conditions, higher wages and social security benefits (Interview, 3 April 2014) (Interview, date).

The conversation among domestic worker groups about the role of skill development and placement agencies comes amidst a growth of professional organisations focused on skill development of domestic work combined with placement of domestic workers (for instance BeAble and Domesteq in Delhi), as well as a policy push on skill development. The Draft Policy on Domestic Work, as well as several interventions by the ILO, who strongly promote skills training as part of its campaign for decent work, are indicative of this policy push. Moreover, there has been a push from skill development organisations such as BeAble and SAATH for a Sector Skills Council for Domestic Workers. Skill Development organisations (SDTT partners workshop).

The focus on skill development for domestic workers raises the question about whether concentrating on skills training and professionalization of the sector would devalue the rights-based movement. This concern was particularly raised during the National Consultation on Domestic Workers Sector Skills Council organised by the ILO in Delhi in August 2014 and attended by representatives of domestic workers’ groups, central trade unions, NGOs, CBOs, placement agencies, etc. At the meeting, Dr. Paul Comyn, Senior Specialist on Vocational Training and Skill Development (ILO) stressed the importance of continuing ‘the fight for legislation, minimum wages and rights of domestic work. The idea of skills training would only be secondary to the continuous struggle for the rights of domestic work’.

Although there have been an increasing number of domestic worker organisations that have focused on skill development as part of their engagement with domestic workers, this issue has not animated the mobilisations of domestic worker groups across the board because of the close links between skills training and placement agencies, which is understood to dilute the function of organisations mobilising for the rights of domestic workers.

# Conclusion

The mobilisation of domestic workers began in earnest in the mid-1980s. However, these were individual efforts spread across the country. Since the late 1990s onwards, there was a growth of organisations focused on mobilising domestic workers. This growth of domestic worker groups has followed the growth in numbers of domestic workers and its increasing feminisation. Moreover, the nature of the groups mobilising domestic workers is fairly disparate with traditional central trade union affiliated organisations occupying space with feminist organisations and those working with unorganised women workers.

By the mid-2000s, especially where domestic worker groups had a presence, there were changes in laws at the sub-national level with the enactment of minimum wage legislations and the setting up of welfare boards. These were sporadic and disparate efforts but hit at the heart of dominant conceptions of the home as an inviolable space outside of the scope of state intervention. Moreover, these were not insignificant attempts at recognising that domestic work is work in dominant state discourse.

The 2000s was the time that groups began to come together for joint action at the national level with proposals for a national level law on domestic work. The initiation of the standard setting process at the ILO for an international instrument on domestic work propelled further mobilisations internationally as well as in India. In the run up to the Convention, several groups mobilised to discuss the proposed convention. The Indian government too set up the Task Force for Domestic Workers and drafted the National Policy on Domestic Workers. These developments also led to renewed network and coalition building between groups at the national and sub-national level for the regulation of domestic work. After the adoption of the ILO Convention, several domestic worker groups got together and formed the National Platform for Domestic Workers with the demand for a comprehensive national level legislation and the ratification of the ILO Convention by the Indian government. While there have been few and far between changes to laws at the national level, the ban on child domestic workers as well as the inclusion of domestic work in the sexual harassment law were no small gains that domestic worker groups wrested at the national level.

In terms of claims making, the complexity of claims made on wage fixation illustrates the difficulty of regulating domestic work. While some states on the back of struggles by domestic worker groups managed to include domestic work in the list of scheduled employment under the Minimum Wages Act, the ways in which these notifications classify domestic work reinforces the caste, as well as gendered inequalities that inform domestic work. Nevertheless, while some groups have been critical of the wages fixed by the state as being lower than those bargained for by workers, there are other groups for whom minimum wages provide a useful mobilisation and bargaining tool for negotiating workers’ wages.

Accounting for violence against domestic workers, particularly in the forms of sexual harassment and caste discrimination are not easy tasks for those groups that come from a more traditional labour background. However, issues such as sexual harassment and caste discrimination are now being taken up by more domestic worker groups, even if somewhat tentatively. However, these mobilisations remain secondary to mobilisations on wages, leaves and other more ‘traditional’ issues of workers with many domestic worker groups.

Skill development and training for domestic work is also now increasingly gaining prominence at both a policy level and amongst domestic worker groups. The professionalization of domestic work, and the implications this has for mobilisations of domestic workers groups on domestic worker rights is still being worked out by domestic worker groups. While some groups have from the beginning been engaged with skills training for domestic workers, there are many organisations for whom this is not the traditional purpose of domestic worker mobilisation and unionisation.

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# Appendix I: the Field of Research

The research is based on extensive reviews of literature and interviews with domestic worker groups in Delhi, Karnataka and Gujarat. For this research, we spoke to members of eight domestic worker unions in Karnataka : the Karnataka Gruha Karmikara Sangha (affiliated to Women’s Voice, an unorganised sector women’s rights organisation), the Karnataka Domestic Workers Union, The Akila Karnataka Domestic Workers Union, (affiliated to the wider National Domestic Workers Movement) the Domestic Workers Rights Union (affiliated to another unorganised sector women’s workers’ rights organisation), Mane Kelasa Karmikara Union (affiliated to the NGO FEDINA), Bruhat Bangalore Domestic Workers Union, affiliated to the NGO APSA), and the central trade union affiliates, Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress (affiliated to INTUC) and Bangalore Zilla Domestic Workers Union (affiliated to CITU).

In Gujarat, we interviewed members of SEWA (which is also a central trade union), SAATH (an NGO working with disadvantaged communities in Ahmedabad), Domestic Workers’ Rights Campaign (a campaign group focused on national level advocacy work), INTUC (a central trade union) and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (another central trade union).

Apart from these two states, we also chose to do primary research in Delhi for perspectives on national level mobilisations (although given that Delhi is also a state, not all mobilisations in the state have a national focus). Here, we interviewed members from ISST-SAATHI centre (a community based organisation working with domestic workers), Delhi Gharelu Kaamgaar Sanghatan (the first domestic workers union in Delhi) affiliated to the Delhi Shramik Sangathan (a community based organisation), Jagori (a women’s group also working with domestic workers), the Domestic Workers Forum (part of Chetanalaya, a Catholic organisation), Nirman (an unorganised workers’ rights organisation), AIDWA (an all India women’s organisation affiliated to the CPI-M) and the National Domestic Workers Movement, Delhi chapter. We also interviewed individuals from Women Organising in Informal Employment (WIEGO) based in Delhi and elsewhere. We interviewed a founding member of the National Platform for Domestic Workers (NPDW) in Delhi and the founder of the National Domestic Workers Movement in Mumbai. We also interviewed a member of the International Labour Organisation in Delhi.

A table with list of interviewees with dates of interviews to

replace this narrative.

1. This paper is based on the findings of a collaborative and comparative UNRISD study conducted by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) entitled, ‘When and Why do States respond to Women’s Claims-making: Locating the Processes of Policy Change in the Context of Anti-Rape and Domestic Worker Mobilisations in India’ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Under the Constitution of India, ‘labour’ is in the concurrent list of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution, so both the states and the central government are competent to legislate on the subject, resulting in a diverse array of both central and state legislations. The Working Group for the 12th 5 year plan on ‘Labour Laws and other Regulations’ lists 44 legislations enacted by the centre, some of which are enforced by the central government, others which are enforced by both central and state governments and still others that are enforced by the state governments alone. Given that labour is in the concurrent list, there are also laws that are enacted and enforced by various state governments. Although there are very few laws regulating domestic work in the country, many of the gains made by groups on law reform have been at the state level. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See the Appendix: Field of Research for the list of interviewees, as well as background of mobilisations in Karnataka and Gujarat. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The sector specific unions are the Karnataka Gruha Karmikara Sangha, the Karnataka Domestic Workers Union, The Akila Karnataka Domestic Workers Union, the Domestic Workers Rights Union, Mane Kelasa Karmikara Union, Bruhat Bangalore Domestic Workers Union). The two domestic worker unions affiliated with central trade unions are the INTUC and CITU affiliated trade unions - Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress and the Bangalore Zilla Domestic Workers Union respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. A previous mobilisation on the inclusion of domestic work in Karnataka as early as 1993 had intermittent success (see more on the mobilisations related to this in section on wages below) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See interviews with Sr. Jeanne Devos, NDWM; Nalini Nayak, SEWA Kerala,; Subhash Bhatnagar, Nirman, Anita Juneja, DSS-DGKS; Ashok Punjabi, INTUC Gujarat, Meena Patel, DWRC; Archana Prasad, AIDWA Delhi; Geeta Menon, SJS, Bangalore, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)