



Postcard Campaign
*Led by domestic workers of Delhi, Haryana & Chhattisgarh
to end sexual harassment in their world of work*
December 2020 - February 2021

Introduction

Domestic workers, largely women, number around 4.2 million (official estimates) in India and are informal workers who don't come under the purview of labour laws. Minimum wages, weekly offs, sick leaves, and more are not guaranteed to them. The lack of government data and regulation have opened this community up to a lot of risks in the workplace including violence, sexual harassment and abuse.

Domestic workers don't speak openly about their experiences of sexual harassment. The culture of silence around the issue is compounded by their economic vulnerability, and a fear of losing their jobs. Consequently, instances of sexual harassment that they face in the workplace remain grossly underreported.

In 2018, the Martha Farrell Foundation [undertook a research project](#) drawing narratives from 45 domestic workers in Gurgaon, where we found that sexual harassment of domestic workers is rampant. The Network for the Rights and Voices of Domestic Workers, a Delhi-based collaboration of organisations working with domestic worker communities in the NCR region backs this finding. Conversations across communities reveal that the silence on the issue is compounded by stigma, power, gender and caste divisions.

A recent report by the Human Rights Watch, released in October 2020, titled '[No #MeToo for women like us](#)' explores and adds to this. The report also elaborates how the issue has been compounded significantly in light of the lockdown triggered by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Although not under the purview of labour laws, domestic workers are in fact, protected under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013. The Law mandates the formation of Local Committees in every district, which is responsible for the safety of domestic workers in their world of work. An [RTI study](#) by Martha Farrell Foundation in 2017, out of 655 districts in the country, only 191 districts were found to have set up a LC, out of these only 18% had conducted orientation of members or awareness programmes, 97% did not respond about SC/ST membership, four districts, one each in Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Punjab (two) had male chairpersons, 11 districts had no NGO representative and 103 replied to say that they are yet to establish an LC.

In light of the above, it's evident that mechanisms to protect domestic workers in their world of work are grossly inadequate and improperly implemented.

The Campaign

Recognising that their right to equality, personal liberty and right against discrimination rest to a large extent on the proper implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013, nearly 3000 domestic workers from Delhi, Haryana and Chhattisgarh banded together to start a movement this New Year 2021.



Supported by the Martha Farrell Foundation and the Network for the Rights and Voices of Domestic Workers, the women workers all sent postcards to the Union Minister of Women and Child Development, Smt. Smriti Irani, and the Delhi/Haryana State Department heads Ms. Rashmi Singh and Smt. Kamlesh Dhandra, with specific demands on the proper implementation of the Law, including:

- An allocated budget to ensure proper implementation of the SHW Act, 2013
- Ensure domestic workers get access to time-bound justice in cases of sexual harassment at work
- Introduce state-specific rules under the SHW Act to suit the individual needs of the state's female domestic worker.

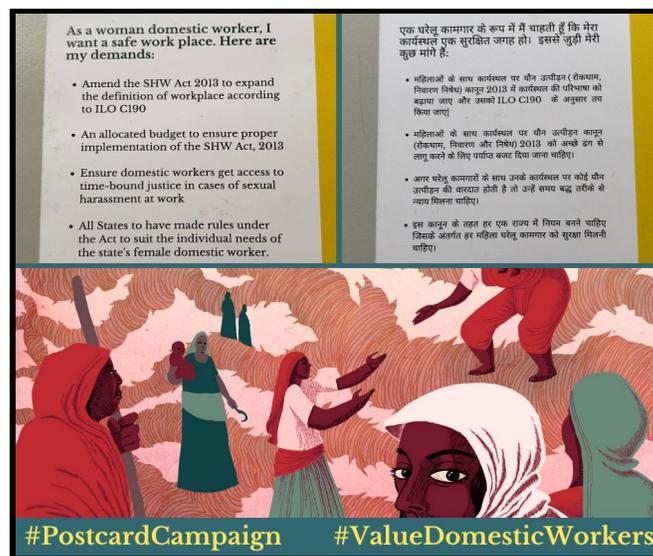
- Proper provisions to be made for domestic workers to avail of maternity benefits, in consultation with the Labour Department

The postcards sported a design by renowned illustrator Harshad Marathe, and were signed across a period of one month (through December), before being posted through the first half of January 2021. By the fourth week of January, the campaign launched on social media, supported by the Martha Farrell Foundation and the Network for the Rights and Voices of Domestic Workers.

Impact

The postcard campaign has had tremendous impact in the last few weeks. Most notably, the campaign has:

- Propelled a larger scale movement among domestic workers, more of whom are beginning to sign and send postcards to their decision makers



- Drawn solidarity and support from multiple influencers and organisations, who've joined in the campaign and shared the posts and their messages of solidarity for the postcard campaign on social media



- A [feature story on Scroll.in on the campaign](#), the larger issue and the demands of the domestic workers
- Nearly 3000 unique organic views on Twitter [on the campaign video](#), developed by the Martha Farrell Foundation and counting

Next Steps

- Build on the momentum created by the Postcard Campaign to sensitise more domestic workers on their rights in the workplace and their rights under the PoSH Act 2013
- Build on the momentum created by the Postcard Campaign to design further interventions to bring attention to the highly invisibilised nature of the issue of sexual harassment in the world of work of domestic workers
- Strengthen the solidarity and continued efforts of the Network for the Rights and Voices of Domestic Workers to ensure the issue gets the attention it deserves, including proper policy implementation
- Involve diverse stakeholders such as employers, RWAs and government and police personnel in conversation to strengthen the implementation of the Act