



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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Its time to protect India's workers from heat

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Context

- In the first week of April 2025, Delhi crossed a dangerous threshold: the temperature soared above 41°C, and nights offered little relief.
- These extreme conditions are no longer outliers but part of a new, deadly normal.
- With climate change intensifying year after year, Indian cities have become the epicentre of a growing crisis.
- And while heatwaves affect everyone, it is **India's millions of urban informal workers who are bearing the brunt of this slow-moving disaster.**
- The **Reserve Bank of India** has pointed out, in 2024, that **extreme heat** threatens the health and livelihoods of occupationally exposed people, potentially causing a projected **4.5% loss to India's GDP.**
- Many **Indian cities now have Heat Action Plans (HAPs)**, inspired by pioneering efforts as in **Ahmedabad**. These plans, guided by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), are meant to prepare cities for increasingly frequent and intense heatwaves. Yet, more than a decade later, most HAPs remain perfunctory, underfunded and poorly coordinated.
- The **NDMA's 2019 heat wave guidelines** do not mention informal workers explicitly, but generally, under the category of outdoor workers and vulnerable groups.
- Globally, cities are adopting worker protections against rising heat. In the U.S., California and Oregon mandate employers to provide water, shade, rest breaks, and heat safety training.
- France's "Plan Canicule" requires work adjustments, hydration during heat alerts, and opened public buildings and spaces to the public for cooling off.
- In Qatar and Australia, outdoor work is restricted during peak heat, and employers are obligated to assess and mitigate heat risks. India, too, offers examples.
- Ahmedabad's HAP introduced adjusted working hours and shaded rest areas. Odisha mandates a halt to outdoor work during peak hours.
- These good practices and innovations do offer replicable, worker-centric models for adapting urban livelihoods to extreme heat.
- **We urgently need a new kind of urban heat response: one that is worker centred, just, and grounded in lived realities.**

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