

Domestic workers in Karnataka get chance to ‘upskill’, fight exploitation

The Kaushalya Karnataka scheme aims to improve skills of domestic workers so they can demand better salaries, benefits and more job options

Anuradha Nagaraj

Chennai: Karnataka has launched a programme to teach new skills to domestic workers to help them avoid exploitation and broaden their job prospects, officials said on Tuesday.

From cooks, babysitters and gardeners to laundry workers and carers for the elderly, the “Kaushalya Karnataka”—or “skilled Karnataka”—scheme aims to improve skills of domestic workers so they can demand better salaries, benefits and more job options.

“Domestic workers are the most exploited among the unorganized sector workers and the scheme wants to change that,” said Ashraful Hasan, director at the state-run skill development department.

“Our programme hopes to give a woman cooking in a home the option of joining a bigger catering service or a maid the option of being a professional housekeeper.”

There are more than 4 million domestic workers in India, most of them women, according to official data. But campaigners say there are likely to be millions more in the unregulated sector.



The scheme aims to help domestic workers avoid exploitation and broaden their job prospects. Photo: HT

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A bill to provide domestic workers with a minimum monthly salary of Rs9,000 and benefits including social security cover and mandatory time off is awaiting approval in Parliament.

In Karnataka, there are an estimated 300,000 domestic workers, according to Hasan.

While a maid will know how to mop and sweep a floor, the scheme—in which workers will receive up to 10 days' training—will teach them about hygiene in the home, how to make a hotel-style bed as well as communication skills, he said.

Domestic workers will also be taught how to operate gadgets now common in many urban Indian homes, like dishwashers, washing machines and blenders.

Campaigners cautiously welcomed the programme, but said better skills would not necessarily lead to better working conditions.

“These are largely part-time workers who are not considered as professionals by anyone,” said Geeta Menon of the non-profit Stree Jagruti Samiti that promotes domestic workers' rights.

“Unless the government connects the skilled worker to progressive employers, the situation will not change.”

The programme aims to create an additional 100,000 skilled workers in Karnataka, providing jobs to unemployed youths and opening up new opportunities for work overseas, officials said.

Josephine Valarmathi of the National Domestic Workers' Movement said a government certificate would at least recognise the “dignity of labour” in the work of maids.

“It's a start but we have to wait and watch if domestic workers get the dues they have been demanding for years,” she said.

Reuters

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