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# Message from Editor

Dear reader,

You are aware that National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) regularly publishes its Newsletter, featuring social work-related news, updates, members' achievements, and valuable articles contributed by our members. Over time, the Newsletter has grown substantially in length due to the enthusiastic and meaningful contributions from across the country.

Many members have suggested creating a separate platform dedicated exclusively to scholarly and thematic articles. Responding to this collective vision, we are pleased to announce the launch of the **Social Work Digest**—a platform devoted entirely to articles contributed by NAPSWI members.

This inaugural issue focuses on the theme: Work, Welfare/Well-being, and Justice, Contemporary Labour Challenges and Social Work profession. We hope this initiative strengthens academic dialogue and collective engagement within the profession.

We are also happy to inform that this initiative is in addition to our ***Journal of Social Work Education, Research and Action***. Soon, you will find a new website dedicated to this journal only.

Warm regards,

Prof. Sanjai Bhatt  
Editor  
*Social Work Digest*

# The Future of Work in the context of Viksit Bharat and Global Economy

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The world of work is evolving at an increasingly rapid pace, mirroring the swift changes shaping the world around us. The latest report by World Economic Forum (2025) says that “technological change, geo-economic fragmentation, economic uncertainty, demographic shifts, and the green transition are among the key drivers expected to shape and transform the global labour market by 2030.”<sup>1</sup> The current trends related to the future of work indicate how organizations operate amid rapid technological advancements and shifting workforce dynamics. It also underscores the adoption of AI, a stronger emphasis on workforce well-being and the need to develop diversity and inclusion.

The Viksit Bharat initiative represents the Government of India's ambitious vision to transform the nation into a developed country by 2047. This ambitious endeavor, encapsulated by the slogan "Bold Vision- Brighter Future", seeks to mobilize efforts across economic, social, environmental and governance domains to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development. Achieving developed nation status holds significant implications for India, promising enhanced global standing, greater economic prosperity for its citizens, and an overall improvement in their well-being.<sup>2</sup> India's labour law reforms, embodied in the four Labour Codes, mark a major shift in the labour governance, employment relations and social protection. Framed within the broader national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, these reforms aim to simplify regulation, enhance compliance, promote formalisation and align India's labour market with the demands of an increasingly integrated global economy.

As per latest estimates, India is home to 1.42 billion (about 17.8% of the global population). Given the young demography of India, it contributes a whopping 25% to the global workforce. India is also one of the fastest growing economies and is currently the fifth-largest economy and expected to become the third-largest global economy by 2030. While 92% of the Indian work force works in the unorganized sectors (agriculture, cottage industry, home work / services), 8% of the workforce is working in organized sectors (in the enterprises owned by government and the private sector). In 2021, 43.96% of the workforce was working in agriculture, 30.7% in services and 25.34% in the manufacturing sector.<sup>3</sup> This workforce is struggling to cope with technological changes and shifting of sectors. Technological change, especially the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI), is set to reshape the world of work.

The report notes that (i) nearly one in four workers worldwide is employed in occupations with some exposure to AI-driven automation; (ii) 16.3% of workers hold jobs with medium exposure, while 7.5% are in high-skill occupations that could see most tasks automated by generative AI. While the full impact of generative AI remains uncertain, its potential to transform entire job categories calls for proactive policies to support worker transitions and upskilling.<sup>4</sup> The past few years especially after COVID 19, have witnessed the convergence of two major trends reshaping the future of work: the rise of work-from-anywhere models (remote work) and the expansion of automation. The pandemic has hastened the global adoption of automation, as organisations sought to manage remote workforces and address challenges related to worker proximity. There are many problems like risks of job polarisation, informalisation, skills mismatch, educational gaps, lack of attitude to adopt new technologies etc.

Prime Minister Shree. Narendra Modi has mentioned in India AI Impact Summit 2026 that while new technologies often face initial skepticism, the speed and trust with which the youth worldwide are accepting AI, taking ownership of it, and using it, is unprecedented. Artificial Intelligence represents a transformation of the same magnitude as historic turning points in human civilization, highlighting that what is being seen and predicted today are only the initial signs of its impact. He stated that AI is making machines intelligent, but more importantly, it is multiplying human capability many times over.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to the future of work, a substantial body of literature has emerged, particularly from the Western world. There are a few reports on the Future of work by reputed private companies and research organization in past two decades. Some of the important reports are produced by The Future of Jobs Report 2025 by the World Economic Forum<sup>6</sup>; 2025 Microsoft New Future of Work Report<sup>7</sup>; 2026 Software Industry Outlook<sup>8</sup>; A new future of work: The Race to Deploy AI and Raise skills in Europe and beyond 2024 by McKinsey Global Institute<sup>9</sup>; World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO) Trends 2025 by International Labour Organisation (ILO)<sup>10</sup>.

In India, only a limited number of studies have been undertaken in the recent past that address this area, including : The current reality and future of work, in India and beyond by Sandra Polasky (2015)<sup>11</sup>, TheFuture of Work and Reskilling the Indian Workforce by Prof. Sriram Prabhakar (2024)<sup>12</sup>; The Future of Work and OSH – A View From India by Pingle (2024)<sup>13</sup>; The Future of Work in India by Nirupam Bajpai and John Biberman (2019)<sup>14</sup>; Expansion of the Gig and Platform Economy in India (2024) by ILO<sup>15</sup>; India Employment Report 2024 Youth employment, education and skills by ILO and IHD<sup>16</sup>

Most of these reports are produced by western world and largely private consultancy firms/organizations. Though these reports include India as place of study yet they are not in conformity with our societal structure, cultural mooring, and societal expectations.

There are not many studies on the theme in India being a new area of research. Since the scope of the study will encompass the evolving nature of work, workforces, and workplaces; the development of sustainable employment frameworks; national initiatives to strengthen labour governance, employment relations, and social protection for achieving the Decent Work Agenda (SDG-8); and an analysis of the determinants shaping the future of work in Viksit Bharat by 2047 and its position in the global economy.

Despite the growing global discourse on the Future of Work, there remains a significant gap in India-centric, policy-oriented and labour-governance-focused research that contextualises these transformations within India's demographic realities, labour market dualities, informality and socio-economic diversity. Existing global studies, while methodologically robust, often insufficiently capture the institutional, cultural and regulatory specificities of India's world of work. This underscores the need for a comprehensive, indigenous and forward-looking study that situates the Future of Work within the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision and India's evolving role in the global economy.

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# The New Labour Codes in the context of social work and the NGOs

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## **Introduction:**

The new Labour Codes in India have become effective from November 21, 2025, consolidating 29 central labour laws into 4 Labour Codes to simplify regulation and improve compliance. The Code on Wages, 2019 applies to all employees of the organised and unorganized sector and covers minimum wages, timely payment of wages and equal remuneration. The Code on Social Security, 2020 that has brought in gig and platform workers within the labour force for the first time, covers social security benefits such as EPF, ESI, maternity benefits and gratuity within the human resource costs. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 covers workplace safety, working hours and migrant, contract, and inter-state workers and women workers for night shifts with certain safeguards. The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 bring in higher thresholds for government approval for layoffs/closures at the industry and hence covers trade unions, standing orders, industrial disputes and layoffs, retrenchment, closure norms, a clause which explicitly keeps charitable organisations outside its' fold. These new codes will have some significantly impact on social workspaces within the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that employ a large base of employers in the country. However, it is pertinent to note that the Labor codes contain specific exclusions for charitable entities. The provisions that apply to NGOs may have some of the compliances that stem from human resource management having implication on financial obligations. Many of the NGOs may have some of the compliances in place, it may be helpful to break down and understand the new Labour Codes from the contexts of the NGOs:

## **Broader applicability**

The Labour codes are applicable to all "establishments," and that includes NGOs as well. This is likely to increase the administrative burden, especially for smaller organizations with limited resources.

- Human Resource Formalization Process: NGOs will be required to issue formal, written appointment letters to all its' employees.
- Digital Compliance: NGOs will be required to maintain electronic records, registers, and file returns online. NGOs may benefit from introducing HR and payroll systems to simply compliance. The NGO will need to incorporate the Digital Personal Data Protection requirements in their operations as part of digital push.

- Grievance Redressal: Any establishment employing 20 or more workers will be required to set up a Grievance Redressal Committee.

### **Financial Implications for NGOs**

The codes may necessitate that the NGO relook at staff remuneration on the following aspects that may impede the financial consideration at the NGO:

- New Definition of Wages: The definition of wages used across the codes considers benefits like Provident Fund (PF), Employees' State Insurance (ESI), and gratuity, making the new definition broader and increasing the employer contributions and overall payroll cost.
- Minimum Wage Push: The Code on Wages, 2019 promotes a minimum wage for all workers, regardless of the sector. NGOs will need to promote for salary structures within their budgets to meet the government-notified floor wage.
- Gratuity for Fixed-Term Employees: The fixed-term employees will be eligible for gratuity after one year of service, as against the current requirement of five years of continuous service. As most NGOs hire staff on a project or fixed-term basis, this will directly impact their budget planning.
- Strict Payment Timelines: The Code on Wages has set timelines for salary payments. For instance, monthly wages must be paid by the 7th day of the following month.

### **Expansion of Social Security to entire workforce**

The Code on Social Security, 2020 extends the social security benefits to the entire workforce, including unorganized, gig, and platform workers and this is likely to expand to contractual employees of NGOs who are hired for specific projects by NGOs, requiring the organization to manage these new additional requirements.

### **Specific Exclusion under Industrial Relations Code**

The NGOs is specifically excluded within the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 that explicitly excludes institutions owned or managed by organizations wholly or substantially engaged in charitable, social, or philanthropic services from the definition of industry. Hence, NGOs may need to seek legal counsel to determine to determine if they are exempt from certain provisions of this specific code on matters like trade unions, strikes, lockouts, and lay-off procedures that are applicable for larger establishments based on their activities.

### **Restrictions on Contract Labour**

NGOs may need to carefully evaluate which of their functions are considered "core" activities as the new code prohibits using contract staffing for "core activities" of an establishment.

In summary, while the new labour codes offer benefits like clearer regulations and streamlined laws, NGOs should prepare for a transition period. This will involve reviewing existing HR policies, updating payroll systems to accommodate the new wage definition, and planning for potentially higher operational costs related to employee benefits and compliance.

## **Key Challenges in the Indian Context**

The work at the NGO is largely informal and hence the employees are effectively outside the coverage even though the language of the codes is inclusive. Hence, the rights of that exists on paper may not really get into operational practice. The social security provisions are only as enablers and not mandatory. The welfare boards are dependent on the state notification and very often the Labour departments do not have an inherent implementation sphere on NGOs. There is also a risk of restructuring operations towards increasing weaker accountability that reduces the employer-employee relationship through contractual agreements. NGO employees have a diluted capacity for collective bargaining due to the poor worker protection and lack of unions to advocate for their rights.

## **Strategic Social Work Interventions**

The Labour Codes may increase commitment for the NGOs, but it also opens a new space for work. Informal, migrant, and gig workers remain excluded from effective labour protection due to weak implementation, low awareness, administrative barriers, and power asymmetries between workers and employers/platforms. Social workers can work towards improving labour security, dignity, and wellbeing of informal and non-standard workers through effective realization of labour code protections by shifting workers from formal legality to lived protection, especially for the most vulnerable workers. The Labour Codes have facilitated and provide the social workers and NGOs with an expansive role to shift from service delivery to rights facilitation, systems advocacy, policy research and labour audits. The roll out of the labour codes creates an opportunity to social workers to focus on increasing awareness of workers on rights and legal literacy that encompasses minimum wages, social security entitlements and occupational safety at workplace through collation building with unions, academics, lawyers. The NGOs can support in increasing and facilitating access to registration and documentation on e-Shram portal and social security schemes for migrant and informal workers through worker collectives and community-based monitoring and social dialogue platforms. The NGOs could work closely with the governments to promote rights-based approaches within a compliance driven system through the creation of welfare boards, rule notification and social security schemes and create appropriate case studies and experiences of roll out; and grievance redressal and collective action related to wage theft, unsafe working conditions and unlawful termination of employees. NGOs can be instruments to link workers to labour departments, legal aid authorities and trade unions. It also opens avenues for expanding psychosocial support to address work-related stress especially insecurity at jobs, concerns of women workers, expanding social security access, and dealing with migrants at workplace.

## **Conclusion**

Labour Codes represent a shift from rights-based regulation to compliance-based governance and in this transitional shift, NGOs and social workers hold the power

to become critical intermediaries—translating legal entitlements into lived protections for India’s informal workforce. What is important to realise is that labour Codes do not fail because they exist, but because they are not inhabited and NGOs and social workers have the capacity and knowhow to inhabit these laws, turning legal text into social protection, and compliance into dignity. NGOs and social workers can function as intermediaries translating Labour Codes into awareness, access, grievance redressal, psychosocial support, and policy advocacy, supporting informal, migrant, and gig workers will experience real labour protection, dignity, and wellbeing beyond legal text. The challenge however exists in navigating the state–corporate–worker power asymmetries that brings to the forefront the delicate balance of neutrality vs advocacy through the regulatory grey zones that impede worker voices and substitution.

# A STUDY ON SOCIAL WORK AND HUMAN RIGHTS.

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## **Abstract:**

The principles underlying human rights are deeply embedded in the philosophy and practice of social work. Historically, social work has advocated for education, equality, healthcare, housing, dignity, and social justice—values that align closely with human rights frameworks. Human rights provide social work with a universal and contemporary guideline for policy and practice, enabling global dialogue on issues such as violence against women, inequality, and injustice. This paper examines the conceptual relationship between social work and human rights, traces their historical development, and highlights social work intervention strategies to address contemporary human rights challenges.

Keywords: Human Rights, Social Work, UDHR, Injustice, Inequality

## **Introduction:**

The concepts of human rights and social work are as old as human civilization. Across cultures and religions, notions of duty, obligation, justice, and fairness have governed social relations. While early ideologies emphasized mutual obligations among individuals and communities, later political thought introduced the demand for rights from governing authorities.

The modern articulation of human rights emerged prominently after the Second World War, largely through the efforts of the United Nations. The unprecedented scale of human suffering during the World Wars necessitated a global framework to protect human dignity. Simultaneously, social work was evolving as a professional discipline, particularly in the West. In India, formal social work education began with the establishment of the Dorabji Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Bombay.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 marked a significant milestone, shaping both human rights discourse and social work practice. This paper explores the challenges of human rights in contemporary society and the role of social work interventions in addressing them.

## **Review of Literature:**

Scholarly contributions highlight the multidimensional nature of human rights and social work. Vijapur's work on Human Rights in International Relations provides a comprehensive understanding of human rights traditions across cultures, including Western, socialist, Islamic, African, Chinese, and Indian perspectives, emphasizing international law and institutions.

Joshi's Handbook of Social Work examines social work theory, advocacy, and emerging trends, underscoring its recognition as an independent discipline with strong academic and practical relevance. Another significant contribution, *Social Work and Human Rights*, emphasizes human dignity and social justice, categorizing rights into first, second, and third generations. While it establishes theoretical linkages, it offers limited guidance on practical application.

Overall, existing literature strongly supports the alignment between social work values and human rights principles but reveals a gap between theory and practice, particularly in translating human rights frameworks into grassroots social work interventions.

### **Methodology:**

The study is based on secondary data collected from books, journals, and published literature on human rights and social work. In addition, focused group discussions (FGDs) with government officials and retired academicians provided contextual insights into contemporary human rights challenges.

#### **Human Rights: Historical and Conceptual Development**

The concept of human rights has evolved through diverse philosophical and cultural traditions. Western political thinkers such as John Locke emphasized natural rights to life, liberty, and property, while Rousseau highlighted the social contract and civil rights protected by the state. These ideas influenced landmark documents such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the American Declaration of Independence.

Non-Western traditions also contributed significantly. Ancient Chinese philosophy recognized the people's right to revolt against oppressive rulers, equating public will with moral authority. Islamic principles emphasized justice, gender equity, inheritance rights, and protection of resources. Indian traditions reflected rights and duties through systems such as Panchayats and ethical governance.

Despite these early foundations, the term "human rights" gained global prominence only after World War II through the United Nations, culminating in the UDHR.

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

The UDHR outlines three broad categories of rights.

First-generation rights include civil and political freedoms such as equality before law, freedom of speech, religion, and protection against torture and discrimination.

Second-generation rights focus on socio-economic entitlements, including the right to food, housing, healthcare, education, and social security.

Third-generation rights emphasize collective and solidarity rights, including peace, development, and an international order that ensures the realization of all rights.

Although not legally binding, the UDHR represents a moral commitment by member states to uphold human dignity and justice.

## **Professional Social Work**

Social work is a relational and practice-oriented profession aimed at improving individual and collective well-being by addressing social, psychological, and structural barriers. It operates through advocacy, empowerment, and intervention at individual, group, and community levels. Social work practice follows generalist and specialist models. Generalist practice addresses diverse populations and problems through integrated, multi-level approaches, while specialist practice focuses on specific client groups or issues, requiring advanced professional training. The profession mediates between individuals and society, often navigating contested issues of entitlement, welfare, and justice. Its core concern lies in enhancing human potential, alleviating distress, and promoting social justice.

### **Social Work Intervention Areas:**

Social work interventions address poverty, health, housing, education, child welfare, ageing, and criminal justice. Poverty remains a critical determinant affecting access to basic needs and services. Social workers play a vital role in child welfare, balancing protection, diversity, and family dynamics.

Work with adults, older persons, and offenders further reflects social work's commitment to dignity, rehabilitation, and social inclusion. In all these areas, social workers contribute directly to the realization of human rights.

### **Social Work and Human Rights: A Justification:**

Social work and human rights are intrinsically linked through their shared commitment to equality, dignity, and social justice. In contemporary welfare and development contexts, social workers must adopt participatory and rights-based approaches, working collaboratively with service users, communities, and policymakers.

The profession must also critically examine its own practices within unequal social structures. Through reflexive and ethical practice, social work can challenge unjust policies, deconstruct oppressive systems, and advocate for structural transformation.

### **Discussion:**

In the Indian context, obligations often overshadow rights, and inequalities persist at individual, group, and institutional levels. Corruption, caste-based discrimination, and weak democratic practices undermine the realization of human rights. The principle of equality diminishes within governance structures, affecting social justice outcomes.

Human rights must be internalized as moral and social responsibilities rather than merely state granted entitlements. Thinkers such as Prophet Muhammad and Jyotiba Phule emphasized equality and human dignity as foundational values. Cultivating compassion, responsibility, and rights consciousness among citizens—especially youth and professionals—is essential for meaningful human rights realization.

**Conclusion:**

While globalization has reduced physical distances, human rights challenges require solutions grounded in international law, ethical governance, and professional practice. This paper highlights the conceptual relationship between human rights and social work, emphasizing the profession's role in addressing injustice and inequality.

Although the discussion primarily addresses theoretical dimensions, it underscores the need for further empirical research on practical social work interventions. Strengthening the application of human rights principles in social work practice is essential for promoting human dignity and sustainable social development.

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# Bonded Labour - Contemporary Forms and Social Work Interventions

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## **Introduction:**

Bonded labour in India is often spoken of as a problem of the past, that is legally abolished, administratively addressed, and gradually declining. Yet, after more than a decade of working with survivors of human trafficking, bonded labour, and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), I have witnessed how deeply embedded and evolving this form of exploitation remains. Bonded labour today rarely appears in its most visible or “classic” forms. Instead, it adapts, intersecting with migration, informal labour markets, gender inequality, caste-based exclusion, and child vulnerability which makes it both harder to identify and easier to deny. Contemporary bonded labour must therefore be understood not merely as an illegal labour but as a structural outcome of systemic poverty, social inequality, and welfare failure. Social work, positioned at the intersection of rights, care, and justice, has a critical role to play in responding to these realities, not only through rescue and rehabilitation, but through prevention, survivor leadership, and systemic change.

## **Contemporary Forms of Bonded Labour in India**

In my field experience across multiple Indian states, bonded labour manifests in sectors such as brick kilns, agriculture, construction, stone quarries, textiles, domestic work. Workers are recruited through advances or loans that appear voluntary but later become mechanisms of coercion. Wages are withheld, mobility is restricted, and debts are manipulated to ensure continued dependence. Migrant workers, particularly from Dalit, Adivasi (Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe), and economically marginalised communities are disproportionately affected.

What is increasingly evident is the overlap between bonded labour and other forms of trafficking. Families trapped in debt bondage often experience intergenerational exploitation: children are withdrawn from school to support household survival, women face heightened vulnerability to sexual violence, and adolescents are pushed into hazardous or exploitative labour. In some cases, debt, migration, and family breakdown create pathways into commercial sexual exploitation, particularly for girls.

Bonded labour and sex trafficking should not be viewed as separate silos. In practice, they frequently coexist within the same ecosystems of vulnerability. I have worked with families rescued from bonded labour where adolescent girls are sexually exploited, while boys were pushed into exploitative labour. These intersections demand integrated social work responses rather than fragmented interventions.

### **Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children as a Systemic Reality**

The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) represents one of the most severe and hidden forms of trafficking in India. Children trafficked for sexual exploitation often come from contexts shaped by extreme poverty, debt bondage, family violence, migration, or previous labour exploitation. In several cases I have encountered, bonded labour was not the end point, but a precursor, where economic desperation and lack of protective systems pushed children into trafficking networks.

Social work interventions with survivors of CSEC reveal layered trauma: sexual violence, coercion, stigma, criminalisation, and long-term psychosocial harm. Rescue operations, while necessary, often expose survivors to further distress through institutionalisation, legal delays, and social rejection. For child survivors, reintegration is particularly complex, requiring sustained psychosocial care, education support, family assessment, and long-term aftercare.

The lived realities of these children challenge simplistic narratives of rescue and rehabilitation. Without addressing the structural drivers like poverty, unsafe migration, lack of education, and absence of social protection, these children remain at risk of re trafficking or secondary exploitation.

### **The Limitations of Rescue-Centric Approaches**

India has a strong legal framework addressing bonded labour and trafficking, including the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, and provisions under the Juvenile Justice Act. However, in practice, responses often remain rescue-centric and compliance-driven. Identification targets are met, rescues are conducted, and cases are closed, while survivors continue to struggle with delayed compensation, lack of livelihoods, unresolved trauma, and social stigma.

From a social work perspective, rescue without sustained aftercare is not protection, it is interruption. Survivors frequently return to the same conditions that made them vulnerable in the first place. In bonded labour cases, delayed rehabilitation assistance and weak livelihood support often push families back into debt. In CSEC cases, lack of community acceptance and economic alternatives leaves survivors isolated and at risk.

Social work interventions must therefore shift from short-term outputs to long-term outcomes, centring survivor wellbeing, agency, and dignity.

A Holistic and Trauma-Informed Approach to Social Work Interventions Effective social work responses to bonded labour and CSEC must be trauma-informed, rights-based, and contextually grounded. In my practice, meaningful interventions begin with ensuring immediate safety and legal protection, but they do not end there.

Psychosocial care like individual counselling, group work, and family-based interventions are essential for addressing trauma, rebuilding self-worth, and restoring trust.

Equally important is access to welfare and entitlements. Survivors often lack identity documents, bank accounts, housing security, or access to healthcare and education. Social workers play a critical role in navigating complex bureaucratic systems, advocating with district authorities, and ensuring survivors are not excluded from schemes due to documentation gaps or stigma.

Livelihood restoration is central to sustainable recovery. Skills training, education, self employment support, and ethical job placement help survivors reclaim work as a source of dignity rather than exploitation. For child survivors, education and long-term mentoring are protective factors that significantly reduce vulnerability.

### **Prevention and Community-Based Practice**

One of the most under-recognised aspects of social work in bonded labour and trafficking contexts is prevention. Community-based interventions, such as safe migration education, debt literacy, child protection awareness, and strengthening local vigilance mechanisms, address vulnerability before exploitation occurs. Engaging Panchayati Raj Institutions, schools, women's groups, and youth networks strengthens collective accountability.

Social workers are uniquely positioned to bridge survivors, communities, and systems. By working at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, social work practice can disrupt the conditions that enable exploitation to persist.

### **Survivor Leadership and Systems Change**

Perhaps the most transformative shift I have witnessed over the years is the emergence of survivor leadership. Survivors of bonded labour and trafficking, when supported through sustained aftercare and capacity building, become powerful advocates for change. They mentor peers, challenge stigma, engage with authorities, and strengthen prevention efforts within their communities.

Survivor leadership challenges paternalistic models of social work and reframes survivors as experts of their own lives. Their participation strengthens programmes, improves policy implementation, and ensures accountability remains grounded in lived experience.

### **Reclaiming Social Work's Role**

Bonded labour and commercial sexual exploitation of children are not anomalies; they are symptoms of deeper structural failures. Contemporary forms of exploitation demand social work responses that move beyond rescue to embrace long-term rehabilitation, prevention, and empowerment.

As Social workers, we must resist simplified explanations and remain grounded in the complex, intersectional, and lived realities of those we work with. By integrating the welfare and wellbeing and by centring survivor voices, social work can play a transformative role in dismantling exploitative systems and building pathways to dignity, justice, and lasting freedom.

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# EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS OF PARAMEDICS IN THE MEDICAL TOURISM SECTOR OF KERALA

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## **Introduction:**

This paper discusses the working conditions, benefits, and remuneration of the paramedical employees working in Ayurvedic hospitals in Kerala. The findings of the study indicate that despite the seemingly attractive nature of employment in Ayurvedic hospital, most of the employees are paid low wage and lack the basic employment benefits including provident fund, health insurance, and paid leaves. On the whole, the paper indicates that there is a strong disparity between the economic rise of Ayurvedic medical tourism and low labor standards of paramedical workers.

India has experienced rapid growth in the medical tourism sector with estimates from the confederation of Indian industry indicating approximately 1,50,000 patients visited India for treatment and will further grow further by 15 % .1 This growth has been aided by several factors like affordable medical fares, availability of staff trained to speak in English, strong presences of alternative medical treatment the availability of superspecialty centres, use of advanced diagnostic equipment. As a result, several centres for specialized care have emerged such as New Delhi for cardiac care, Chennai for eye care, and Kerala and Karnataka for Ayurvedic healing

In the context of Kerala , the history of medical tourism can be traced to 1994, when the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation(KTDC) promoted Ayurveda in tourism for the first time. And at present the market is expected to grow by nearly \$300 billion in the next five years. Currently, there are 924 Ayurvedic health tourism centers across Kerala, offering a wide range of healing and wellness services, distributed across all 14 districts of the state. The number of tourists seeking Ayurvedic medical care has increased by 40%, resulting in a 40% increase in the state's tourism revenue

Existing studies have shown that paramedic staff face various issues while working in health sector .Studies conducted on issues faced by para medic staff in Hardoi district in Uttar Pradesh, found that despite being part-time employees, ASHA workers often work full-time, despite having outcome based incentives, they have to work longer than stipulated hours and get very late salaries and lower incentives.. One worker mentioned that they hadn't gotten a salary for four months. With a lack of monetary benefit, coupled with lack of basic entitlements like support in getting back home at night, and a lack of information regarding expected work , they find the work difficult and disheartening

**Rational**

The study is important as the condition of workers in the Ayurveda industry which is one of the dominant industries in Kerala is very unfavorable. This study will help in understanding the condition of the workers. and the access to their rights as workers.

**Objective**

Understand the working condition of the workers in Ayurveda centre understand about the benefits and remuneration of staff

**Research Design**

This research aims to understand the role of paramedic staff in Ayurvedic hospitals and the problems they face will follow a qualitative method of study, as this will help in attaining a better understanding of the problems faced by paramedical staff in such institutions. The staff are from Ernakulam and trishur which are popular tourist destination .The staff are from various departments in the Ayurveda hospitals, including therapy, front office and cleaning staff. For the interview, six therapists and 1 person each from the pharmacy, reception, cleaning, and x-ray departments were interviewed. Out of the 10 people interviewed, four were women A semi-structured interview was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the respondent's feelings and beliefs on specific topics The interview last between 30 and 40 minutes, . For data analysis thematic analysis was used this involved reading through the transcription and looking for patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes.

**Sampling design**

Purposive sampling was employed to collect data from the Ayurveda staff. Furthermore, data from the hospital management were also obtained through snowball and purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used for my study because it allowed me to pick individuals who satisfied certain criteria relating to the research question and study aims.

**Result****Wages and remuneration**

Medical tourism is considered as a lucrative industry, due to perceived monetary benefits such as salary and tips and is a key factor motivating many people to pursue employment in Ayurveda hospitals. However several respondents have pointed out that they receive low wages . One of the respondents said that “ I gets Rs. 15,000 per month, but This is not enough and that wages should be increased as I have significant experience . In some cases, they are not given any other work-related benefits such as ESI, PF, or employer-provided medical insurance, and their reimbursement is limited to the payment they received. This maybe due to various reasons like being contractual workers, lack of necessary experience for joining the scheme .

**Erratic and long nature of work:**

There are no fixed working hours, and the workload depends on the number of patients, which can lead to extended working hours . Many respondents highlighted long and unpredictable hours as a major challenge. One respondent added that “ Breaks are often minimal and frequently skipped when patient demand is high” .Another participant added “I

start work at 8 a.m. and end at 6 p.m. even in the off-season despite there being hardly any patients", when demand was high I would have to work overtime during peak season. In addition, i only get a one-hour lunch break in between, during which the room has to be cleaned for the next patient . Another respondent added that " the long hours are particularly difficult as would be standing up through their work as part of the procedure" . another respondent add that " I have had six patients one after the other without a break. and while there is a two-hour lunch break in many case I only get half hour to have lunch He further adds that this has negatively affected his health and he has developed varicose vein and cervical pain Another respondent added " I have to work long and continuous hours, as a result of which I have fatigue and body pain in the evening .

### **Interaction with clients:**

One of the main positive reasons for the staff to choose this profession in general and the jobs in particular is the belief they are genuinely helping patients. A respondent had noted that the work gives him mental satisfaction and is the only positive among the various issues they face such as low remuneration and a lack of rest time. Nevertheless, these benefits are occasionally undermined by negative experiences reported during patient interactions, with therapists being especially affected One , Respondents notated that "i experiences some issues due to the nature of the illnesses while treating patients. And some patients sometimes panic during the procedures, and as a result, these occasionally lead to argument . Another responded notated that this issues was prominent while working with children he said " A major challenge is persuading uncooperative children to cooperate during the treatment. This becomes difficult as i have to do this without using force or scolding the children, as this sometimes leads to conflicts with the children's families" . There was also difference between the attitude of domestic and international patients and majority of issues was created by Native patients .

*"I don't have issues with international patients—although sometimes treat us with arrogance however there are frequently problems with domestic patients including rude behaviour, a lack of respect, and treating like a domestic servant. In addition some patients argue with us about the effectiveness of the treatment as well as haggle over the fees."*

### **Discussion**

Paramedical staff face multiple issues which affect their wellbeing several ( Nabirye et al., 2011) found that the 7.5% of Nurses and Paramedical Staff are complete satisfied with their work but the present study found that more than 60 % of the paramedic staff in ayurveda hospital are not satisfied with their jobs . Similarly Mohanty et al., (2019) found that more than 60% of the healthcare workers suffer from physical burnout . Simlary Yasobant and Rajkumar (2014) found that nurses face the highest health risk among medical professionals and 56% of nurses reported experiencing body pain over a 12-month period this may be caused due to factors like working in the same position for long periods, working in awkward or cramped positions, and bending. This study found that more than 50 % of the staff faced various health issues like neck and back pain due to prolonged standing .Additionally various factors like working hours and wages are major issues the para medic staff face Steinmetz et

al. (2014) points that various factors like long working hours and limited reimbursement like wages and overtime benefit leads to migration of health workers to other country . The result form this study also found that many of the paramedic staff especially therapist wants to migrate abroad as there is better benefits in abroad and the hospitals are regulated as compared to hospital in India

**Conclusion :**

This paper explored the working conditions, benefits, and remuneration of the paramedical employees working in Ayurvedic hospitals in Kerala even though Ayurvedic medical tourism is often seen as a lucrative sector, the results show a big discrepancy between the economic growth of the industry and the working conditions of the employees in the sector. Informal or contractual employment, poor wages, excessive and unpredictable working hours, and prolonged standing during treatment processes are among factors noted in the study that have led to severe body physical health challenges among the employees. Although this has been a challenge, most workers have remained in the field because of the job satisfaction of being able to assist patients and also because there are few other job opportunities.

**Ethical considerations :**

- The researcher has ensured that informed consent is obtained from every participant before interviews are conducted
- Personal details of the participant are kept confidential, and the data will not be shared with any other individual unless stated otherwise.
- The respondents were also informed that they might leave the interview at any moment and that they could opt not to answer any questions

# My field experiences with Domestic Workers: Problems and Challenges in India

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## Introduction (250)

### 1.1 The objectives of the article are:

(a) To examine the major problems and policy gaps related to domestic worker's protection and welfare in India; and (c) To explore social work roles and interventions with domestic workers.

### 1.2 Background:

Persistent undervaluation and inadequate protection of domestic workers reflect deep policy gaps (ILO, 2025). "even as domestic work constitutes 3.5% of women's employment and involves nearly 200,000 child domestic workers in India", (Chadha, 2024).

Domestic work encompasses a broad spectrum of household and care-related services, including cleaning, cooking, caregiving (WIEGO, n.d.), regardless of the nature of the services provided, domestic workers who live with employer; domestic workers who come from outside; domestic workers employed by service providers; and domestic service providers employed for profit" (ILO, 2018).

In India, there are several problems faced by domestic workers such as: the recognition of domestic work as work, regulation of working conditions, minimum wages, paid leave, inclusion in social security programmes/schemes and so on (Moghe, n.d.).

**1.3 Rationale:** Drawing on John Rawls's theory of justice, social and economic inequalities should be structured in a manner that prioritizes the well-being and conditions of domestic workers (Dutta, 2017). The Supreme Court (2025) underscored the need to close legal loopholes to protect domestic workers, recognising domestic work as a vital source of employment for disadvantaged women". A social worker in the labour welfare setting has a significant role such as legal advocacy and support; rehabilitation & skill building; counselling; and promoting welfare activities for their overall quality of life.

## 2. Description of roles and activities:

The role was a Project staff followed by the responsibilities such as: to act as a liaison by facilitating clear communication between international delegates and domestic workers during unstructured interviews in Delhi & Mumbai , and by ens-

-uring the systematic sharing of information related to workplace challenges, policies, and legal practices concerning domestic workers. This professional involvement of the author with domestic workers, can explore the decent working conditions for domestic workers at the workplace in India and encourage academic research to fulfil the policy gaps. Furthermore, it further seeks to analyse the role and response of social work interventions in addressing the labour advocacy and policy engagement related concerns of domestic workers.

### 3. Key observations, Challenges and Gaps

#### 3.1 Problems faced by domestic workers: -

Physical & sexual abuse

- Untouchability and discrimination
- Unpaid overtime & Workload
- No fixed working hours
- No job security and satisfaction
- Age vulnerability & social stigma
- Insufficient identity document (Aadhar card, Ration Card, etc.) of migrant domestic workers

#### 3.2 Policies related to the Domestic Workers in India

##### a) Policies for Labours in India

**Fundamental Rights:** Article-14 (Equality before law), 15 (Non discrimination), 17 (Untouchability) & 21 (Right to life with dignity)

**DPSPs:** 39d (Equal pay for equal work), 39e (Worker protection from exploitation), 39f (safe and humane working environment), 41 (Right to work & public assistance in unemployment), 42 (Working conditions & maternity leave), & 43 (Living wages & decent standard of life for workers).

**Labour Codes:** Code on Wages, 2019: Guarantees minimum wages and timely payment; Social Security Code, 2020: Provides health insurance, maternity, and pension benefits; Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020: Ensures safe & humane working conditions; and Industrial Relations Code, 2020: Covers industrial relations and disputes.

**Rights of Domestic Workers:** Minimum Wages: Entitled to state prescribed minimum wages; Working Domestic Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2008: Provides a regulatory framework for wages and working conditions and incorporates measures to curb exploitation and trafficking.

**ILO Convention 189 (2011):** International standards for domestic worker's rights of fair wage; social security & protection from exploitation. Yet, India hasn't ratified.

##### b) Gaps in Policies

Hours: Maximum 8-hour workday with overtime pay; Rest and Leave: Weekly offs and annual leave; Social Security: Health insurance, provident funds, and pension schemes; and Protection from Abuse: POSH Act, 2013, protects against sexual harassment

## b) Gaps in Policies

- No comprehensive law or centrally recognized legal framework
- No legal worker's identity card (formal/informal recognition)
- No worker pension/insurance
- No occupational health, safety, and well-being
- No labour welfare and social security measures
- No formal contract between employers and domestic workers
- State legislative intervention is required
- Exploitation by third party (agent/consultant) involvement

Collectively, these labour codes provide a consolidated framework for wage protection, social security, occupational safety and industrial relations. However, their applicability and enforcement with respect to domestic workers remains limited and uneven.

## 4. Implications for social work practice: -

**a) Proactive Role-Watchdog and Right Advocate:** - Ensure effective implementation of labour laws especially in informal sectors like: households, private office cleaner; occupational health & safety and prevent exploitation for example: advocate to file sexual harassment at workplace complaint or legal aid for domestic violence.

**b) Mediator between domestic worker and employer/agent:** facilitate collective bargaining and resolve conflict.

**c) Counselling and Psychological Support:** address issues like work and workplace problems, mental health problems, alcohol and substance abuse, family counselling. **d) Group work and community organization:** formation of self-help group (SHGs) of domestic workers, leadership development programme, and awareness programme on domestic worker's rights, government welfare schemes, and financial literacy.

**e) Social Welfare Administration:** Planning, organizing, and implementing welfare schemes of the government, like recreational & cultural activities, Creches for domestic workers' children, skill development programme, and health insurance and economic safety.

**f) Advocacy and Legal Support:** registration for welfare board, E-Shram registration, support to access the worker identity card (Aadhar Card, Rational card etc.), legal aid on wage theft, awareness on economic, physical & sexual abuse, and represent domestic worker's voice in policy forum.

**g) Employer Sensitisation:** Encourage employers (Households) and RWAs (Resident Welfare Associations) for ethical practices, and written contracts with domestic workers.

- h) Researcher and Policy Influencer:** Conduct action research, and document and analyse the working conditions and workplace security and decent work practices.
- i) Networking:** Collaboration and partnership with International, National and Non governmental organizations for domestic worker overall welfare and well-being.

## Conclusion

Social workers contribute to the empowerment of domestic workers by raising awareness of their rights, psychosocial and legal support, collective mobilisation, social security access, and advocacy for dignified working conditions in the unorganised sector. State governments must initiate ground-level interventions to address the multiple vulnerabilities of domestic workers, many of whom are migrants, displaced persons, unskilled, and illiterate respectively.

These vulnerabilities are further shaped by intersecting factors such as age, gender, sex, caste, and socio-economic status. Professional social workers in the field of labour welfare are trained to identify and engage domestic workers within communities, slums, and residential welfare associations (RWAs) at the grassroots level, as well as to contribute at the policy level through research and administrative roles. In doing so, they play a critical role in bridging gaps in social welfare policy design, implementation, and service delivery.

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# THE FUTURE OF WORK(ERS): ADDRESSING PRECARITY, GIG ECONOMY CHALLENGES & SOCIAL PROTECTION RESPONSES

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The future of work, particularly for workers in the gig and platform economy, is being reshaped by rapid technological change, evolving regulatory landscapes, and persistent challenges around precarity. As of early 2026, the gig economy has reached “critical mass” in many regions, with millions relying on platforms like Uber, Door Dash, Swiggy and others for primary or supplementary income. Yet, this growth often comes at the cost of income insecurity, lack of benefits, algorithmic control and limited social protections.

The global gig economy is booming, valued at over \$600 billion in 2025, it comes to expand, driven by digital platforms that promise flexibility and autonomy. In the United States alone, around 70 million people freelanced or giggered in 2025. With projections suggesting over 50% of the workforce could be freelancing by 2027. Globally, platforms generate trillions in revenue, often outpacing traditional employment in sectors like tech and delivery. Many workers, especially younger generations (Gen Z and Millennials) are drawn to the independence in the setting work hours and work remotely. However, this flexibility frequently masks deeper vulnerabilities.

Gig and platform work is characterized by High Precarity – unstable earnings, lack of job security, and exclusion from traditional employee rights. Common issues like:

They paid low and unpredictable pay due to this after expenses (fuel, vehicle maintenance) many workers earn far below minimum or living wages. A 2025 Human Rights Watch report highlights median wages as low as \$5.12 per hour in some U.S. platforms after deductions.

There is absence of benefits and protections because no employer sponsored health insurance, paid leave, retirement contributions, unemployment benefits or workers compensation. Worker’s bear rises like accidents, illness and burnout alone. Even they faced isolation, mental health crises, and social reproduction burdens fall entirely on individuals.

Platforms often label workers as “independent contractors” to evade responsibilities, despite significant control over work. These issues disproportionately affect marginalized groups, including women, migrants.

Look into this matter, social protection measures also taken by national or international levels. European Union platform work Directive (adopted 2024, effective December 2024) it introduces a presumption of employment for platform workers under significant control, granting rights to minimum wage, benefits, collective bargaining, along algorithmic transparency. Member states must transpose it by December 2026, with some countries like Spain, France already advancing national laws. It protects against automated firings and ensures data privacy. International Labour Organisations (ILO) in 2025, the ILO advanced toward binding global standards on decent work on platform economy. Discussions at the 13th international labour conference pushed for a convention and recommendations, focusing on fair pay, occupational safety, social security inclusion, and protections regardless of employment status. A potential treaty could be adopted in 2026, urging countries to expand protections universally.

India also expanding health insurance and welfare contributions from platforms in 2025. Future oriented proposals include universal or portable benefits, sectoral bargaining, and worker centric platforms. Public-private partnerships and digital organizing are gaining tractions to secure dignity and fairness. So, basically by looking ahead the Gig economy is not inherently the “future of work” it’s a warning of unchecked platform power.

Without intervention, precarity could worsen with AI integration and future automation. However, the 2025-2026 regulatory wave signals a shift; from corporate dominance to worker-centred protections.

**To realize this – stakeholders must prioritize:**

1. Binding international standards.
2. Algorithmic accountability and transparency
3. Inclusive social security systems that cover all workers, regardless of status.
4. Strong collective action and union support.

The path forward requires balancing innovation with justice – ensuring the future of work is not just flexible, but decent, secure, and equitable for all workers. As momentum builds in 2026, the gig economy challenges could transform into opportunities for a more resilient labour landscape.

Artificial Intelligence is profoundly reshaping the gig economy, acting as a both a disrupter and a enabler. In ride – hailing, delivery, freelancing and micro task platforms, AI drives efficiency while intensifying precarity for many workers. AI has both its positive and negative impacts.

Here, we discussing the negative impacts of AI.

**1. Delivery and ride hailing:** Autonomous vehicles and robotaxis pose the biggest threat. Uber's partnerships aim for robotaxis in major U.S. cities in 2026, potentially reducing demand for human drivers. Early evidence shows wage compressions in AV – active markets, with platforms like Uber, DoorDash and Lyft testing self- driving deliveries.

**2. Digital freelancing:** Generative AI hits hard on content writing, data entry, transcription, basic graphic design, and customer support.

**3. Broader effects:** AI agents automate task allocation, performance monitoring and even client interactions. This exacerbates income volatility, wage suppression, and inequality, especially for low-skill or marginalized workers.

Many gig workers report anxiety over long- term security, with AI flooding markets with low -cost alternatives and pushing a race to the bottom.

**Positive impact of AI:**

1. New roles emerge in AI related tasks: data annotation, prompt engineering, AI training, machine learning support and content moderation.

2. Productivity boosted, Freelancers with advanced AI skills often outpace full-time employees.

3. Platform enhancements -AI improves matching, predicts demand, optimizes scheduling, streamlines operations for platforms.

# Work, Wellbeing, and Precarity: Labouring Bodies, Welfare Gaps, and Social Work Responses in Contemporary India

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## **Introduction :**

Labour occupies a central place in shaping individual wellbeing, social security, and collective development in India. For a majority of workers, particularly those engaged in informal, contractual, and migrant labour, work is not merely a source of income but a condition that structures everyday survival, bodily health, and social dignity. However, despite constitutional protections and an expanding framework of labour legislation, the lived realities of workers continue to be marked by insecurity, unsafe conditions, low wages, and limited access to welfare mechanisms.

India's labour landscape is characterised by a high degree of informalization, with a significant proportion of the workforce operating outside stable employment arrangements and formal social protection systems. Informal workers often experience irregular incomes, long working hours, hazardous working environments, and weak bargaining power. These conditions produce cumulative vulnerabilities that extend beyond the workplace, affecting nutrition, housing, health, family life, and intergenerational wellbeing. Labour precarity thus emerges not only as an economic issue but as a broader social problem with deep implications for equity and justice.

Recent reforms in labour governance, particularly the consolidation of multiple labour laws into the Four Labour Codes, have been presented as efforts to simplify regulation and improve compliance. While these reforms signal a shift in the regulatory approach to labour, they have also raised concerns regarding dilution of worker protections, reduced avenues for collective representation, and uneven implementation across sectors. For workers located at the intersections of caste, gender, migration, and poverty, legal reforms alone have not translated into substantive improvements in everyday security or wellbeing. In this context, understanding labour through a narrow legal or economic framework is insufficient. Labour must be examined as a social determinant that

shapes bodily risk, mental stress, and the reproduction of everyday life. This perspective foregrounds the relationship between work conditions and wellbeing, drawing attention to the ways in which labour regimes produce differential exposure to harm and insecurity. It also highlights the limits of welfare approaches that focus primarily on targeted schemes without addressing structural conditions of work.

Social work, as a profession committed to social justice and human dignity, occupies a critical position within this landscape. Beyond service delivery, social work has the potential to engage with labour issues through rights-based advocacy, policy engagement, and ethically grounded practice with labouring communities. By situating labour within broader questions of wellbeing and justice, social work can contribute meaningfully to addressing contemporary labour challenges and strengthening welfare responses in India.

### **Work and Wellbeing – A Conceptual Lens :**

Work occupies a central role in shaping wellbeing, extending far beyond its function as a means of income generation. The conditions under which work is organised—its stability, safety, duration, and social valuation—directly influence physical health, mental wellbeing, and social dignity. For large sections of India's workforce, particularly those engaged in informal and precarious employment, work often entails sustained exposure to risk, uncertainty, and stress, making wellbeing an unevenly distributed social outcome.

Understanding labour through a wellbeing lens requires attention to the embodied nature of work. Labouring bodies are sites where economic arrangements are translated into lived experience. Long working hours, hazardous environments, repetitive physical tasks, and inadequate rest contribute to occupational injuries, chronic illnesses, and psychological distress. These impacts are rarely confined to the workplace; they extend into domestic life, shaping family relations, caregiving responsibilities, and the capacity to sustain everyday life. Wellbeing, in this sense, is inseparable from the social organisation of work.

Labour precarity further intensifies vulnerabilities by weakening access to social protection and collective support. Informal and contractual workers often remain excluded from employer-based benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and retirement security. The absence of stable employment relationships limits workers' ability to assert rights or negotiate safer conditions, reinforcing power asymmetries between labour and capital. Precarious work thus functions as a mechanism through which risk is systematically transferred onto workers and their families.

Work and wellbeing are also shaped by social hierarchies. Caste, gender, migration status, and class significantly influence the types of work individuals perform and the risks they face. Marginalised communities are disproportionately represented in hazardous, low-paid, and socially devalued occupations, where exposure to injury-

-and illness is normalised. Women workers often experience a dual burden of paid labour and unpaid care work, intensifying physical exhaustion and emotional stress. Migrant workers, separated from social networks and welfare entitlements, face heightened insecurity and limited access to support systems.

This conceptual framing highlights the limitations of welfare approaches that address outcomes without engaging with the conditions of work itself. Schemes aimed at income support or insurance coverage, while necessary, cannot fully address the structural drivers of ill-being embedded within labour arrangements. A wellbeing-oriented perspective demands attention to how work is organised, regulated, and valued, and how these processes reproduce inequality.

For social work, this lens underscores the need to engage with labour as a site of structural injustice rather than as an individual problem. By situating wellbeing within the broader political economy of work, social work can move toward interventions that combine advocacy, policy engagement, and ethical practice, addressing both immediate needs and the underlying conditions that shape labouring lives.

### **Contemporary Labour Challenges in India :**

Contemporary labour challenges in India are shaped by the intersecting processes of informalisation, migration, technological change, and uneven regulatory enforcement. While these dynamics affect workers across sectors, their impacts are most acutely felt by those located in informal, contractual, and precarious forms of employment. Examining a few key challenges illustrates how labour conditions continue to undermine wellbeing and social security, despite the presence of legal and policy frameworks.

### **Informalisation and Precarious Work :**

A defining feature of India's labour market is the predominance of informal employment, characterised by the absence of written contracts, job security, and employer-provided social protection. Informal workers often face unpredictable incomes, irregular working hours, and sudden loss of employment, making long-term planning and financial stability difficult. Precarious work arrangements transfer economic risk from employers to workers, compelling individuals and families to absorb shocks related to illness, injury, or job loss. This insecurity has cumulative effects on nutrition, housing stability, children's education, and access to healthcare, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability.

### **Migrant Labour and Social Exclusion**

Internal migration has become an essential survival strategy for millions of workers, particularly from rural and economically marginalised regions. Migrant workers frequently encounter exploitative labour practices, poor living conditions, and exclusion from local welfare systems due to documentation barriers and lack of portability of entitlements. Separation from social networks and support system

-further intensifies psychological stress and social isolation. The precarious position of migrant labourers highlights the limitations of welfare mechanisms that remain territorially bounded and inadequately responsive to mobile populations.

### **Occupational Health, Safety, and Risk :**

Unsafe working conditions remain a persistent concern across sectors such as construction, manufacturing, sanitation, and the informal service economy. Exposure to hazardous materials, lack of protective equipment, excessive working hours, and weak enforcement of safety standards contribute to high rates of occupational injury and illness. For many workers, bodily harm is treated as an inevitable aspect of earning a livelihood rather than as a preventable outcome of poor regulation and power imbalances. The normalisation of risk reflects deeper structural inequalities, where certain bodies are rendered more expendable within the labour process.

### **Gendered and Caste-Based Vulnerabilities :**

Labour markets in India are deeply stratified along caste and gender lines. Marginalised caste groups are disproportionately concentrated in stigmatized, hazardous, and low-paid occupations, where exposure to health risks and social discrimination is routine. Women workers, particularly in informal and home-based work, experience lower wages, job insecurity, and limited recognition of their labour rights. In addition to paid work, women continue to bear primary responsibility for unpaid care work, resulting in intensified physical and emotional burdens. These intersecting inequalities shape differential experiences of work and wellbeing, often remaining invisible within policy discourses that treat workers as a homogeneous category.

### **Changing Work Arrangements and Technological Shifts :**

The expansion of remote work, platform-based employment, automation, and digital technologies has further altered labour relations. While such changes are often framed as opportunities for flexibility and efficiency, they have also introduced new forms of surveillance, work intensification, and employment insecurity. Platform and gig workers frequently operate without formal recognition as employees, limiting their access to labour protections and social security. These developments raise important questions about regulation, accountability, and the future of work in a rapidly transforming economy.

Taken together, these challenges reveal that labour issues in contemporary India are deeply embedded within broader structures of inequality and governance. Addressing them requires moving beyond fragmented interventions toward integrated approaches that recognise work as a central determinant of wellbeing and social justice.

## Welfare Gaps and the Limits of Policy Reform

India's labour welfare framework comprises a wide range of legislations, social security schemes, and targeted interventions intended to protect workers from economic insecurity and social risk. Over time, welfare measures addressing minimum wages, compensation for injury, maternity benefits, and social insurance have expanded in scope. However, the persistence of widespread labour precarity highlights a critical gap between formal policy intent and lived realities. Welfare provisions often remain fragmented, unevenly implemented, and poorly aligned with the conditions of informal and precarious work.

A central limitation of labour welfare in India lies in its historical dependence on formal employment relationships. Many welfare entitlements are tied to employer–employee frameworks that exclude large segments of the workforce operating outside formal contracts. Informal workers, self-employed individuals, home-based workers, and gig workers frequently fall through institutional gaps, lacking consistent access to insurance, paid leave, or retirement security. As a result, welfare mechanisms often function as partial safety nets rather than comprehensive systems of protection.

The consolidation of labour legislation into the Four Labour Codes represents a significant shift in India's approach to labour governance. Framed as an effort to simplify regulations and improve compliance, the new codes aim to rationalise laws related to wages, industrial relations, occupational safety, and social security. While these reforms have the potential to

streamline administrative processes, concerns remain regarding their implications for worker protections, collective bargaining rights, and enforcement mechanisms. For many workers, particularly those in informal and unorganised sectors, legal consolidation has not translated into greater clarity or improved access to welfare.

Implementation remains a persistent challenge. Weak enforcement capacities, limited inspection mechanisms, and reliance on self-reporting by employers undermine the effectiveness of labour protections. In practice, workers often lack awareness of their rights or face significant barriers in accessing grievance redressal mechanisms. Fear of job loss, power asymmetries, and bureaucratic hurdles discourage reporting of violations, further entrenching insecurity. Welfare schemes, when accessed, are frequently experienced as conditional, temporary, or inadequate to address sustained vulnerability.

Another limitation of existing welfare approaches is their tendency to focus on compensatory measures rather than preventive strategies. Income support or insurance schemes may provide short-term relief, but they do little to address hazardous working conditions, excessive work hours, or unstable employment arrangements that generate ill-being in the first place. By treating risk as an individual misfortune rather than a structural outcome of labour organisation, welfare interventions risk normalising unsafe and exploitative conditions.

These gaps point to the need for a reorientation of labour welfare from fragmented schemes toward integrated systems grounded in dignity, security, and wellbeing. Policy reform must be accompanied by robust implementation, meaningful worker participation, and accountability mechanisms that prioritise protection over flexibility alone. Without addressing the structural conditions under which work is organised, welfare measures will continue to fall short of ensuring substantive justice for labouring populations.

### **Role of Social Work in Labour Advocacy and Wellbeing**

Social work occupies a critical position at the intersection of labour, welfare, and social justice. As a profession grounded in principles of human dignity, rights, and equity, social work is uniquely placed to respond to contemporary labour challenges that extend beyond legal violations or economic deprivation. Engaging with labour through a wellbeing-oriented lens enables social work to address both immediate vulnerabilities and the structural conditions that produce insecurity and harm.

One of the central roles of social work in the labour context lies in rights-based advocacy. Workers located in informal and precarious employment often lack access to information, representation, and institutional support necessary to claim their rights. Social workers can play a vital role in facilitating awareness of labour entitlements, supporting access to grievance redressal mechanisms, and advocating for inclusive welfare provisions. This requires moving beyond individual case resolution toward collective engagement with labouring communities and institutions responsible for regulation and enforcement.

Social work practice also has an important role in addressing occupational wellbeing and psychosocial risk. Labour precarity, unsafe working conditions, and economic insecurity generate significant physical and mental stress for workers and their families. Social workers engaged in community settings, health institutions, and labour welfare programmes can contribute to early identification of occupational risk, psychosocial distress, and exclusion from welfare systems. Interventions that integrate counselling, referral, and community-based support can help mitigate immediate harm while highlighting systemic gaps that require policy attention.

Engagement with migrant and marginalised workers represents another critical area for social work intervention. Migrant labourers often face layered vulnerabilities related to documentation, housing, access to public services, and social isolation. Social workers can facilitate linkage with welfare schemes, support portability of entitlements, and work with local institutions to promote inclusive service delivery. At the same time, ethical practice demands sensitivity to power asymmetries and the avoidance of paternalistic approaches that frame workers as passive recipients rather than rights-bearing individuals.

Social work also has a significant role in policy engagement and institutional advocacy. Through research, documentation, and field-based evidence, social workers can contribute to policy debates on labour reform, welfare design, and implementation mechanisms. By bridging lived experiences of workers with policy processes, social work can help ensure that labour governance frameworks remain responsive to ground realities. This includes engaging with local governance structures, labour departments, trade unions, and civil society networks to strengthen accountability and participation.

Finally, social work education and professional practice must continuously reflect on the ethical dimensions of labour engagement. Addressing labour issues requires critical awareness of how caste, gender, class, and migration shape access to work and exposure to risk. Ethical social work practice involves challenging normalised exploitation, resisting depoliticised welfare approaches, and affirming the centrality of dignity and wellbeing in labour interventions.

By situating labour within broader questions of wellbeing and justice, social work can move beyond fragmented service delivery toward transformative engagement. In doing so, the profession reinforces its relevance in addressing one of the most pressing social challenges of contemporary India.

## **Conclusion**

Contemporary labour challenges in India reveal the limits of approaches that treat work solely as an economic activity or welfare as a matter of targeted assistance. For a large section of the workforce, particularly those engaged in informal, migrant, and precarious employment, labour conditions continue to shape everyday experiences of insecurity, bodily risk, and social exclusion. These realities underscore the need to reframe labour not only as a site of production, but as a central determinant of wellbeing, dignity, and social justice.

While policy reforms and welfare schemes remain important, their impact is constrained when they fail to address the structural organisation of work and the inequalities embedded within labour markets. Legal frameworks that emphasise simplification and flexibility must be accompanied by robust implementation, accountability, and protections that prioritise workers' security and safety. Without such commitments, welfare interventions risk functioning as temporary relief rather than as mechanisms of substantive justice.

This article has argued that social work has a critical role to play in bridging the gap between labour, welfare, and wellbeing. By engaging with labouring communities through rights-based advocacy, ethical practice, and policy engagement, social work can contribute to more inclusive and responsive labour welfare systems. Situating labour issues within broader social, economic, and political contexts allows the profession to move beyond individualised interventions toward collective and structural responses.

Reimagining labour welfare through a wellbeing and justice lens also demands reflection within social work education and practice. Preparing social workers to engage meaningfully with labour issues requires strengthening critical understanding of political economy, social inequalities, and institutional processes. As work continues to shape life chances and social security for millions, social work's commitment to dignity, equity, and justice positions it as an essential actor in addressing the evolving challenges of work, welfare, and wellbeing in India.

# A Reflective Account of My Fieldwork Experience at Patiala School for the Deaf and the Blind

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## **Introduction**

Fieldwork constitutes a vital component of professional training in social work, as it enables students to translate theoretical knowledge into meaningful practice. As a student of the Department of Social Work, Punjabi University, Patiala, my concurrent fieldwork placement at Patiala School for the Deaf and the Blind was a deeply enriching and transformative experience. The institution, managed by the Society for Welfare of the Handicapped (Regd.), is committed to providing free residential education and rehabilitation services to children with hearing and visual impairments. Completing 240 hours of fieldwork between August and November, I was provided with an opportunity to engage directly with children with sensory disabilities within a structured, inclusive, and supportive educational environment.

This fieldwork experience allowed me to move beyond classroom learning and gain firsthand exposure to the realities of disability, inclusion, and rehabilitation. Through daily interaction with deaf and blind students, teachers, and staff members, I developed a deeper understanding of communication barriers, adaptive educational methods, and the psychosocial needs of children with special abilities. The experience demanded patience, emotional sensitivity, and adaptability, encouraging continuous self-reflection on my role as a future social work professional. Most importantly, it strengthened my values of empathy, dignity, and respect for diversity. The fieldwork reinforced the belief that disability is not an inability but a different way of engaging with the world, and that inclusive support systems play a crucial role in enabling individuals to reach their full potential.

## **The Institution and Its Approach**

Patiala School for the Deaf and the Blind is a specialized educational institution that focuses on the holistic development of children with hearing and visual impairments. The school integrates academic learning with vocational training, co-curricular activities, and life-skills education. Trained educators and staff members adopt child-centred and inclusive practices to ensure that students receive not only education but also emotional security, social acceptance, and opportunities for self-expression.

### **Fieldwork Exposure and Learning Environment**

During my fieldwork tenure, I actively observed classroom teaching and assisted educators in instructional activities. I gained exposure to teaching methods such as the use of sign language, visual and tactile aids, and Braille-based learning. These observations enhanced my understanding of individualized education planning and the importance of adapting instructional strategies according to the specific needs of deaf and blind students. Regular interaction with students helped me develop effective communication skills and build rapport grounded in trust and empathy.

### **Student-Led Fundraiser Exhibition**

One of the most impactful initiatives during my fieldwork was the organization of a fundraiser exhibition conducted entirely by us as fieldwork students. The exhibition displayed handmade products crafted by deaf students, developed as part of their

vocational training. We were actively involved in planning, coordination, and execution of the exhibition.

The initiative aimed to promote economic empowerment and social recognition of the students' skills. Observing the confidence and pride among the deaf students as their work was appreciated by visitors was a powerful learning experience. This activity highlighted the importance of participatory and empowerment-based approaches in social work practice and reinforced the value of dignity of labour and inclusion.

### **Five-Day Embroidery Workshop**

Another significant contribution during my fieldwork was the organization of a five-day embroidery workshop, which was planned and conducted by the fieldwork students themselves for deaf students. The workshop focused on structured skill training in embroidery, encouraging creativity and vocational competence.

The hands-on nature of the workshop enabled students to actively engage in learning and skill enhancement. Their enthusiasm and dedication throughout the sessions highlighted the importance of vocational education as a tool for rehabilitation, self-confidence, and future livelihood opportunities. This experience strengthened my understanding of skill-based empowerment within disability welfare settings.

### **Children's Day Sports Activities**

As part of Children's Day celebrations, sports activities were organized for both deaf and blind students, keeping inclusivity and safety as central considerations. The activities were designed according to the physical abilities of the children. Different sports activities were planned separately for deaf and blind students, ensuring meaningful participation for all.

For deaf students, activities focused on coordination, teamwork, and physical agility, while for blind students, games emphasized sensory awareness, balance, and safe movement. These activities promoted physical fitness, emotional well-being, and social interaction, highlighting the importance of adaptive recreation in the holistic development of children with disabilities.

### **Communication Skills and Professional Growth**

A key learning outcome of my fieldwork was acquiring basic sign language skills, which significantly improved my ability to communicate with deaf students. Over time, this helped reduce communication barriers and foster meaningful interaction. The experience emphasized that effective communication requires effort, empathy, and openness, particularly while working with marginalized populations.

Professionally, the fieldwork enhanced my observation skills, ethical sensitivity, and understanding of disability-inclusive practice. Personally, it reshaped my perceptions of disability, replacing preconceived notions with respect for resilience and capability.

### **Conclusion**

My fieldwork experience at Patiala School for the Deaf and the Blind was both enlightening and transformative. It provided invaluable insights into disability welfare, inclusive education, and participatory social work practice. The experience strengthened my commitment to working in the areas of disability rehabilitation and child welfare. I remain grateful to the institution for providing a nurturing environment that fostered learning, compassion, and professional growth, which will continue to guide my future journey in social work.

# Announcement: Call for Contributions

*NAPSWI Social Work Digest – Special Issue*

*Theme: Professional Social Work in India: Past, Present, and Future*

In celebration of World Social Work Day (17 March 2026), the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) is proud to announce a special themed issue of the Social Work Digest.

While we embrace the global theme, "Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society," this issue specifically seeks to highlight the unique indigenous practices, philosophical foundations, and developmental models that India contributes to the global social work discourse. From the grassroots spirit of Harambee to the Indian ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family), we invite you to share how Indian social work is shaping a more inclusive and sustainable tomorrow.

## **Submission Guidelines**

To maintain editorial standards, please ensure your contribution meets the following criteria:

- Length: Maximum 1,250 words.
- Format: Microsoft Word document (.doc or .docx).
- Typography: 12-point font size, Times New Roman.

## **Required Information:**

- Full Name and Designation.
- Active Email Address.
- A concise Summary/Introduction at the beginning.
- Complete References listed on the final page.

## **Important Dates & Submission Details**

- Submission Deadline: 12 March 2026
- Send to: [napswi@gmail.com](mailto:napswi@gmail.com)

We encourage practitioners, educators, and student ambassadors to submit articles that bridge the gap between local action and global impact. Let us unite to showcase the strength of Indian social work on the world stage.

Editorial Team,

NAPSWI Social Work Digest

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*NAPSWI serves as a facilitator, providing a professional platform for dialogue and knowledge sharing. Our objective is to provide contributors with nationwide exposure by circulating these insights among our members, academic institutions, and the broader community of social work professionals. NAPSWI does not assume responsibility for the accuracy or consequences of the information provided within individual contributions.*

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