Rregulation of domestic work

What is the issue?

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- Recently there was a confrontation between workforce of domestic workers and their employers in Noida (Uttar Pradesh).
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- The incident revealed the nexus between the police, employers, as well as right-wing politicians who have extended support to the wealthy residents.
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- Amidst high exploitation of domestic workers, there is an increased need for modifying labour laws to bring domestic work under the purview of state regulation.
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What are the developments in this regard?

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- In the past, domestic work was closely enmeshed with **feudal structures of labour extraction**, such as begar. There were predominantly male workers.
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- The numbers reduced considerably with the growing intensity of the anti-feudal struggle and development of occupational diversities in the post-Independence era.
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- This **developmental trend**, however, **reversed** since the early 1990s when India moved for **economic liberalisation**.
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- National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data of the post-liberalisation period recorded increase in numbers of domestic workers in general and **women workers** in particular.
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- As of today, a large number of these workers are inter-State migrant labourers from impoverished districts in West Bengal, Assam and Jharkhand.
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What are the problems with domestic working?

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- The employer-dominated domestic work industry is characterised by many forms of exploitation. This includes among many,
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  - Irregular payment of wages by employers.
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  - Extraction of more work than agreed upon at the start of employment.
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  - The practice of arbitrarily reducing wages.
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- The **private nature of regulation** has allowed the employer to exercise almost quasi-magisterial powers over the domestic workers.
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- It resembles the early colonial period in which employers predefined the terms of contract and penalised attempts by the workers to leave or renegotiate the contract.
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- There is also a social element in terms of the difference in caste groups who employ and who work.
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- Many women working at low wage rates are subsequently compelled to seek employment in more than one house and also to rope in their teenage daughters into domestic work making them vulnerable.
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- Domestic workers take on an almost absolute risk of unemployment or criminalisation when they try to obtain their dues.
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What is to be done?

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- The lack of state regulation of domestic service over empowers the employer

and subsequently leads to over exploitation of the worker.
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- India should consider ratifying the International Labour Organisation’s Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.
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- It should also modify the country's labour laws so as to bring domestic work under the purview of state regulation.
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- There is an absolute need for a firm regulation on this to ensure that rights of workers are protected and to relieve them from near servitude.
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Source: The Hindu

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