

MIGRANT WORKERS IN INDIA DURING COVID-19

‘ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS’

The Economic Survey of India 2017 estimated that there were 9 million annual Inter State Migrants between 2011 and 2016. According to Census 2011, total number of internal migrants in the country (accounting for inter- and intra-state movement) were 139 million. Current trends have shown that Inter State Migration is mostly from States with rising working-age population (UP, Bihar, MP etc.) to those with declining working-age population (Southern states, Punjab, Maharashtra etc).

According to World Bank, the nationwide lockdown in India which started about more than a month ago has impacted nearly 40 million internal migrants. A large number of stranded population who could not reach their destinations during this lockdown (especially contractual labourers, daily wage workers, rickshaw pullers, construction workers, street vendors, manual scavengers, brick kiln workers, workers working in the small repair shop, roadside eatery workers, security guards) needed immediate assistance in terms of food and shelter. Responding to a petition filed in the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), stated that there are more than 10 lakh migrant workers in relief camps. The government-run shelters have 6.3 lakh and those run by NGOs have over 4 lakh migrant workers. Kerala is reported to run the highest number of relief camps (15,541) for migrant workers, followed by Uttar Pradesh (2,230) and Maharashtra (1135). Currently, there are currently 234-night shelters operational in Delhi, which can house about 9000 homeless people which can barely handle 1% of the estimated homeless population in Delhi. The Civil Society Organizations of the country have come together and provided food, shelter, soaps and medical assistance to such population.

Migrants are generally vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in situations and places where the State and society is unable to protect them, either through lack of capacity, applicable laws or simple neglect. For instance, children may be forced to undergo unsafe migration and work far away from their homes to support their families. In Jaipur alone, 50000 child labourers are currently involved in various industries/workshops, working in harsh conditions and most of the time as bonded labourers. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated their plight, wherein rescue operations have stopped and there is no access to health care facilities and social distancing norms are non-existent.

Govt of India, acknowledging the role of CSOs, created a High -level Committee for Engagement of Private Sector, International Organisations, CSOs/NGOs and other Development Partners, under the Chairmanship of Shri Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog to

review and strategize the engagement and contribution to mitigate the COVID19 outbreak in India. Regular interactions through Video Conferencing are being organized by NITI Aayog. NITI Aayog is regularly communicating with over 90000 CSOs of the country, registered on DARPAN portal and seeking their support. In a major country-wide exercise, Prayas collected reports from CSOs across the country about their ongoing COVID-19 relief interventions, covering all States and UTs, and submitted it to Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog. The Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India, in his recent interaction with CSOs appreciated the work done by CSOs and urged them to continue to do so.

Prayas team is reaching out to more than 4000 people every day by serving hot cooked food. Till date, Prayas has reached out to over 1 lakh people, serving cooked food as well as providing them dry rations and other essential items. Prayas is constantly responding to needs



of vulnerable communities in Delhi, mostly comprising daily wage labourers and migrant workers who have been rendered jobless. The teams are currently supplying rations to communities in Sangam Vihar, Tigri, Anand Parbat, Bawana, Jahangirpuri, Badli, Govindpuri, Kalkaji, Kirti Nagar, Navjeevan Camp, Bengali Camp, RK Puram, Okhla etc. and making them aware about the necessary precautions to be taken while maintaining norms related to social distancing. For over 3 lakh population in B Block, Bawana, there are just 5 Feeding Centres in schools where cooked food is distributed by the area SDM & DC. A large

number of people who worked in the nearby Industrial Area which is completely closed, are left with no job and no wages. Prayas is helping these communities by distributing food packets every day.

Besides serving food and distributing essential items, 38 Children Homes/ Shelters/ Observation Home/ Special Training Centres/ Railway Shelters/ Open Shelters run by Prayas are functional and catering to the needs of children and vulnerable sections of the



population. The Childline 1098 (24×7) Team of Prayas functional at six locations, namely, New Delhi Railway Station, Jahangirpuri, Bawana (Delhi), Raxual and Samastipur (Bihar) and Andaman & Nicobar Islands is supporting the distressed children during the ongoing crisis of COVID-19 and lockdown. The Prayas Health Services functioning in Arunachal Pradesh, Nutritional Resource Centre in Supaul and Prayas Health Services in Delhi are working 24 hours in strengthening the community surveillance process (early identification and reporting) and also building community linkage with the public health services on preparedness, prevention and control (home quarantine, home care, stigma and discrimination) through its Medical Doctors, Nurses, and Para Medical Staff. The Prayas Janhit Swasthya Seva Kendra, functioning under the aegis of Prayas Health Services has set up 'Quarantine Facility' for the people suspected of COVID-19 virus. The team of 40 health professionals is working round the clock to serve the population of 4000 living in 30 remote villages of Arunachal Pradesh.



TACKLING THE 'MIGRANT' CRISIS:

- There are large no of institutions and facilities in existence and functional across the country. For example, there are 9000 homes/shelters, majority run by NGOs alongside the Child helplines (1098) which cater to the requirements of nearly 3 lakh homeless, destitute and other children in extremely difficult circumstances. Similar institutions are in existence for elders, disabled, women and girls in crisis, whose services could also be taken. These institutions could become the nodal points for multiple types of services including non-institutional care in the communities. They could be specially authorized to undertake COVID 19 related services.
- The skill development related community-based organisations and training providers are available for economic rehabilitation services during this crisis. With financial incentives, home based, micro/small-scale cottage industries and livelihood activities could be supported by CSOs without causing health hazards so that the migrants returning back home could have opportunities for sustaining their livelihoods.
- Since a majority of the migrant workers are involved in informal sector (which accounts for 93% of India's workforce), tracing them in their home or destination states is a gigantic task for delivery of services. CSOs could assist the government and PRIs in tracking each and every migrant and ensuring that essential services are delivered.
- Community based CSOs can help reducing the social stigma related to COVID-19. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has repeatedly stressed on the fact that there is a need to differentiate between the disease and the victims and CSOs could be effective in communicating such ideas to the people.
- Organizations can provide psychological and counselling support to workers who are residing in quarantine centres or those who have been forced to stay in shelter homes.
- It is estimated that there are 20 million domestic workers in the country, most of whom have been rendered jobless during the lockdown. These workers, who are mostly migrants from UP, Bihar and Jharkhand, are entirely dependent on their monthly 'cash' incomes and their jobs need to be restored as early as possible.