

Welfare Schemes for Migrant Workers in Kerala

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Abstract: Kerala has been a front-runner among the states in India, introducing social security schemes for different vulnerable sections of the society. These schemes, executed mainly through different welfare boards, and have been successful in extending social security to a limited extent to the majority of the vulnerable groups especially migrants. In India, social security is enumerated in the Directive Principles of State Policy and is one of the subjects in the Concurrent List in the Constitution of India, which is federal in nature. One of the major priorities of the state government is extending the coverage of social security net to workers in the unorganized sector (Government of Kerala, 2009). This paper examines key actions by the government to promote the social security of the migrant workers.

Key words: Vulnerable groups, Migrants, Social security schemes,

I. INTRODUCTION

Kerala is the first state in the country to enact a social security outline for the migrant workers. The details of schemes/programmes executed by Government for welfare of unskilled and skilled migrant labourers in the country include such as; Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri SVANIDHI Scheme, Aatm Nirbhar Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, One Nation One Ration Card, financial assistance to building and other construction workers etc.

'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)' is a universal education programme of Government of India to provide free and compulsory education to the children of 6-14 years age group under Right to Education, which is open to the children of inter-state migrant workers as well. Important departments like Ministry of Minority Affairs, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Department of School Education and Literacy provide scholarships to diverse target groups of students including children of Migrant workforces. All these scholarships are synchronized through National Scholarship Portal.

In order to safeguard the concern of the migrant workers, the Central Government had passed the Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979. This Act has now been incorporated in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and the Code commonly known as OSH Code, offers for decent working situations, minimum wages, grievances redressal devices, protection from misuse and exploitation, enrichment of the skills and social security to all group of organised and unorganised workers including migrant workers.

While a comprehensive legislation for migrants' welfare is still in the works, the state government introduced a Awaz health insurance welfare scheme for the migrant workers on 2010. The scheme provides a registered migrant four benefits: accident/ medical care benefits, death benefit, children's education allowance; and termination benefits. If the labourers become incapable of undertaking jobs for more than six months due to accidents or chronic diseases, they are eligible to get a special assistance of up to Rs. 25000. The labourers who have registered in the scheme continuously for three years are also eligible to enjoy a retirement benefit of Rs. 1000 per year subject to a minimum of Rs. 10,000 and a maximum of Rs. 25,000. Financial support to the tune of Rs. 50,000 in the event of death in accident at work place and Rs. 10,000 in the event of natural demise is provided to the dependents of the migrant labourers. An additional assistance of Rs. 5000 to Rs. 15000 (depending on the distance to the state of origin) is also given for transporting the body to their native places. About 5.13 lakh migrant workers have registered for the State government's Awaz health insurance scheme.

In addition, 58,888 migrant workers have registered under the Government's Inter State Migrant Workers welfare scheme (ISMWWS). Under the ISMWWS, a separate fund was generated under the Kerala Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (KBOCWFB) for the welfare of migrant workers. The welfare fund scheme would be scrutinized by an advisory committee chaired by the State Labour Commissioner and comprising representatives of various trade unions. To gain the benefit, a worker needs to register with the scheme. A worker in the age group 18 to 60 years can enroll under the scheme after completion of one month from his/her arrival in the state. A membership card is issued to each migrant worker who gets enrolled paying a renewable annual membership fee of ₹30. Government of Kerala contributes a sum equal to three times of the annual receipts through membership to the fund, and a similar contribution is also earmarked from the KBOCWFB. The scheme mandates every employer in the state who occupy interstate migrant workers to confirm that such workers are registered under the scheme. The Welfare Board, which is funded mainly from the cess on construction activities, will credit twice that amount in her/his account. The government will provide the rest of the money needed for the welfare events. However, the worker is eligible to get only Rs. 100 per day and the maximum limit fixed per occurrence of disease is Rs. 2000. For the well-being of the construction workers there is also a provision for assistance of Rs.3,000 per annum for the education of the children of migrant labourers who are studying beyond Class X in Kerala.

The scheme is executed through the Kerala Construction Workers Welfare Fund Board. In order to bring more migrants under the safety net of the scheme, the Government was now distributing pamphlets and application forms in Hindi.

Implementation of 'Guest App', the mobile application developed by the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Fund Board for online registration of guest workers. The app has the facility to send the soft copy of the identity card to the WhatsApp number of the guest worker. The district executive officers of the welfare fund board and labour department officials visit work sites and the photographs of migrant workers has be taken and distributed ID-cards to guest workers. Labour department has begun the process of issuing licenses to contractors and conducting registration of owners of the institutions, where more than five workers brought by agents or contractors are employed. As per the current situation anyone can declare himself to be an agent, bring migrant workers from outside and exploit them by giving meagre wages, maintained in deplorable conditions and pocketing the rest. In this situation, the Labour Department is executing a system wherein only those with authority and experience can act as agents. This will be in accordance with the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act, 1979.

II. CONCLUSION

Kerala is considered as the gulf to the domestic migrants and home to twenty five lakh migrants, most of whom hail from West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Jharkhand, UP and Bihar. Migrant work forces are one of the most exploited classes of society now a days and it is necessary to protect them. Government introduced various acts and schemes need to be approved, the already implemented schemes are supposed to be revised and amendments are supposed to be made and a check should be done on implementation of such schemes. An extensive campaign about the benefits of the scheme among the migrant workers and the employers should be forced to acknowledge employing migrants. The creativity of the state government to introduce a welfare scheme for migrant workers, in spite of its weaknesses, needs to be appreciated.

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