'Migrants need social security numbers'

Parliamentary panel seeks registration at the gram sabha level rather than through the Internet

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

The panel, headed by Biju Janata Dal leader Bhartruhari Mahtab, has suggested that such a number is essential to avert situations such as the one at the beginning of the lockdown when several lakh workers had to walk back to their villages from big cities as they were shut out of employment overnight.

At a meeting of the panel held on Monday, Labour Secretary Heeralal Samariya revealed that the government was planning to set up a website to register migrant workers. Mr. Samariya further said a worker's Aadhaar would be used for the registration.

"The members felt that Aadhaar alone doesn't work. A social security number will help in mapping the number of migrant workers and their migration patterns," said one of the committee members who attended the meeting.

No concrete figures

The Labour Ministry was unable to give any concrete figures on the number of migrant workers. Quoting the Railway Ministry, officials said 1.08 crore migrant workers had travelled on Shramik Special trains started by the government to ferry migrant workers.

One of the panel members, according to sources, pointed out that students and family members of the workers too used these trains and thus the figure doesn't accurate represent the number of migrant workers. The panel has recommended that both the State of origin and State where the worker has migrated to should be recorded. It also pointed out that the government's Social Security Code Bill, 2019, which is under the committee's consideration, provides for a social security fund. But there are no specific details in the legislation as to who would contribute to the fund and how it would be utilised.

"The migrant workers may or may not have access to the Internet, which is why we suggested that the smallest arm of administration – the gram sabhas – should be roped in. The same work can be done by municipality workers in urban areas," another member said.

Survival needs: In this photo dated May 31, migrant workers travelling by a 'Shramik Special' train queue up for water at Vijayawada. ▪K.V.S. GIRI