

Final Report: Addressing Heat Injustice among Domestic Workers in Bangalore

Reporting Period: December 2025 – August 2026

Project Status: Completed / Ongoing Advocacy

1. Project Summary

This project aimed to understand and address the growing challenge of heat stress among domestic workers in Bengaluru, an informal workforce that remains largely invisible in city-level Heat Action Plans and occupational health frameworks. Grounded in a bottom-up approach, the project combined participatory research, heat-health capacity building, storytelling, and stakeholder engagement to advocate for structural changes that protect domestic workers from the increasing risks of heat waves.

Over the course of the project, HeatWatch completed 40 in-depth interviews and 2 shadowing exercises with domestic workers, delivered two heat-health training sessions reaching 55 workers, developed and disseminated a Heat Safety Charter for residential communities in collaboration with the Bengaluru Apartments Federation, piloted a youth-led Neighbourhood Heat Exposure Audit in collaboration with Reap Benefit and Samaaj Data, conducted thermal imaging documentation across low-income settlements with the support of Sustainable Futures Collaborative (SFC), launched the citizen-led #OpenOurParks campaign with The Indian Ploggers Army in response to the distress domestic workers described about the lack of accessible resting spaces during long commutes in peak heat, collaborated with Socratus Foundation for a public exhibition at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), developed policy recommendations for the Karnataka State Unorganised Workers Social Security Board (KSUWSSB) alongside initiating engagement with the North Bengaluru Corporation Commissioner on heat-safety measures for informal workers, and developed a multimedia digital repository and replication toolkit.

2. Project Highlights

- **40 in-depth interviews** completed with domestic workers across Bengaluru, using mobility mapping, expense mapping, and workload mapping tools.
- **2 shadowing exercises** conducted to document real-time heat exposure during commutes and work routines.
- **55 domestic workers trained** across two heat-health capacity-building sessions on 6 and 8 April 2026, facilitated by Dr. Archana S and Dr. Soumya from St. John's Medical College Hospital.
- **Thermal imaging documentation** conducted in May 2026 with the support of Sustainable Futures Collaborative (SFC), capturing kitchen and exterior surface temperatures across low-income settlements in Bengaluru.

- **Heat Safety Charter** developed and disseminated to Bengaluru Apartments Federation (BAF) member communities through BAF's WhatsApp communities.
- **#OpenOurParks campaign** launched in collaboration with The Indian Ploggers Army, advocating for public parks to remain open through the day as accessible resting and cooling spaces for informal workers, with media coverage in The Times of India, The Hindu, Bangalore Mirror, and Deccan Herald.
- **Public exhibition** *Invisible Work, Visible Heat* hosted on 5 June 2026 at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Bengaluru, in collaboration with Socratus Foundation.
- **Flash talk at IIM Bangalore** delivered at the *Urban Health: Healthy Cities & Healthy Communities* discussion in June 2026, supported by the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum and IIMB NSRCEL, addressing the project's findings on heat and domestic workers, the Heat Safety Charter for apartments and employers, and the case for public parks as cooling spaces for informal workers.
- **Engagement initiated with the North Bengaluru Corporation Commissioner** on the Heat Safety Charter and broader heat-safety measures for informal workers.
- **Youth-led Neighbourhood Heat Exposure Audit** piloted in collaboration with Reap Benefit and Samaaj Data.
- **Policy recommendations** developed for KSUWSSB, anchored to specific provisions of the Karnataka Domestic Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2025; formal submission through Board channels is being pursued.
- **Two stakeholder consultations** convened during the project: the first online on 18 December 2025 bringing together domestic worker leaders from the Domestic Workers' Rights Union (DWRU) and Karuna Domestic Welfare Trust, representatives from the Karnataka App-Based Workers Union, and independent researchers to ground the research in worker-led priorities; and the second on 18 May 2026 bringing together 16 participants representing domestic worker unions, civil society organisations, research institutions, and domestic workers themselves.
- **Digital repository and replication toolkit** currently in the final stages of production, to be shared with BSF before the end of August 2026.

3. Impact and Outcomes

3.1 Stakeholder Engagement and Consultations

The project was grounded in sustained engagement with domestic worker organisations, unions, researchers, and civil society partners across Bengaluru. HeatWatch entered into a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the **Domestic Workers' Rights Union (DWRU)**, working closely with Ms. Geeta Menon, Ms. Radha, and Ms. Yashodha, who supported community outreach, worker mapping for interviews, and facilitation of stakeholder engagement. In parallel, ongoing engagement with **Ms. Nagamma of the Karuna Domestic Welfare Trust** brought insights on long working hours, denial of basic facilities, and the specific health risks faced by

women workers managing chronic illnesses and care responsibilities. Together, these partnerships ensured the project was grounded in existing worker organising efforts across more than one network.

Two structured stakeholder consultations were convened over the course of the project.

First Stakeholder Consultation (18 December 2025)

An online consultation was convened at the start of the project to ground the research design in worker-led priorities. Participants included Geeta Menon and Radha from DWRU, Krishamma (a domestic worker), Ms. Nagamma from Karuna Domestic Welfare Trust, Ms. Selvi from the Karnataka App-Based Workers Union (KAWU), and independent researchers Ms. Anousha Peters (Equidem) and Dr. Rajesh Joseph (Azim Premji University). The consultation surfaced early themes that shaped the research, including the close links between heat stress and lack of access to toilets, water, rest, and sick leave; workers continuing to work despite illness due to fear of income loss; and the specific ways in which heat compounds women's health impacts such as anaemia, menstrual discomfort, and pregnancy-related risks. Participants stressed that heat stress is deeply connected to dignity, caste, gender, and job insecurity, and must be addressed as an occupational health issue.

Multi-Stakeholder Consultation (18 May 2026)

A second consultation was convened at Samagata Space, bringing together 16 participants representing domestic worker unions, civil society organisations, research institutions, and domestic workers themselves. The consultation served as a mid-project dissemination platform to present research findings, showcase multimedia documentation, and co-develop pathways for institutional engagement and heat-safety protections.

3.2 Quantitative Outcomes from Participatory Research

A. Employer Survey Outcomes (n=67)

An online employer survey was disseminated through citizen networks to understand levels of awareness, attitudes, and existing practices related to summer heat and domestic workers' wellbeing.

- 61% of employers reported prior awareness that heat stress can be an occupational health risk for workers.
- Only 14% reported having noticed visible signs of heat-related discomfort such as fatigue, dizziness, excessive sweating, or fainting among domestic workers, indicating a gap between awareness and recognition of lived impacts.

- Over 84% stated they would be willing to follow clear heat-safe guidelines introduced by housing societies or RWAs.

B. Mobility and Commute Exposure (n=40)

Heat exposure for domestic workers begins long before they reach their workplaces. Workers often travel between multiple homes each day, relying on walking and public transport during the hottest hours.

- 38 out of 40 workers walk as part of their daily commute, covering approximately 2.5 to 4 km per day.
- 36 out of 40 workers travel between workplaces during peak afternoon heat, between 12 PM and 3 PM.
- 35 out of 40 workers arrive at their first workplace already fatigued from their commute.
- 14 out of 40 workers have no place to sit and rest at any of their workplaces.

C. Water Access and Workplace Dignity (n=40)

Access to drinking water, toilets, and opportunities to rest emerged as a significant concern for many workers.

- 20 out of 40 workers deliberately avoid drinking water during the day to reduce the need to use toilets due to the lack of dignified access at workplaces.
- 8 out of 40 workers had no toilet access at all at any of their workplaces.
- 17 out of 40 workers felt unable to freely rest, drink water, or slow down during work.
- 13 out of 40 workers reported discriminatory practices, including being provided tap water while the household uses filtered water, and the use of separate or disposable cups.

D. Health Impacts (n=40)

Workers reported a range of health impacts associated with prolonged exposure to heat during travel and work.

- 36 out of 40 workers reported at least one heat-related health symptom during summer.
- The most commonly reported symptoms were extreme tiredness or weakness (35 workers), headache (31 workers), body pain or muscle cramps (29 workers), dehydration symptoms (26 workers), and dizziness or light-headedness (24 workers).
- 23 out of 40 workers reported UTI or urinary distress, often linked to deliberate water avoidance at work.
- 4 out of 40 workers reported kidney stones.
- 21 out of 40 workers visited a hospital or clinic during summer due to heat-related health problems.

E.Menstrual Health and Heat (n=29)

Among the 29 workers for whom the question was applicable, heat was reported to worsen menstrual health and make work more difficult.

- 15 out of 29 workers reported that heat worsened menstrual symptoms.
- 9 out of 29 workers said menstrual symptoms made it difficult to complete work.
- 15 out of 29 workers experienced increased cramps or body pain during summer.
- 12 out of 29 workers reported heavier or excessive bleeding during hotter months.
- 13 out of 29 workers experienced genital irritation, rashes, or fungal infections during summer periods.

F.Heat Exposure Inside the Workplace (n=40)

Many workers continued to experience heat stress inside the homes where they worked.

- 18 out of 40 workers reported working in spaces with poor ventilation or no fans.
- 15 out of 40 workers regularly worked in kitchens during peak afternoon hours without adequate exhaust systems.
- 6 out of 40 workers reported undertaking terrace work involving direct exposure to sunlight.

G.Heat, Productivity and Workload (n=40)

Workers consistently described how heat made everyday tasks slower, harder, and more physically demanding.

- 28 out of 40 workers reported that their work slows down significantly during summer months.
- Workers estimated that tasks such as mopping, washing vessels, and cooking took an additional 10–15 minutes because of heat-related fatigue.
- Many workers also reported that return journeys home took 10–15 minutes longer during summer due to exhaustion and slower travel.

H.Economic Burden (n=40)

The impacts of heat extended beyond health and affected workers' incomes and household finances.

- 30 out of 40 workers reported higher household expenses during summer, ranging from ₹500 to over ₹3,000 per month.
- Increased expenses were associated with electricity consumption, cooling refreshments, and medicines, all of which were borne entirely by workers.

- 10 out of 40 workers experienced direct wage loss during summer.
- The most commonly reported wage loss ranged from ₹2,000 to ₹3,000 per month.

I. Long-Term Needs Identified by Workers (n=40)

Workers identified both immediate heat-safety measures and longer-term labour protections as priorities.

- 24 out of 40 workers identified paid leave and job security as among their most important long-term needs.
- 17 out of 40 workers reported having little choice but to continue working when unwell because taking leave often meant losing wages or risking employment.

3.3 Training Outcomes

Two heat-health training sessions were conducted on 6 April 2026 at Suchitra Hall, Banashankari, and on 8 April 2026 at YWCA, Koramangala, reaching a total of **55 domestic workers**. The sessions were facilitated by Dr. Archana S and Dr. Soumya from St. John's Medical College Hospital, using a curriculum co-developed with insights from the primary research and worker interviews. A short video documentation of the training has also been included in the [shared drive folder](#).

Pre- and post-training surveys were administered across the two sessions. Of the 55 workers trained, pre-training data was collected from 21 workers and post-training feedback was collected from 27 workers. The results reflect a clear shift in awareness, risk recognition, and behavioural intent.

Pre-Training Baseline (n=21)

- 42.9% reported prior knowledge of how heat affects the body and the ability to work.
- 61.9% were not aware of the concept of heat stress or heat-related illness, though some were familiar with symptoms such as excessive sweating and dizziness.
- 76.2% reported familiarity with signs and symptoms of heat-related illness.
- Only 42.9% felt they had enough information to protect themselves from heat-related challenges.

Post-Training Outcomes (n=27)

- 92.6% reported understanding "very well" how heat affects their body and work.
- 66.7% reported a clear understanding of what heat stress or heat-related illness means.
- 96.3% reported they can now recognise heat-related risks and know how to protect themselves.

- 77.8% reported being "very likely" to take protective action (rest, stop work, or seek help) if they feel unwell due to heat.
- 92.6% found the training useful for staying safe in summer.
- Most commonly identified protective actions: drinking water regularly (85.2%), resting in shade or cool places (63.0%), informing other workers (63.0%), watching for danger signs and stopping work (48.1%), and using an umbrella while walking (44.4%).

The pre- and post-training comparison indicates that while experiential familiarity with symptoms was moderately high at baseline, structured understanding of heat stress as a concept and confidence in protective preparedness were low. Post-training results demonstrate meaningful gains across all indicators, particularly in risk recognition (from 42.9% baseline preparedness to 96.3% post-training confidence) and in the likelihood of taking timely protective action.

3.4 Thermal Imaging Documentation

In May 2026, with the support of Sustainable Futures Collaborative (SFC), HeatWatch used a thermal camera to document surface temperatures in kitchens where domestic workers were cooking, across low-income settlements in Bengaluru. Thermal cameras capture surface temperatures (walls, vessels, floors, and bodies) rather than air temperature, so readings tend to be higher than standard weather reports.

In **Manjunatha Colony, Basavanagudi**, average kitchen surface temperatures were 45.3°C and 36.6°C for the two workers observed, while exterior surface temperatures of the same homes were 43.2°C and 31.5°C, representing differences of approximately 2°C and 5°C respectively. In **Garvebhavi Palya and Somasundarapalya**, both areas with significantly less green cover and more extensive concretisation, the differences were more pronounced: average kitchen surface temperatures reached 39.5°C and 42.8°C, compared to exterior surface temperatures of 32.5°C and 38.2°C, representing differences of 7°C and 4.6°C respectively.

These findings offer a glimpse into the additional heat burden domestic workers experience while carrying out everyday tasks. Thermal images from this documentation are available [via the shared drive link](#).

3.5 Youth-Led Neighbourhood Heat Exposure Audit

The Neighbourhood Heat Exposure Audit was piloted in collaboration with Reap Benefit and Samaaj Data as a youth-led initiative, deployed via a WhatsApp-based bot that enabled youth volunteers to document thermal conditions at public spaces and domestic worker worksites. Across both, three gaps surfaced consistently: absence of free drinking water, inadequate seating, and insufficient shade, with transit stops and building gates emerging as the most thermally

stressed spot categories. The pilot was constrained by unexpected rainfall and limited participation, but findings will inform refinement and scaling of the tool in subsequent rounds.

3.6 Digital Repository and Multimedia Storytelling

The synthesis of research findings into a multimedia digital repository is currently underway. The repository brings together domestic workers' stories, photographs, and thermal imaging documentation to illustrate how heat is experienced across commutes, homes, workplaces, and daily routines. By centering workers' own accounts of labour, care, health, mobility, and dignity, it seeks to make visible the often-overlooked impacts of extreme heat on domestic workers and contribute to broader conversations on equitable climate adaptation in cities.

3.7 Replication Playbook / Toolkit

A replication toolkit is being developed to enable adoption of the participatory research and community engagement approach by other organisations working with informal workers, including security guards, gardeners, delivery workers, and other society staff, and to support replication in cities beyond Bengaluru.

Both the digital repository and the replication toolkit will be released and shared with BSF before the end of August 2026.

3.8 Government Engagement and Policy Advocacy

Policy recommendations were developed for the Karnataka State Unorganised Workers' Social Security Board (KSUWSSB), anchored to four specific interventions:

1. Naming heat stress as an occupational health hazard in the Karnataka Domestic Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2025, specifically within the rules to be framed under Section 12(2)(e).
2. Expanding the Ambedkar Karmika Sahaya Hastha Scheme (AKSHS) medical benefit to cover heat-induced occupational illness, currently restricted to accident cases only.
3. Using the KSUWSSB smart card registration system to disseminate heat safety information in Kannada, Hindi, and English during the summer season.
4. Embedding heat protection into the proposed Domestic Workers Board and Welfare Fund, including summer income support during declared extreme heat events.

Each recommendation is tied to existing provisions and administrative pathways within KSUWSSB's mandate, requiring in most cases a Board decision rather than legislative amendment. Formal submission through the Board's channels is being pursued; engagement has been slower than anticipated due to a change in government around the time HeatWatch initiated outreach. HeatWatch will continue engaging with KSUWSSB and the Labour Department to

advocate for these recommendations to be incorporated into the draft rules being framed under the Bill.

3.9 Employer and Public Engagement and Dissemination

Heat Safety Charter Dissemination

The Heat Safety Charter developed in collaboration with the Bengaluru Apartments Federation (BAF) was disseminated to BAF's member apartment communities across the city through BAF's WhatsApp communities. The Charter was also showcased during the launch of the Bengaluru Heat Collective. Interest has been expressed by the North Bengaluru Corporation Commissioner, with ongoing discussions on opportunities to further disseminate the Charter across apartment complexes and individual households.

#OpenOurParks Campaign

Emerging directly from the research finding that domestic workers on long commutes had no accessible resting spaces during peak heat hours, HeatWatch launched the #OpenOurParks campaign in collaboration with The Indian Ploggers Army. The campaign advocates for public parks in Bengaluru to remain open through the day as accessible resting and cooling spaces for informal workers. A formal representation with citizen endorsements was submitted to the Jayanagar MLA, and the campaign received coverage in The Times of India, The Hindu, Bangalore Mirror, and Deccan Herald. The campaign has become an ongoing citizen-led effort, complementing the project's broader advocacy on heat as a labour and dignity issue in the city.

Public Engagement

On 5 June 2026, HeatWatch collaborated with Socratus Foundation and the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Bengaluru, to host *Invisible Work, Visible Heat*, a public event that highlighted the experiences of domestic workers during periods of extreme heat. The event featured worker narratives, thermal imaging documentation, and project findings, helping raise awareness among members of the public, researchers, and civil society organisations about the impacts of heat on domestic workers' health, mobility, livelihoods, and working conditions. As part of the exhibition, an artefact centred on Pushpa's story, developed through the project's shadowing exercise, was displayed for a month and continues to be showcased at other venues.

The project also created opportunities to bring together its different strands of work at public forums. At the *Urban Health: Healthy Cities & Healthy Communities* discussion held at IIM Bangalore in June 2026, supported by the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum and IIMB NSRCEL, HeatWatch delivered a flash talk on the findings from the project. The talk addressed the heat-related challenges faced by domestic workers, the Heat Safety Charter as a mechanism for apartments and employers to improve conditions for workers within their homes, and the case for

public parks to remain open through the day as cooling centres for informal workers on long commutes. Project findings and worker shadowing documentation were also presented at the Active Mobility and Health webinar convened by Bengaluru Sustainability Forum (BSF) and its collaborators, helping bring attention to the heat-related challenges domestic workers face during their daily commutes and the importance of heat-sensitive mobility infrastructure.

4. Challenges and Lessons Learned

- **Government transition affecting advocacy timelines:** Engagement with KSUWSSB has not been as effective as anticipated, largely due to a change in government around the time HeatWatch initiated formal outreach. This slowed the response cycle on the submitted policy recommendations. HeatWatch will continue engaging with KSUWSSB and the Labour Department to advocate for these recommendations being reflected in the draft rules being framed under the Karnataka Domestic Workers Bill, 2025.
- **Challenges in employer engagement:** While the development of the Heat Safety Charter created a foundation for employer engagement, reaching individual RWAs and residential communities at scale proved challenging within the project timeline. Building awareness and encouraging adoption of heat-safe practices requires sustained engagement and continued collaboration with community networks and residential associations.

5. Future Plans and Strategies

- **Digital Repository and Replication Toolkit (before end of August 2026):** A digital repository of worker stories and multimedia documentation, along with a toolkit for replication of the project in other cities and for other informal worker groups, will be released and shared with BSF.
- **Continued KSUWSSB Advocacy:** HeatWatch will continue engaging with KSUWSSB and the Labour Department to advocate for the four policy recommendations being reflected in the draft rules being framed under the Karnataka Domestic Workers Bill, 2025.
- **Heat Safety Charter Dissemination:** Continued dissemination of the Heat Safety Charter through the Bengaluru Apartments Federation to Resident Welfare Associations across the city.
- **Replicability to Other Worker Groups:** Reflections and learnings will inform extension of the approach to other society staff, including security guards, gardeners, and delivery

workers.

- **Photo Exhibition:** Public dissemination of artefacts developed through worker shadowing sessions as part of Socratus Foundation's *Experience Centre on Heat* in Bengaluru, with the exhibition continuing to be showcased at other venues to reach wider audiences.

6. Feedback on the Role of the BSF Small Grant

The BSF Small Grant was instrumental in enabling this project and supporting HeatWatch's research on the impacts of heat stress on domestic workers in Bengaluru. The funding made it possible to undertake in-depth worker interviews, shadowing exercises, stakeholder consultations, training sessions, and engagement activities over the course of the project.

Beyond the financial support, the BSF team's engagement was meaningful in ways that extended well past the grant itself. BSF actively facilitated introductions to civic groups, researchers, and residential community networks in Bengaluru at different stages of the project, participated in consultations and public events, and helped amplify project outputs including the dissemination of the Heat Safety Charter. The BSF platform lent institutional credibility that opened doors to conversations that would have otherwise been difficult to initiate.

For HeatWatch as an organisation, this grant also played a formative role in deepening our footprint in Bengaluru. Building on our earlier work with waste workers in the city, this project allowed us to bring the voices and experiences of domestic workers into the city's climate conversation. It contributed to HeatWatch being invited into the newly launched Bengaluru Heat Collective, where we now continue to bring an occupational-health and worker-rights lens to the city's coordinated response on heat. This grant also enabled the project to respond to emergent opportunities, including the #OpenOurParks campaign in collaboration with The Indian Ploggers Army, which developed during the course of the project and complemented broader conversations on heat resilience and access to public spaces in Bengaluru.

7. Systemic Reflections from the Project Relevant to the City

- **Occupational heat exposure among domestic workers remains under-addressed in the city's climate response.** While Bengaluru's climate planning increasingly recognises heat as a key urban challenge, the experiences of domestic workers highlight the need for greater attention to workplace conditions, employer practices, and social protection.
- **Heat exposure extends across both public and private spaces.** Workers experience heat during daily commutes, in public spaces, and within homes where they work, highlighting the need to address mobility, public infrastructure, housing conditions, and workplaces together.

- **Residential communities can play an important role in supporting heat-safe working conditions.** Engagement through the Heat Safety Charter demonstrated opportunities for employers, RWAs, and apartment communities to adopt practical measures that improve working conditions and reduce heat-related risks for domestic workers.
- **Access to water, toilets, and rest is both a health and dignity issue.** The project found that heat vulnerability is shaped not only by environmental conditions but also by access to basic amenities, workplace expectations, and everyday experiences of dignity at work.

8. Case Studies, Narratives and Multimedia Documentation

Worker narratives and shadowing exercises were an important part of the project, helping document how heat shapes everyday experiences of work, mobility, health, and care responsibilities. These narratives, along with shadowing documentation, thermal imaging outputs, and project learnings, have informed the development of a digital repository and replication toolkit.

Images and video documentation from fieldwork, training sessions, stakeholder consultations, public engagement activities, thermal imaging exercises, and the **#OpenOurParks** campaign have been organised and added to the existing [shared drive folder](#) previously shared with BSF. The digital repository and replication toolkit are currently being finalised and will be shared with BSF before the end of August 2026.