DOMESTIC WORKERS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN TAMIL NADU (CHENNAI)

This fact sheet provides results from a survey completed in Tamil Nadu (Chennai) in 2019 with 73 domestic workers.

The National Domestic Workers Movement in Tamil Nadu estimates that 90 percent of domestic workers stopped working because of the Covid-19 crisis of 2020. Cash grants were provided by the Domestic Workers Welfare Board, along with additional food support, often by non-state actors. However, these measures have done little to address widespread food shortages and the major loss of work and income experienced by domestic workers in the state.

POLICY CONTEXT

Tamil Nadu was one of the first Indian states in which the National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM) began organizing domestic workers in the mid-1980s. Compared to several other Indian states, Tamil Nadu has relatively progressive legislation and programmes for domestic workers, including its own Domestic Workers Welfare Board. The state has a more advanced set of labour protections in place for domestic workers in the country. Domestic Workers were included in the schedule of the Tamil Nadu Manual Labour Act 1982 on 1st June, 1999. This was the first instance of legal recognition of domestic workers as workers in India. Child labour in domestic work was specifically banned in October 2006, and the Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Board was constituted in January 2007. Nevertheless, despite these provisions, domestic workers still face many work-related risks and many still lack access to social protection.

LONGER-TERM RISKS TO INCOME SECURITY

- Rs 8,051 (USD108.41) / month minimum wage - skilled workers (8 HR day)
- Rs 6,836 (USD92.05) / month minimum wage - unskilled workers (8 HR day)
- Rs 5,020 (USD67.59) / month typical domestic worker salary

FEWER HOURS

Due to illness or accident in the last 12 months

25%

Occupational safety and health

25% due to an injury/illness resulting from their work

90% visited a health care facility in the last 12 months

Most visited a mixture of public and private health care providers

25% went to a public hospital or clinic
Ensure the 2019/20 national labour codes, which do not recognize domestic workers, are not applied in Tamil Nadu until there is specific and comprehensive national legislation for domestic workers. The government should instead continue to promote the existing state labour code that includes domestic workers.

**Access to Social Protection**

- **Access to healthcare**: 70% have access to a health benefit
- **Access to paid maternity leave**: 14% have access to maternity benefit
- **Access to old age pension**: 40% have access to an education, marriage, and funeral benefit
- **Other benefits**: 36% reported access to a food security benefit

**Cost of Healthcare Access**

- **RS 1,255 (USD16.88)** typical weekly salary
- **Healthcare costs almost a week’s wages**
- **RS 1,100 (USD14.80)** typical direct cost of one healthcare visit

**Recommendations**

Implement reforms to the Domestic Workers Welfare Board to include direct representation of domestic workers and their unions on the Labour Welfare Board.

A Domestic Workers Welfare Board should be created outside of Chennai, to reduce access barriers for domestic workers living outside of the capital city.

The Welfare Board social security provision should include housing benefits. The issue of housing plays a large role in undermining income security.

Implement mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment, as there are no redressal mechanisms or complaint committees through which these issues can be addressed.