Social Security Number for Migrants

GS-Paper-3 Economic development (Mains)

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour has recommended that the government introduce a social security number for migrant workers, especially those working in the unorganised sectors which are beyond the purview of the labour laws.

Background: The Ministry of Labour and Employment was unable to give any concrete figures on the number of migrant workers. However, the officials quoted data from the Railway Ministry. About 1.08 crore migrant workers had travelled on Special Shramik express trains initiated by the government to ferry migrant workers.

It was pointed out that students and family members of the workers too used these trains and thus this figure doesn’t accurately record the number of migrant workers.

Social Security Number: Instead of making Aadhar the basis for providing government benefits to migrants, they should be given a social security number which is a more effective way of covering them for insurance, health and other welfare programmes.

A social security number is essential to avert situations like the one during the extended lockdown when several lakh workers had to walk back to their homes as they were shut out of employment overnight. The number will not only help in mapping the number of migrant workers but also their migration patterns.

Suggestions:

Both the State of origin and State where the worker has migrated to should have a record. The migrant workers may or may not have access to the Internet, therefore the smallest arm of administration — the gram sabhas — should be roped in. The same work can be done by municipality workers in the urban areas.

Concerns

It flagged issues related to the social security fund stated under the Social Security Code Bill 2019. There are no specific details in the legislation as to who will contribute to the fund and how it will be utilised.

It also discussed changes in labour laws by some states in the wake of
pandemic and impact on workers.

Most of the beneficiaries under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana were local workers and not migrants.

Social Security Code Bill, 2019

- The central government has been working to concise 44 central labour laws into four broad codes on wages, industrial relations, social security and occupational health & safety.
- The Social Security Code Bill seeks to amend and consolidate nine laws related to social security, including the Employees' Provident Fund Act, 1952, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and the Unorganised Workers’ Social Security Act, 2008. Social security refers to measures to ensure access to health care and provision of income security to workers.
- It proposes setting up a social security fund. This fund will provide welfare benefits such as pension, medical cover, and death and disablement benefits to all workers, including gig workers. ***Gig workers refer to workers outside of the traditional employer-employee relationship (e.g., freelancers).
- The Code provides for the establishment of several bodies to administer the social security schemes notified by the government.
- It provides that every woman shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for, the payment of maternity benefit at the rate of the average daily wage for the period of her actual absence, i.e. the period immediately preceding the day of her delivery, and any period immediately following that day.
- The Code specifies penalties for various offences, such as falsification of reports, punishable with imprisonment of up to six months.