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Karnataka Domestic Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2025: How Karnataka Plans to Rescue, Register and Retire Domestic Workers with Dignity

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On 15 October 2025 the Karnataka Government published a draft law that could redraw the employment map of every household in the State. Titled the Karnataka Domestic Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2025, the 30page Bill wants to pull an estimated 1012 lakh housemaids, cooks, nannies, caregivers, gardeners and replacement “gig” helpers out of the legal shadows and place them at par with formal sector workers. Registration, a written agreement, minimum wages, weekly off, maternity money, accident compensation, old age pension and even a unique ID number are promised while employers, placement bureaus and app based platforms face fines up to ₹50,000 and three to seven years in jail if they underpay, confine, discriminate or employ children. The Labour Department has kept a 30day objection window open, but if the draft survives legislative scrutiny Karnataka will become the first large State to treat the “invisible” home as a regular workplace.

The core idea is simple: no domestic worker can be engaged without a written employment agreement that mirrors a model format the State will notify. The pact must list the worker’s name, nature of work, daily hours, wages, leave, welfare fee contribution and termination clause. An oral understanding, WhatsApp promise or agency nod will not do; absence of the document itself becomes a punishable offence on day one.

Once the agreement is signed the law compels both sides plus any placement agency or digital platform that sourced the worker to register on a government portal within thirty days. Domestic workers will be issued a three year renewable certificate carrying a unique identification number that opens the door to every benefit. Employers who skip the formality are barred from hiring, while agencies that supply unregistered hands can be prosecuted. The same thirty day deadline applies to existing service providers already operating inside Karnataka; delay can be condoned only if “sufficient grounds” are shown to the labour inspector.

Registration is not a onetime box ticking exercise. A worker who changes employer, household or city must log in again and update the database within thirty days; failure freezes social security payouts. Certificates have to be renewed every three years on payment of a small fee, and the State Board may deactivate the number if contributions fall unpaid, effectively turning off the benefit tap.

The Bill deliberately keeps the net wide. “Domestic work” covers every chore performed inside a house, bungalow, flat, farmhouse or guestroom; “domestic worker” embraces part timers, full timers, live in staff, replacement staff and even migrant workers hired through an app. Likewise, “employer” is not just the lady of the house any adult member who exercises “ultimate control” over household affairs is liable, and if you hire through an agency both you and the agency are joint employers. Platforms headquartered in Karnataka but placing workers across India also come under the law so long as the job site is inside the State.

Having secured entry on the register, the worker acquires a statutory bundle of rights that go far beyond the Minimum Wages Act. She cannot be forced to stay on the job, must be paid the notified minimum wage plus overtime, cannot be made to work more than forty eight hours a week and is entitled to at least one full day off or two staggered half days every week. Annual leave with wages, maternity and paternity benefit limited to two children, accident compensation modelled on the Employees Compensation Act and access to state run health coverage are all written into the chapter on rights. Discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, gender, region, language or nature of work is explicitly outlawed, and confining a worker inside the house or seizing her mobile phone can invite charges of illegal confinement.

To finance these promises the legislation creates a tripartite Karnataka State Domestic Workers Social Security and Welfare Board with equal representation from government, workers’ unions, employers, resident welfare associations and digital platforms. The Board will administer a dedicated Fund fed by registration fees, a five percent welfare cess collected periodically from employers and agencies, all fines imposed under the Act, and grants from the Centre or the State. Interest earned on bank deposits will also flow back into the pool. Every year the Board must present an audited statement of accounts to the legislature and publish an annual report detailing how many workers registered, how many accidents were compensated, how many pensions paid and how many children sent to school with education assistance.

Inspectors authorised by the Board will function as labour cum social security officers. They can walk into any household or agency office on a written complaint or on their own if they suspect child employment or sexual exploitation and demand records, rescue minors, or seize registers. Obstructing an inspector carries three months in prison and a ₹20,000 fine. Because the home is a private space, the law arms inspectors with the same powers a civil court enjoys: summoning witnesses, examining people on oath and issuing search commissions.

Disputes that do not involve sexual harassment which continues to be tried under the 2013 POSH Act will be mediated at the district level by grievance redress committees. These panels must try conciliation first; if that fails the worker or employer can approach the State Board for a binding order. Appeals on questions of law lie with the Karnataka High Court.

Penalties climb steeply for repeat offenders. A first time failure to register or pay wages attracts three months' imprisonment and a ₹20,000 fine; a second conviction for the same clause doubles the jail term and pushes the fine to ₹50,000. Employing a child or trafficking a woman domestic worker for "immoral purposes" fetches a non negotiable minimum of three years behind bars, extendable to seven, plus a ₹50,000 fine. Wage delay earns interest and a separate prosecution; the employer cannot hide behind the excuse that the agency, and not she, was supposed to transfer the salary.

The Bill is designed to override any contract or earlier law that offers lower protection, but workers are free to bargain for better terms. It also carries a "non derogation" clause: every other labour statute already on the books continues to apply, so a domestic worker could theoretically be covered simultaneously by the Employees' State Insurance Act, the Employees Compensation Act and this new State law. Finally, the government has retained a two year "removal of difficulty" power to smooth operational bumps without having to return to the legislature for quick fixes.

Concluding paragraph

Whether the draft survives the coming month of public scrutiny will depend on how loudly Bengaluru's tech backed cleaning apps, middleclass resident associations and small neighbourhood brokers object to sharing compliance costs. But the message from Vikasa Soudha is unambiguous: the days of treating the home as an unregulated private fief are numbered. If Karnataka can fuse a digital registry, contributory welfare fund and strict penal deterrent into one workable statute, it may hand the rest of India a template for finally counting and protecting the women (and men) who cook, clean and care behind closed doors. For further details write to contact@indialaw.in

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