



One Nation One Ration Card

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This article is based on **“The needs of migrants should be addressed through a concerted national policy”** which was published in The Hindu Business line on 04/05/2020. It talks about the ‘One Nation-One Ration Card’ scheme amid the migrant crisis.

Covid-19 pandemic has created a dilemma of lives vs livelihood, for governments as well as citizens. But in the absence of **basic income** and food security, this dilemma may hurt migrant workers the most and will lead to a migrant crisis.

This migrant crisis will question the development paradigm, as these workers are the wheel of the urban economy in India. Moreover, according to the 2011 census, there are 45 crore internal migrants who accounted for 37% of the population.

In this context, a nationwide **One Nation One Ration Card scheme (ONORC)** must become a reality now. This scheme will be instrumental in the welfare of migrant workers and play a vital role in averting migrant crisis as it existed today.

Rationale of ONORC

Currently, ration cardholders can avail their entitlement of subsidised foodgrains under **the National Food Security Act**, only from the designated Fair price shop (FPS) within the concerned state.

- If a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state.
- However, the migration of the poor from rural areas to urban locations is more commonplace.
- Thus, geographical location is one of the hindrances that migrant workers face in order to claim their quote of grains and subsequently get denied their right to food.
- To address the grim state of food security in the country and combat the problem of hunger, the government has started the ‘One Nation, One Ration Card’ facility.

- Currently, this scheme is applicable in several states and the central government seeks to implement this across the nation by June 2020.

Benefits Emanating from ONORC

- **Interoperability of Ration Card:** Under the ONORC, the beneficiaries from one state can get their share of rations in other states where the ration card was originally issued.
 - After the scheme gets implemented at the national level, any PDS recipient can use their ration cards at any PDS shop across the country.
 - ONORC seeks to provide **universal access to PDS food grains** for migrant workers.
- **Empowering Consumers:** ONORC will also give the beneficiaries the opportunity to opt for the dealer of their choice. If any dealer misbehaves or misallocates, the beneficiary can switch to another FPS shop instantly.
- **Reducing Social Discrimination:** ONORC will be particularly beneficial for women and other disadvantaged groups, given how social identity (caste, class and gender) and other contextual factors (including power relations) provide a strong backdrop in accessing PDS.
- **Achieving SDG:** This will help achieve the target set under SDG 2: Ending hunger by 2030. Also, it will address the poor state of hunger in India, as highlighted by the **Global Hunger Index**, where India has been ranked 102 out of 117 countries.

Associated Challenges

- **Exclusion Error:** The digitisation of this PDS process, through Aadhaar-linked ration cards and smart cards, has been pushed in an effort to reduce leakages. However, there has been a rise of exclusion errors in post-Aadhaar seeding.
 - There are many sections of society who still don't have Aadhar Card, thereby depriving them of food security.
 - The fears of exclusion are also applied for migrant workers, as the fingerprints of people engaged in construction labour and domestic work may change or fade and may not match with the ones entered in Aadhar.
- **Logistical Issues:** An FPS receives the monthly quota of products strictly in accordance with the number of people assigned to it.

The ONORC, when fully operational, would disrupt this practice, as some FPSs may have to cater to more numbers of cards even as others cater to less, owing to migration of people.
- **Lack of Data:** There is no exact data on the mobility of poor households migrating to work, locating intra- and inter-state destinations and sectors employing the workers.

- **Domicile-Based Social Sector Schemes:** Not only PDS, most of the anti-poverty, rural employment, welfare and food security schemes were historically based on domicile-based access and restricted people to access government social security, welfare and food entitlements at their place of origin.

Steps To be Taken

- The Unorganised Sector Social Security Act, 2008, had drawn up a system of documenting informal sector workers through a system of welfare boards.
In order to get credible data regarding the migrant workers, this must be implemented in letter and spirit.
- A dedicated e-commerce platform ONORC may resolve the challenge of logistical issues.
- Social auditing must be made mandatory to measure the performance of ONORC.
- NFSA defines food security as nutritional security.
Therefore, portability of Integrated Child Development Services, Mid-Day Meals, immunisation, health care and other facilities for poor migrant households can't be neglected and should be made portable.
- In the longer run, the PDS system may be replaced by a fool-proof food coupon system or direct benefit transfer, targeting the poor, wherein a Below Poverty Line family can buy rice, pulses, sugar and oil from any Kirana store at the market price, by either paying fully through the coupon or by cash.

Conclusion

The current migrant crisis should be seen as an opportunity to develop a national migration policy addressing the challenges faced by migrant workers productivity, living conditions and social security.

One Nation One Card

-  **One Nation, One FasTag** launched to ensure seamless mobility in the country
-  **One Nation One Mobility Card** for different modes of transport across different States
-  **One Nation, One Ration Card** being launched by the Government
-  **Transparency in trade & commerce** through One Nation, One Tax, that is GST
-  After GST, **incidence of tax has been reduced**

Drishti Mains Question

The nationwide rollout of One Nation One Ration Card scheme will play an instrumental role in the welfare of migrant workers. Analyse.



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<https://youtu.be/1OoFTqwE1bs>

This editorial is based on **“App for one season: on Centre's directive to use Arogya Setu”** which was published The Hindu on May 5th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.