



Woes of Migrants Amid Covid-19

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Why in News

The **Covid-19** pandemic and the imposition of **lockdown** in order to curb it has brought the **perils of migrant workers** into the light.

Challenges

- Most of the migrant workers are **not routed through licensed contractors** so a huge number is excluded from getting any benefit out of the **Inter-State Migrant Workmen (ISMW) Act, 1979**.

According to ISMW Act, an **inter-State migrant worker is any person who is recruited by or through a licensed contractor**.

The ISMW Act was drawn up after **repealing the Orissa Dadan Labour Act, 1975**.

- The Act is **only applicable** to any **establishment which has five or more inter-State migrant workers as employees** which again leaves a significant number of workers.
 - In reality, a **small proportion** of migrant workmen are **placed under such establishments**.
 - Migrants from establishments with less than five migrant employees also cease to be migrants, legally.
- The ISMW Act is also **not legally enforceable**.
- **Coronavirus** crisis has exposed the **inadequacy of the ISMW Act** highlighting needs for legal safeguards and welfare measures for migrants.

Suggestions

- **Repealing of the ISMW Act, 1979 and replacing** it with a new Act, or by **enlarging the scope** of **Unorganised Workers' Social Security (UWSS) Act, 2008** to include legal entitlements, to define the migrant workman as a subset, to provide for contingencies of livelihood loss and to make the Act legally enforceable.

- **Universalisation of registration** and issuance of **Aadhaar-based Unique Worker's Identification Number (UWIN)**.
- Schemes like **MGNREGA, Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) and Ujjwala** need to be **made portable and extensive**.
- **Geofencing** of different benefits enabling a migrant worker to choose location-wise benefits.
- Preparing a **comprehensive database of the migrant workers'** source and destination, demography, employment patterns and skill sets.
It will help in skill development, providing social security benefits, planning for mass transit of migrant labour and preparing for any contingency plan in emergency situations.
- **Empowering the Inter-State Council**, set up under **Article 263 of the Constitution** to effectively and comprehensively deal with larger issues related to migrant workers.
Migrant worker issues have **complex Centre-State and inter-State dimensions**.

Steps Taken by Government

- **The UWSS Act, 2008:** It provides for **social security and welfare of unorganised workers**.
 - The UWSS Act defines **unorganised workers as home-based worker, self-employed worker or wage worker in the unorganised sector**.
 - It has **two features**:
 - Registration of unorganised workers.
 - Portable smart I-card with a **UWIN**.
- **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana:** To ensure **old age protection** for unorganised workers.
- **Atal Pension Yojana:** It is a **social security scheme** launched under the **National Pension System (NPS)** and **aims at providing a steady stream of income** after the **age of 60** to all citizens of India including the migrants and labourers.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana** and **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana** (under the **Gram Swaraj Abhiyan**): Both of the schemes provide for **life insurance** and **accident insurance respectively** to the migrants and labourers.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (Ayushman Bharat):** It aims at **providing health** cover to protect the migrants among others against the financial risk arising out of catastrophic health episodes.

Source: TH