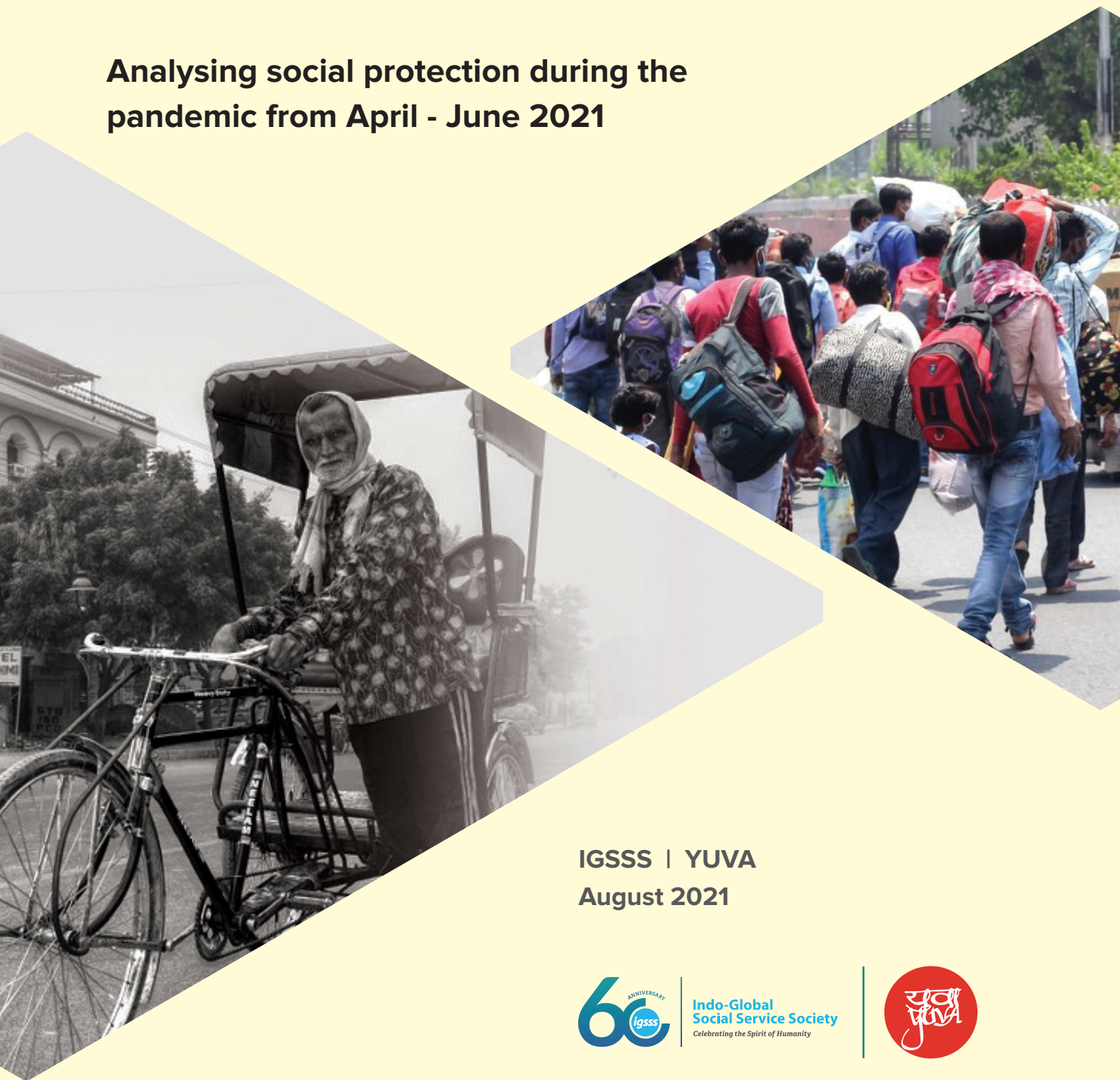


Seeking Justice for Informal Workers During the COVID-19 Second Wave

Analysing social protection during the pandemic from April - June 2021



IGSSS | YUVA
August 2021



Indo-Global
Social Service Society
Celebrating the Spirit of Humanity



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In solidarity

IGSSS and YUVA



Abbreviations

AB-PMJAY	Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
BMC	Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation
BOCW	Building and Other Construction Workers
BOCW-WB	Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CMIE	Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DBT	Direct Benefit Transfer
DUSIB	Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Service
IGSSS	Indo-Global Social Service Society
ILO	International Labour Organization
INR	Indian Rupee
LOR	Letter of Recommendation
NDUW	National Database for Unorganised Workers
NFSA	National Food Security Act

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
NULM (SUH)	National Urban Livelihoods Mission—Shelters for Urban Homeless
PDS	Public Distribution System
PM SVANidhi	Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor’s AtmaNirbhar Nidhi
PMGKAY	Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana
PMSMA	Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan
PMSSY	Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
PWM	Plastic Waste Management
RECS Act 1996	Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service Act 1996
RWA	Resident Welfare Associations
SECC	Socio-Economic and Caste Census
SHG	Self-Help Group
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SWM	Solid Waste Management
TVC	Town Vending Committee
ULB	Urban Local Body
YUVA	Youth For Unity And Voluntary Action

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Executive Summary

This report analyses the social protection extended by state governments to urban informal workers during the second wave of the pandemic in India. These include orders and schemes announced between 1 April 2021 to 10 June 2021—the peak of the second wave. The workers focussed on are construction workers, domestic workers, street vendors and waste-pickers—accounting for the highest number of workers within the urban informal economy. This analysis is based on orders and schemes announced by 10 states (Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh). The report also provides an analysis of important initiatives by states (other than the 10 identified) and the central government that are important relief and social protection measures. These relief measures at the central and state level broadly cover the following three categories of social protection—food security, livelihood security (cash transfers, loans, essential service declarations, pensions) and health and safety.

The findings highlight that during the second wave, a larger number of state governments provided relief to more types of informal workers. This is an important recognition of the workers' vulnerabilities during a crisis. What emerges clearly is that the legal recognition of different worker groups is a necessary precursor for that group to be included in government relief programmes. There remains, however, a severe lacunae in ensuring relief and social protection for the most vulnerable among these workers. A limitation of this report is that it does not highlight issues in accessing this relief, the last mile infrastructure needed to deliver relief.

The summary of findings is as follows:

Construction workers:

As in 2020, direct cash transfers have been a key relief measure adopted by several states to provide immediate assistance during the 2021 lockdowns. Of the 10 states, 5 states provided cash transfers between INR 1,000–INR 5,000 for registered construction workers. Delhi (INR 5,000), Assam (INR 2,000), Maharashtra (INR 1,500), Madhya Pradesh (INR 1,500) and Uttar Pradesh (INR 1,000) extended cash relief. The Delhi government also announced support up to INR 10,000 for COVID-19 treatment and medical care of registered construction workers and families. With registration continuing to be the most important precursor to access social protection, 3 out of the 10 states (Assam, Gujarat and Odisha) ordered new registration drives for construction workers during the second wave of the pandemic through their respective Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards. Construction activities were allowed by Gujarat, Delhi and Maharashtra. No states mentioned

construction workers in the vaccination priority lists.

Domestic workers:

Among the 10 states, only the Maharashtra government released an order for direct cash transfer of INR 1,500 to registered domestic workers. The central government had released an order to conduct an All-India Survey on Domestic Workers. According to the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the labour bureau has launched the study and aims to work on the ground to release results by November 2021. Although there was no such announcement on listing domestic workers under essential services, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) allowed domestic workers to work and travel during the lockdown. Only the Madhya Pradesh Government prioritised domestic workers for vaccination.

Street vendors:

Only 4 states—Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh—announced cash transfer schemes for street vendors, ranging from INR 3,000 (Odisha) to INR 1,500 (Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra) to INR 1,000 (Madhya Pradesh). These were for registered street vendors, or those who were beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) credit scheme announced in 2020. An ongoing scheme for vendors, Jagan Thodu of the Andhra Pradesh government, announced as a welfare measure in 2019 promising INR 10,000 interest free loans to all street vendors, was renewed during the second wave of the pandemic via a government circular.

Registrations linked to the survey process remain important to access benefits. Only two state governments initiated surveys and registration drives for vendors during the second wave by opening new registration portals (Gujarat) and releasing lists of registered vendors (Chhattisgarh). Only the Gujarat and Assam governments released circulars allowing street vendors to operate freely without police harassment. The Assam government announced the setup of compulsory sanitisation points in all its local and weekly markets. Only 2 states (Odisha and Chhattisgarh) mentioned street vendors in their priority lists to receive vaccination.

Waste pickers:

It is a matter of concern that neither central or state governments considered providing any relief to waste pickers. There is only one circular passed by the central government which says a registration drive must be launched to ensure coverage of all eligible identified persons from the most vulnerable and economically weaker sections of the population, including waste pickers under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Other informal workers and marginalised identities:

This study attempts to record some practices of state governments (other than the 10 primarily considered states) across the country who have provided relief to informal sector workers. It was found that some states announced meaningful relief measures for distinct groups like beedi workers,

rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, tea garden workers, sex workers, dock workers, amongst many others. Circulars/orders released for marginalised identities like the homeless, transgender communities, women, children, tribal groups and people with disabilities from states (apart from the 10) have also been recorded. It was found that most state governments aim to safeguard children who have been affected/orphaned by COVID-19. Education fees assistance and monthly allowances have been uniformly announced across most states for COVID orphans. Groups like persons with disabilities, tribal groups, and the homeless have been afforded vaccination priority by states like Chhattisgarh and Odisha. Assam and Chhattisgarh also provided transgender persons a priority status in vaccination while the Centre announced INR 1,500 cash transfer to registered transgender persons.

Recommendations to Ensure a Social Protection System for Urban Informal Workers:

Recommendations are provided for each sector, based on informal sector experts, existing studies, and demands from the informal workers themselves. The recommendations are based on the overall analysis of the study and the broad themes that have emerged, i.e., Ensuring Livelihood Protection, Food Security, and Health and Safety.

Chapter 1

Introduction



Relief as Social Protection for Urban Informal Workers

During the nationwide lockdown in 2020, the central government announced a series of relief measures, packaged collectively as the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan. It included the expansion of existing social protection schemes (such as the Public Distribution System [PDS]) and the announcement of a few relief measures—cash transfers for women, wage support for construction workers and loans for street vendors. Thereafter, some state governments implemented their own social protection schemes and issued circulars to ensure relief for workers. The access to many of these schemes were limited and orders remained on paper. The extreme vulnerability of urban informal workers was highlighted like never before. Since the initial few months of the pandemic, governments have had time to develop more robust and responsive social protection mechanisms for informal workers in light of the ongoing pandemic and their heightened vulnerability in times of crisis.

While the second wave of the pandemic has impacted India differently, with the health crisis reaching a peak, the humanitarian crisis has loomed large. Workers and their families were barely recovering from the nationwide lockdown when the second wave hit. The PDS has been expanded across the country once again. However, for urban informal workers there has been no relief scheme announced by the central government this year. This time, the responsibility to decide lockdowns and social protection was left to state governments. Most matters relating to social protection are in the concurrent domain of centre, states, and local governments. The need for social protection floors and social protection for informal workers has been highlighted through the pandemic and it is imperative that various levels of governance respond to this. Social protection is broadly understood as measures to reduce poverty and vulnerability by reducing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to manage those risks, including those associated with unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability, and old age (Narayan, 2019).

Social protection floors are an integrated set of social policies designed to guarantee income security and access to essential social services for all, paying particular attention to vulnerable groups and protecting and empowering people across the life cycle (ILO, 2011). According to the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, only about 6 per cent of workers in the unorganised sector had any social security/social assistance to cope with contingent risks. The high

levels of deprivation/vulnerability and the low (and declining) coverage of social security provide a strong rationale for adequate and effective social protection, and the creation of a social protection floor, along with other measures to improve the quality of employment (ILO, n.d.).

For urban informal workers, who are reliant on daily wages, social protection during the pandemic can take the form of relief measures such as crisis cash transfers, one time cash transfers, income support, interest-free loans, health insurance, pensions for older workers among others. This is over and above legal recognition and social security, that is their right. Social protection integrates a basket of initiatives that ensure socio-economic security and legal recognition.

For governments, social protection is an investment to ensure poverty reduction. While economic growth can lift people out of poverty, it cannot ensure escape from vulnerability to crises (Ahmad, 2019) There are multiple ways in which the social protection system is being strengthened. The Supreme Court order on 29 June 2021 (Rajagopal, 2021) gives some direction on this. The Supreme Court had taken suo moto cognisance of the plight of migrant workers in 2020. On 29 June 2021, among other directives, the Supreme Court ruled that the registration of workers must be completed by states by 31 December 2021 and that the National Database for Unorganised Workers (NDUW Project) must commence by 31 July 2021. This is a crucial first step to ensure registration of the vast majority of informal workers who remain unregistered and bereft of social protection. Relief measures too are a step in the right direction. In the long run however, a robust social protection system that protects all informal workers and their families is what is needed.

About the Report

This study is a continuation of a study published by Indo Global Social Service Society in May 2020, during India's first pandemic induced lockdown (IGSSS, 2020). The study analysed the government response to the crisis of the informal sector workforce in 2020. The 2020 analysis highlighted many welfare measures announced at the national level, such as the extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), Jan Dhan Yojana, promises to speeden up the One Nation, One Ration Card scheme, PM SVANidhi credit scheme among others. State governments announced limited measures for informal sector workers (restricted to cash transfers, rations and some social security measures) whose access to relief was conditional upon their prior registration. Millions of other workers like domestic workers, waste pickers, unregistered street vendors, rickshaw pullers, etc. were excluded, even though their financial suffering was evident (IGSSS, 2020).

In 2020, YUVA conducted an extensive research towards understanding access to relief and social protection among the urban poor in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region during the first wave of the pandemic. The study looked into issues of access and advocated for strong social protection for the urban poor during a crisis. It revealed grave issues regarding low access to entitlements,

financial schemes and health insurance. Startling figures were highlighted, such as 82 per cent of workers having ration cards but only 45 per cent of them being registered in the local metropolitan region. Almost 60 per cent of all respondents were daily wage earners who were left without jobs for 4 months during the pandemic. Only 29 per cent of registered construction workers received compensation from the Building and Other Construction Worker (BoCW) boards, let alone the unregistered workers (YUVA, 2020).

In a continuous study by Action Aid, almost 24 per cent respondents reported having zero wages in the unlock phase, and close to 50 per cent said their monthly wages were less than INR 5,000. Additionally, over 64 per cent respondents said that they had not received the wages due to them at the time of the lockdown (ActionAid, 2021). A study in January 2021 tracking 2,800 unemployed migrants since April 2020 titled *How Robust is the Recovery?* Azim Premji University revealed that 20 per cent of the migrant workers were still unemployed, indicating that the levels of employment have not reached pre-COVID levels yet (Abraham, Kesar, Basole (2021).

This report seeks to add to the existing literature on this topic and aims to connect the dots between the research being conducted on the ground to map the harsh realities of the workers and the subsequent reactions of the state and national governments through programmes, schemes and orders. It focuses on social protection provided during the second wave of the pandemic in India. These include one-time relief schemes and orders extended by states to the highest employing sectors in urban India (construction work, domestic work, street vending, waste picking) and important schemes initiated by states for various kinds of informal workers.

Choice of Worker Groups

Each of the 4 worker's groups this report focuses on are unique in terms of what legal recognition and resultant social protection and relief they were provided. Construction workers have a national law—the Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) (RECS) Act 1996—that brings them within the ambit of social security. The BOCW Act protects the rights and safety of workers, looking into aspects such as health, education and employment for the welfare of construction workers across the country.

Street vendors too, have a central law, i.e., the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014, with states having formulated rules and some local governments having formulated schemes for implementation. The Street Vendors Act protects the right to a dignified livelihood (YUVA and NHF, 2019).

While there is no central law that protects domestic workers, some states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha and Rajasthan) have introduced minimum

wages for domestic workers. Additionally, states like Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have also constituted welfare boards for domestic workers and by registering with these boards the workers can avail welfare benefits. Under the current legislative framework, domestic workers in India only find a passing mention under the definition of a ‘wage worker’ in the Social Security Code 2020, which mandates the setting up of state Welfare Boards so that registered workers can avail benefits of schemes notified by the government (YUVA, 2019).

The Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules 2016 and the Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules 2016, intend to acknowledge ‘waste pickers and other informal waste workers’ by defining them and their role in recycling but the state of registration and integration of waste pickers is at a very preliminary stage of implementation (IGSSS and AIW, 2019). Currently, the delay in the notification of the 4 Labour Codes has left informal workers rights in a state of limbo.

In this context, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- To understand central and state government responsiveness to the urban informal sector workers during the second wave of the pandemic
- To provide recommendations building on important social protection practices being implemented

Methodology

This report has been compiled by collating data on all government advisories, circulars and orders related to the relief measures announced for urban informal sector workers in 10 Indian states during the localised lockdowns caused due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The states include:

1. Andhra Pradesh
2. Assam
3. Bihar
4. Chhattisgarh
5. Delhi
6. Jharkhand
7. Madhya Pradesh
8. Maharashtra
9. Odisha
10. Uttar Pradesh

The states chosen have the highest population of urban informal workers in the country, owing to the presence of metropolitan cities and the largest intake of migrant workers. More than 70 per cent of all

migrant workers work in the states that have been considered (Bloomberg, 2020). These 10 states are also where both IGSSS and YUVA have a presence.

The relief measures and orders analysed are time-specific. They were announced between 1 April 2021 to 10 June 2021. This is the period that saw a rapid rise in cases and the peak of the second wave of the pandemic. The rapid growth in cases then saw a sharp decline in the first week of June, which saw India consistently reporting less than a lakh cases per day (Bhatnagar, 2021). This time period coincided with harsher lockdowns, severe illness and the slowdown of business. This was the time when informal sector workers required support from the government.

Since there is no official website that provides a compiled list of all the relevant government orders from every department, it was compiled from multiple government websites, official Twitter accounts of government officials and ministers, private websites and news articles, which documented the same. This was then double checked with people working in different states.

A matrix has been prepared, taking into account central government orders and state government orders from 10 states for a specific worker's group. After compiling government orders on the basis of the sector, the orders were further classified into social protection categories—food security, livelihood security, and health and safety measures. The matrix has been colour coded as red (no relevant announcements), yellow (general relief measures announced which may or may not help the workers in question) and green (relief measures announced expressly for the workers group in question).

Social Protection Category	Sub-category
Food Security	PDS provisions and cooked meals
Livelihood Security	Cash transfers, pensions, essential services declarations, grievance redressal mechanisms
Health and Safety Measures	Health insurance, COVID specific orders such as provision of masks, sanitation kits and priority in vaccination drives.

Table 1.1 Description for social protection category and sub-category

Key

No relevant orders released for worker group	General orders released which may or may not benefit worker group	Relief measures announced for specific worker groups in question
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The report also focuses on compiling important relief-based social protection measures through government orders and circulars. This is not a comprehensive list, as all the states and all the relevant social protection measures are not recorded. However, a significant amount of detail regarding progressive and far reaching orders have been included. They have been divided into 3 categories

- i. Government orders benefitting worker groups other than the 4 focussed on in the study
- ii. Government orders from states other than the 10 focussed on in the study
- iii. Government orders benefitting marginalised identities

Limitations

- **Limited states considered:** This report has included an analysis of relief based social protection in 10 out of 28 states and union territories of India for its analysis. The pandemic has had devastating impacts across India, in some places more than in others. The reason for no considering all the states/union territories is due to time and resource constraints.
- **Limited timeframe:** A limited timeframe, i.e., from 1 April to 10 June 2021 has been considered for recording and analysing the central and state government responses. Since this period can be categorised as the peak of the second wave of the COVID pandemic, this period saw the harshest lockdowns, drying up of the livelihood options for the target population and extreme financial distress, along with medical problems. The actions of the state, local and central governments needed to be quick in this period, not only considering the public health crisis but the impoverishment of the urban poor in the informal sector too at this time. A sharp rise in the nationwide COVID cases after 1 April signals the onset and a similarly precipitous fall in the cases after 10 June signified the end of the second wave as the localised lockdowns were slowly lifted in most states.
- **Limited livelihoods chosen:** The selected livelihood groups in the study are not representative of the entire informal sector or the complexities within it.
- **Limited information as all circulars are not well publicised:** The analysis does not include the following orders:
 - i. Orders from Urban Local Bodies such as municipalities or other local authorities
 - ii. Orders not on the public domain
 - iii. Orders from the judiciary have not been recorded unless orders from judiciaries have been implemented or announced by the respective governments

General Relief Measures Announced by Central and State Governments



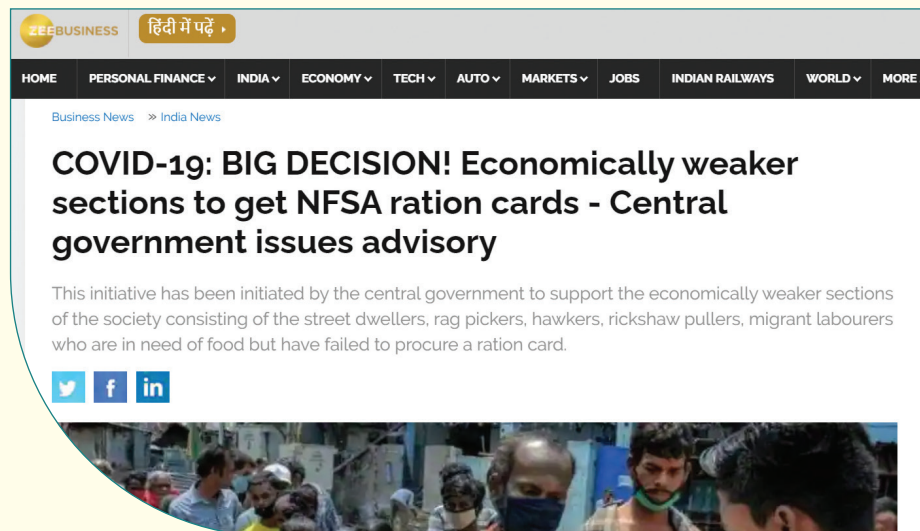
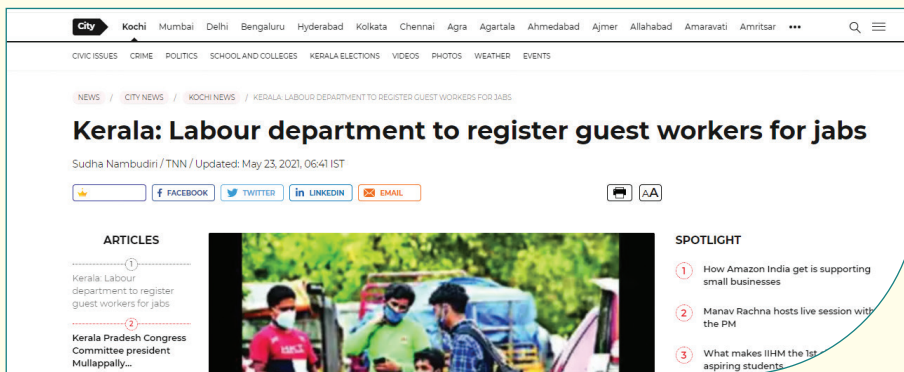
During the second wave, social protection measures announced aimed to benefit the poor at large, majority of whom work in the informal sector. These orders are not specific to the workers' groups considered, however they benefit them as they are targeted towards the urban poor. These common measures can be categorised as follows:

1. Food Security
2. Livelihood Security
3. Health and Safety Measures

Category	Sub Category	Orders and Schemes by the Central and State Governments
Food Security	Dry ration	Expanding PMGKAY from May-November 2021 - 5 kg food grains/person/month free to 81.35 crore beneficiaries under NFSA
		Supreme Court order (29 June 2021) directs states not yet implementing One Nation One Ration Card scheme to implement it no later than 31 July 2021
		National order to distribute PDS ration; State circulars only by Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh governments
		Distribution to 'non PDS ration beneficiaries' by Delhi and Maharashtra government
		Registration drives for PDS enrollment by the Assam government
	Cooked food	Supreme Court order (29 June 2021) directs states to ensure cooked food for migrant workers via community kitchens in prominent places till the pandemic ends
		Community kitchens established by Bihar government
		Dal Bhaat Kendra by the Jharkhand government
		Shiv Bhojan Thali Scheme by Maharashtra government
	Cash transfers	
Livelihood Protection	Livelihood registration	Gujarat government passes a circular to set up a portal app to facilitate unorganised workers' registration to access entitlements
	Pension	Odisha government orders payment to beneficiaries of the Madhu Babu Pension scheme
		Maharashtra government orders payment of advance to beneficiaries of the national pension scheme and state assistance schemes
	Grievances	Central government passes circular to set up 20 control rooms for workers to address their grievances
	Others	

Health and Safety	Health Insurance	Maharashtra government implements the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojana to provide cashless medical treatment for ration card holders who are hospitalised COVID patients. Not all hospitals in Maharashtra are compelled to get enrolled in this insurance scheme though
	Covid-19 testing, check-ups, SOPs, safety kits	Andhra Pradesh government implements Aarogyashri Scheme for free medical treatment of COVID and post-COVID complications among families with annual income less than INR 5 lakh
	Vaccination	Central government offers free vaccinations via public hospitals and health dispensaries to all above 18 years.

Table 1.2 General Relief Measures Announced by Central and State Governments



FOOD SECURITY

Foodgrains for the poor were announced by almost all states to beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System (PDS). The PMGKAY scheme was reintroduced from May to November 2021, ensuring free-of-cost food grains at 5 kg per person per month to 81.35 crore beneficiaries covered under National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA).

The Supreme Court order led to the Department of Food and Public Distribution issuing an advisory to all states and union territories, asking them to launch a registration drive for marginalised sections such as rag pickers, street vendors and others to get NFSA ration cards and to avail much needed foodgrain (Singh, 3 June 2021). Only the Delhi government specifically announced ration for all those

without ration cards after the intervention of the Delhi High Court. The Assam government announced a registration drive and managed to add thousands of families to the PDS rolls, thereby expanding benefits (Singh, 31 May 2021).

Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar (Thakur, 2021) and Jharkhand (Prabhat Khabar, 2021) organised low cost or free meals through canteens and community kitchens for workers, benefitting numerous persons during the pandemic.

The central government announced cash transfers for all ration card holders or PDS beneficiaries in the union territories of Chandigarh, Puducherry and urban areas of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. This is implemented as per provisions of the Cash Transfer of Food Subsidy Rules, 2015, under NFSA. In these union territories, NFSA is being implemented in cash transfer mode, under which the cash equivalent of subsidy is being transferred directly into the bank accounts of eligible households to enable them to purchase foodgrains from the open market (NFSA, 2013).

LIVELIHOOD PROTECTION

Grievance Redressal: 20 control rooms were set up by the Ministry of Labour and Employment across the country to receive and address the grievances of workers regarding wages, etc. during the national lockdown. As per the Ministry, lakhs of workers used these grievance cells in 2020 and were assisted. The control rooms could be contacted via phone, WhatsApp or email. The grievance cells were re-established in April 2021, are being monitored by central officials and have been instructed to assist the aggrieved workers to the maximum extent possible and ensure timely delivery of relief to the needy (PTI, 2021).

Pension Advance: In June 2021, the Odisha government ordered officials to disburse pension amounts for 3 months in advance to all the beneficiaries, keeping in mind the prevailing situation of COVID-19 (Sharma, 2021). The Maharashtra government also announced an advance of INR 2,000 for all National Pension Scheme beneficiaries (Lokmat, 2021)

HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES

Health Insurance: The Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh governments released circulars extending their existing health insurance schemes. The Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojana (Maharashtra government) scheme provides cashless medical treatment for ration card holders who are hospitalised COVID patients. Not all hospitals in Maharashtra are compelled to get enrolled in this insurance scheme though. There have been almost 5 lakh beneficiaries of this scheme since the start of the pandemic in many districts of the state (Thevar, 2021).

Under the Aarogyaashree health insurance scheme, free medical treatment of COVID and post-

COVID complications to all families whose annual income is less than 5 lakh in the state is being provided by the Andhra Pradesh government. These schemes may benefit informal sector workers if their registration in said schemes is assured by the government. However, India still has one-of-the highest level of out-of-pocket expenditures contributing directly to the high incidence of catastrophic expenditures and poverty, according to the Economic Survey (The Hindu, 29 Jan 2021)

The Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) health insurance scheme (5 lakh annual coverage for 40 per cent of the poorest) is an important scheme but its integration with other state and central schemes is necessary. There have been reports of the PMJAY scheme being severely underused since the beginning of the pandemic due to infrastructural shortages and other issues (Kumar et al., 2020). Private healthcare is also much more widespread in India. State scheme coverage in private institutions is also low, for example, only around 8,200 private hospitals are registered under the AB-PMJAY scheme out of the almost 43,000 private hospitals in India, which is less than 20 per cent.

Vaccinations: The central government began registration of vaccination for those above the age of 18 years on the CoWin platform and at government COVID vaccination centres in May 2021. As per revised guidelines (June 2021), the Central government will procure vaccines and provide them to all states free of cost. Private hospitals can charge INR 150 for the vaccine. Vaccination drives for the age group 18–44 yrs had also been initiated by Assam, Delhi (Livemint, 2021), Gujarat, Jharkhand (The Indian Express, 2021), Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh (Livemint, 2021) and Odisha (Debabrata, 2021) in the months of May and June 2021.

Almost all states have released priority lists for the vaccines, especially seeing the vaccine shortage in the past months. Most priority lists rightly include patients who are more medically vulnerable, but they also include professional groups such as journalists, lawyers and so on. Informal sector workers, given the nature of their jobs and their frequent rural-urban migration patterns, are susceptible to the virus. States like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal have prioritised the informal sector workforce for vaccination. This has been discussed in the following chapters.

The image is a screenshot of a news article from a website. The main headline is "Aahar centres keep food flowing for poor in Bhubaneswar". Below the headline, it says "Minati Singha / TNN / May 11, 2021, 14:10 IST". There are social media sharing buttons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email. Below the headline, there is a large photograph showing a group of people, including children, at an outdoor food distribution center. To the left of the photo is a list of "ARTICLES" with three items: "Aahar centres keep food flowing for poor in Bhubaneswar", "Odisha government issues health advisory for old-age homes", and "LIVA Miss Diva India 2021 goes digital". To the right of the photo is a "SPOTLIGHT" section with three items: "How Amazon India get is supporting small businesses", "Manav Rachna hosts live session w the PM", and "What makes IIMM the 1st cho aspiring students". At the bottom right, there is a "CORONAVIRUS" section.



Chapter 2

Construction Workers

Overview

The construction sector is one of the largest employment providing sectors, plagued with issues of improper working conditions and the lack of a social safety net, even though as per 2017 government data the construction sector contributes to 9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) employing around 44 million workers (Nigam, 2021). To tackle exploitation at the workplace and help formalise this sector, two central Acts were introduced in 1996, i.e., the Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act and the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess Act. Despite these provisions, migrant labourers' journeys back to their homes at the onset of the pandemic stood testimony to the insecurity and transient nature of their jobs (Banerjee, 2020). The pandemic has marginalised them to an extent where most are not able to manage two meals a day and have accumulated debt to carry out daily life activities.

Keeping in mind the welfare of the construction workers, on 25 March 2020 when the lockdown began, all state governments/union territories announced that they would transfer funds in the accounts of construction workers through the direct benefit transfer (DBT) mode from the cess fund collected by the Labour Welfare Boards under the BOCW Cess Act (IGSSS, 2020). However, there were issues of it not being enough and then the second wave further worsened the situation. In 2020, only 10 out of 30 states specifically announced cash transfers for construction workers for a month. However, registration as an issue remained a constraint in accessing the funds across states. During the initial days of the second wave, states like Maharashtra (Mahamulkar, 2021), Delhi and Karnataka ordered construction work to carry on as it had been (on sites which had accommodation facilities for workers) creating a degree of livelihood security that the first lockdowns did not provide.

levels of deprivation/vulnerability and the low (and declining) coverage of social security provide a strong rationale for adequate and effective social protection, and the creation of a social protection

State	Food Security		Livelihood protection						Health and Safety		
	Cooked food	Dry ration	Livelihood registration initiated	Cash transfer	Pension	Essential service declaration	Legal action on grievances	Other	COVID testing, safety SOP, PPE provision, health checkups,	Vaccination	Health insurance
Central											
Andhra Pradesh											
Assam						Construction activities allowed					
Bihar											
Chhattisgarh											
Delhi		Free food-grains		INR 5,000 to registered RT-PCR positive		Factories and construction activities allowed					
Gujarat			Portal, app launched for registration			Construction activities allowed					
Jharkhand											
Madhya Pradesh				INR 1,000 per worker							
Maharashtra	Shiv Bhojan Canteens offer free food	Ration for construction workers	Registration to resume	DBT of INR 1,500 to registered workers		Construction activities allowed	Toll free number set up for construction workers				
Odisha			Registration under BOCW Board								
Uttar Pradesh				INR 1,000 to informal-workers							

Table 2.1 Matrix of relief-based social protection for Construction Workers

Key

No relevant orders released for worker group	General orders released which may or may not benefit worker group	Relief measures announced for specific worker groups in question
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Analysis

FOOD SECURITY

Dry Rations

Out of the 11 state orders related to the second COVID wave, it is seen that all have focused either on providing dry rations up to 5 kg or cooked free meals to construction workers or migrant labourers.

Cooked Food

Odisha's Aahar centres are providing subsidised meals at INR 5 to many migrants and other workers (Singha, 2021). Chhattisgarh has initiated free ration for children in schools, apart from ration to PDS families. Delhi (Government of Delhi, 5 May 2021) too followed a similar trend along with extending ration to non-card holders as well (Dey, 2021). States such as Bihar, Jharkhand and Maharashtra have been proactively providing cooked meals. Maharashtra is providing midday and evening meals through Shiv Bhojan Canteens, Bihar is providing meals to poor families until 8 June and Jharkhand is extending the provision through dal bhaat kendras.

LIVELIHOOD PROTECTION

Social security is a broad category, including emergency cash transfers, livelihood security (essential service declaration), pension scheme beneficiaries, specific legal recourse and other such services. The informal sector is insecure in their livelihoods, suffering from the twin dangers of low earnings and insecurity of jobs.

Livelihood Registration

Few states have made sure to register their construction workers so that they can claim entitlements. Assam is working towards the registration of 5 lakh card holders. Gujarat has launched a portal and mobile app to facilitate the registration of construction and unorganised sector workers to avail smart cards and access their entitlements. The Odisha government too has issued orders to register migrant workers under the Construction Workers Welfare board.

Other states have not expressly released orders to enhance the functioning of their respective Building and Other Construction Workers (BoCW) boards to facilitate the registration of workers and make sure they are provided some sort of safety net.

Cash Transfers

As in 2020, direct benefit transfers have been a key relief measure adopted by several states in lieu of providing immediate assistance during the lockdown. Delhi has been leading in providing maximum assistance upto INR 5,000 to registered construction worker families and has also announced support upto INR 10,000 for COVID treatment and medical care of registered workers

and families (The New Indian Express, 5 May 2021). Assam has announced special assistance of INR 2,000 to poor families during the lockdown. The Maharashtra government has announced INR 1,500 while the Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh governments have announced INR 1,000.

Pensions and Essential Service Declaration

To provide a continuous source of livelihood, construction activities were allowed by Gujarat in 29 cities post lockdown followed by Delhi (Jain, 2021) and Maharashtra. A toll free number has been initiated by Maharashtra to look into the grievances of construction workers. The Odisha government ordered payment of Madhu Babu Pension Scheme for the elderly, persons with disabilities (PwD) and others for 3 months as a step to provide some relief.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Andhra Pradesh flagship scheme Aarogyashri is providing free medical treatment of COVID and post COVID complications to all families whose annual income is less than INR 5 lakh in the state, which may or may not benefit families of construction workers depending on their registration for this scheme and previous involvement as a beneficiary from the scheme. However, none of the states have indicated construction workers in the priority lists despite advocating for opening up of construction sites as a livelihood security measure, putting them at much higher health risk.



Chapter 3

Domestic Workers

Overview

The two waves of the pandemic, multiple lockdowns and absence of legal measures had a combined effect where many livelihoods in the informal sector have been consumed. Among those hardest hit are domestic workers, a substantial number of them being women who have lost their livelihoods and income (Panicker, 2021). In India, despite deliberation and formulation of various draft bills by eminent individuals and movements, the State has paid little attention to draft a National Law or Policy for Domestic Workers (YUVA, 2019). The inadequacy of legal or regulatory regimes that have the potential to protect the worker in the domestic work sector was exposed when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country. Since domestic workers are not considered significant enough to have adequate redressal mechanisms in law or policy, the sector is largely missing from the State's purview of social protection.

In April 2020, only the Meghalaya government announced that employers should refrain from evicting live-in domestic workers during lockdown. It further added that the violation will result in penal action. Other than this order, no announcement was made for protecting the lives and livelihood of domestic workers (IGSSS, 2020). The following matrix captures the relief provisions for domestic workers announced by the central and state government during the second wave peak of COVID-19 (April–June 2021) (Bhattacharya, 2021).

State	Food Security		Livelihood protection						Health and Safety		
	Cooked food	Dry ration	Livelihood registration initiated	Cash transfer	Pension	Essential service declaration	Legal action on grievances	Other	COVID testing, safety SOP, PPE provision, health checkups,	Vaccination	Health insurance
Central			Survey launched								
Andhra Pradesh											
Assam											
Bihar											
Chhattisgarh											
Delhi		Ration for PDS and non-PDS									
Gujarat											
Jharkhand											
Madhya Pradesh									Vaccination priority for domestic workers		
Maharashtra				DBT of INR 1,500 to domestic workers							
Odisha											
Uttar Pradesh											

Table 3.1 Matrix of relief-based social protection for domestic workers

Key

No relevant orders released for worker group	General orders released which may or may not benefit worker group	Relief measures announced for specific worker groups in question
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Analysis

FOOD SECURITY

Ration and Cooked Food

The lack of initiative of the central and state governments regarding the provision of ration and cooked food was similar to the first lockdown in March 2020. Only the Delhi government specifically announced ration for domestic workers, including those who were not PDS beneficiaries.

LIVELIHOOD PROTECTION

Of all 10 states, only Maharashtra released an order that mentioned a direct benefit transfer (DBT) of INR 1,500 to registered domestic workers. Even though the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008 mandates the state government to establish welfare boards and initiate registration for domestic workers, orders/circulars related to that were missing. The central government had released an order to conduct an All-India Survey on Domestic Workers (PIB, 2021). According to the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the labour bureau has launched the study and aims to work on the ground to release results by November 2021. The Ministry has also organised training sessions and expert meetings on the same. Although there was no such announcement regarding listing domestic workers under essential services, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) allowed

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Because their work requires them to be in others' homes—often multiple homes—and to come in close contact with individuals and items that may be carrying the virus, domestic workers are frontline workers in this pandemic and at risk (WIEGO, n. d.). Safety measures like providing free sanitisers, preventive medicines, masks, PPE kits and testing drives are essential for them. Apart from the Madhya Pradesh government, no other state government prioritised domestic workers for vaccination.



Chapter 4

Street Vendors

Overview

During the first lockdown, relief measures provided to informal workers and street vendors were few and far between, leaving their lives and livelihoods in a lurch (Kumar et al., 2021). However, the announcement of the Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) credit scheme for vendors afforded them the recognition that was long due, along with an opportunity to venture into the formal banking and credit system after decades of only depending on private, exploitative moneylenders. The progress of the scheme was halted by the second wave of the pandemic which incapacitated street vendors all over the country again. Even though lockdowns in 2021 were localised and not absolute, most street vendors whose business had not been able to pick up after last year were thrust into financial despair again.

In 2020, although the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs had allowed vegetable and fruit vendors to operate during the nationwide lockdown, only Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Delhi state governments expressly clarified that there is no restriction on the sale of vegetables and fruits (considered essential items) during the lockdown and that these vendors have the right to practice their livelihood without interference from the police. Apart from the PM SVANidhi scheme, in Karnataka there was a specific order waiving off loans given to roadside vendors specifically and Kerala announced loans to vendors through the Kudumbashree (network of self-help groups [SHGs]) organisation.

In 2020, only 10 out of 30 states and union territories specifically announced cash transfers for street vendors along with other vulnerable groups to facilitate survival during the lockdown. Ranging from INR 3,000 (Odisha and Bihar) to INR 1,000 (Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan), these cash transfers were a one-time benefit provided only to 'registered' street vendors, which is where the serious lacunae lay. Registration depended on 2–5 year old surveys conducted by local authorities which had gross underestimations, incomplete procedures, unverified bank account numbers, no linkages between IDs and bank details, etc., all of which contributed to the grim situations street vendors have had to endure for an entire year now.

State	Food Security		Livelihood protection						Health and Safety			
	Cooked food	Dry ration	Livelihood registration initiated	Cash transfer	Pension	Essential service declaration	Legal action on grievances	Other	Financial loans	COVID testing, safety SOP, PPE provision, health checkups,	Vaccination	Health insurance
Central		NFSA card registration drive for vendors										
Andhra Pradesh								Jagan Thodu zero interest loans extended				
Assam						Street vendors allowed to work maintaining protocols				Hand washing points and sanitisation in market areas		
Bihar												
Chhattisgarh			Survey and release of street vendors list								Street vendors prioritised for vaccination	
Delhi		Ration for PDS and non-PDS										
Gujarat						Fruits and vegetable shops to be opened						
Jharkhand												
Madhya Pradesh				Cash relief of INR 1,000 to street vendors						Vaccination priority for domestic workers		

Maharashtra				Cash relief of INR 1,500 to 3.85 lakh vendors								
Odisha				Cash relief of INR 3,000 to 87,000+ street vendors							Street vendors prioritised for vaccination	
Uttar Pradesh				Cash transfer of INR 1,000 for vendors								

Table 4.1 Matrix of relief based social protection for street vendors

Key

No relevant orders released for worker group	General orders released which may or may not benefit worker group	Relief measures announced for specific worker groups in question
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Analysis

FOOD SECURITY

The central government in June 2021 directed all states to identify and issue ration cards to the most vulnerable and economically weaker sections of society to ensure their coverage under the National Food Security Act (PTI, June 2021). This group involved street vendors along with ragpickers, street dwellers and other vulnerable groups. Since Delhi was one of the few states who guaranteed the provision of rations to all persons regardless of them having a ration card or not, street vendors were surely included in the potential beneficiaries for food relief.

LIVELIHOOD PROTECTION

Cash Transfers

Only 4 states—Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra (Singh, 8 June 2021), Odisha (Mohanty, 2021) and Uttar Pradesh (Abhishek, 2021)—announced cash transfer schemes for street vendors (amongst other groups) during the second wave of the pandemic. These amounts ranged from INR 3,000 (Odisha) to INR 1,500 (Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra) to INR 1,000 (Madhya Pradesh) and were released to registered street vendors, or those who had registered themselves under the PM SVANidhi loan scheme and have successfully received the Letter of Recommendation (LOR) from the local municipal corporations or have received the loan of INR 10,000 itself in the period since

July 2020. Although these orders are welcomed, they exclude the majority of vendors who have not been registered under the PM SVANidhi nor under the Street Vendors Act by their respective Town Vending Committees (TVCs). This only points towards the long standing demands of activists, vendor and hawker unions, which have been demanding the proper implementation of the act as that would have increased registration/formalisation, which in turn would have enhanced the government's reach to street vendors in times of crisis.

LIVELIHOOD REGISTRATION

Street vendors are entitled to be surveyed, mapped, registered and accommodated in the city's vending zones. This procedure is mandated by the Street Vendors Act and carried out jointly by the urban local bodies and the Town Vending Committees. Almost all states have ratified their own street vendors rules and have been due to start surveys and registrations. This process received impetus after the first lockdown, with a few state governments (The Times of India, 2019) putting the survey process of vendors into action. After two waves of the pandemic and the devastation of livelihood opportunities for vendors, it was necessary for the government to initiate registration processes through the local government on an urgent basis.

Only the Chhattisgarh and Gujarat (The New Indian Express, 2021) governments took steps of this nature during the second wave. The Gujarat government opened a new portal for registration of all informal sector workers, including street vendors, while Chhattisgarh released lists of registered vendors with permanent addresses after conducting surveys. Only the Gujarat (The Times of India, 28 April 2021) and Assam (The Sentinel, 2021) governments released circulars allowing street vendors to operate freely without police harassment during the second wave of the pandemic, as long as they maintained COVID appropriate behaviour.

Apart from the ongoing PM SVANidhi micro credit scheme for street vendors announced in June 2020 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, no other state apart from Andhra Pradesh released specific orders announcing loan schemes for street vendors. The Jagan Thodu scheme (The Hindu, 7 June 2021) of the Andhra Pradesh state government promises INR 10,000 interest free loans to all street vendors. This is an ongoing scheme for vendors announced as a welfare measure in 2019 which has been revived during the second wave of the pandemic.

HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES

The Assam government announced the establishment of compulsory sanitisation points in all its local and weekly markets. This step will directly benefit street vendors and their customers.

Odisha and Chhattisgarh mentioned street vendors in their priority lists to receive the vaccines. The urban poor communities have seen extremely low rates of vaccination as compared to the wealthier sections of society. Only 2 out of 11 states included vendors in their priority lists. This must be remedied.



Chapter 5

Waste Pickers

Overview

In March 2016, the Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change, Government of India, notified the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules 2016 which acknowledged ‘waste pickers and other informal waste collectors, by defining them and recognising their role in recycling (IGSSS and AIW, 2019). Waste pickers are the frontline workers in defence against the spread of COVID-19 as they manage all the waste while exposing themselves to disease and infection in the process. However, they continue to be unrecognised and unprotected, and face a very high risk of not just COVID-19 but also hunger and immense deprivation as their livelihood has significantly been disrupted over the past two years of the pandemic. Waste pickers have been facing challenges in protecting their rights—repressive regulatory regimes, societal discrimination, economic insecurity, and heightened health and safety risks (WIEGO, 2021). The lack of consideration towards the inclusion of this particular livelihood makes the initiatives/schemes of the government deficient.

Despite two years of the deadly pandemic, the central and state government did not consider providing basic essentials like cash transfer, food relief and health support to waste pickers, leaving them reliant on nonprofits and civil society for any support initiatives. In 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic, it was only in Raipur that the District Magistrate announced that waste pickers would be provided with ration. States have taken initiatives for below poverty line (BPL) families, daily wage labourers, construction workers, and street vendors in terms of cash/income transfers but not a single state has mentioned waste pickers in their relief measures. Apart from this, the government has also failed to mandate provisions for the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for waste pickers, such as masks, gloves, boots, and sanitation kits (soap, sanitiser, and sanitary pads).

State	Food Security		Livelihood protection						Health and Safety		
	Cooked food	Dry ration	Livelihood registration initiated	Cash transfer	Pension	Essential service declaration	Legal action on grievances	Other	COVID testing, safety SOP, PPE provision, health checkups,	Vaccination	Health insurance
Central		Ration card drive									
Andhra Pradesh											
Assam											
Bihar											
Chhattisgarh											
Delhi											
Gujarat											
Jharkhand											
Madhya Pradesh											
Maharashtra											
Odisha											
Uttar Pradesh											

Table 5.1 Matrix of relief-based social protection for waste pickers

Key

No relevant orders released for worker group	General orders released which may or may not benefit worker group	Relief measures announced for specific worker groups in question
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FOOD SECURITY

The present situation for waste pickers is the same as in the 2020 lockdown, where no order was passed to address their food crisis. There is only one circular that was passed by the central government, and it says a registration drive must be launched to ensure coverage of all eligible identified persons from

the most vulnerable and economically weaker sections of the population, including waste pickers under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

LIVELIHOOD PROTECTION

Orders and circulars were released for other sectors like street vendors, domestic workers, construction workers, sex workers that announced financial aid in one or the other states, but waste pickers were excluded entirely.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

While vaccination drives were held in all parts of India, there was no circular and order specifically for waste pickers. They are one of the essential frontline workers who have served extensively during the lockdown by contributing towards waste management (Shalaka, 2020). It was critical to provide them with safety implements such as PPE kits, preventive medicines and to organise vaccination drives for them, yet all states neglected their duty towards waste pickers.



Chapter 6

Other Informal Workers and Marginalised Identities

Overview

This chapter is a compilation of some of the relief measures of various state governments for informal sector workers, marginalised groups and the urban poor community at large. Since this study does not encompass all the states of the country, or all the groups of informal workers or all marginalised identities who have suffered disproportionately during the second wave of the pandemic, this chapter seeks to list some of the most imperative and critical orders, schemes and practices being undertaken by state governments to provide relief to these marginalised groups during the pandemic.

Presenting a curated collection of some of the good practices being announced in states in the months of April and May 2021, organised into three categories and each have a separate matrix

1. **Relief measures for Various Informal Workers (Urban and Rural):**

After COVID–19 induced lockdowns and restrictions were imposed in 2021, nearly half (47 per cent) of informal workers did not receive their full wages or were paid only partial wages. Wages apart, 57 per cent of these workers had less than two days of rations left (GaonConnection, 2021). Informal worker groups such as gig workers, daily wage labourers, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, weekly market vendors, small shop assistants, tailors, cobblers, dock workers, seafarers, tea garden labourers, artisans, handloom workers and many more whose livelihood depends on personal interactions, daily travel or bustling markets have all undergone tremendous financial distress.

Table 6.1 contains some of the government circulars and relief measures announced for informal sector workers other than the 4 groups considered in the earlier chapters of this report. Different state governments have rightly recognised the variance between informal sector groups and have announced relief measures for them.

2. **Relief Measures for Various Informal Workers by Various States:**

In the earlier chapters of this report, only 10 states have been considered while preparing the matrix with government orders for informal workers. While table 6.2 does not include all

the other states/union territories' government orders, it does include some progressive and wide ranging relief measures offered to informal sector workers in India by those states, not included in the earlier chapters. The worker groups considered are the same with the addition of migrant workers being considered for some form of relief by the various state governments.

3. Relief Measures by Various States for Marginalised Groups:

While the primary focus of this report is on informal sector workers, it must also be established that the urban poor communities comprise many identities that are marginalised by definition. These groups have to suffer from the twin burden of insecure livelihoods, social stigma and discrimination. Table 6.3 is a short compilation of some of the government orders aiming to provide relief to these particular vulnerable communities within the fold of the urban informal sector workers.

Government	Rickshaw Pullers	Auto Drivers	Migrant Workers	Anganwadi Workers	Tea Garden Workers	Sex Workers	Gig Workers (Delivery Workers, Taxi Drivers, Bus Conductors, etc)	Artisans/ Weavers/ Handloom Workers
Maharashtra		Relief of INR 1,500	Free distribution of food			INR 5,000 in bank accounts of commercial sex workers (by Pune District Administration)	Allowed to work as essential service workers	
Assam	Allowed to work as essential service workers	Prioritise for vaccine			Allowed to work as essential service workers	Ration distribution	Allowed to work as essential service workers	
Delhi		INR 5,000 cash transfer	Canteens and hostels provision				INR 5,000 cash transfer for taxi drivers	
Tamil Nadu							Prioritised for vaccine	
Gujarat			Hostels with canteen provision					
Uttar Pradesh				Cash relief to anganwadi workers who died on COVID duty				
West Bengal								Prioritised for vaccine

Table 6.1 Matrix of relief for various informal workers groups

Analysis

Cash Relief

Some states like Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh promised cash transfers to those informal sector workers who were not recognised in the first lockdown. Auto-drivers were provided with cash transfers by the Maharashtra and Delhi governments to ease their financial distress. In Pune, women dependant on commercial sex work were provided with cash assistance of INR 5,000 by the district administration. The Delhi government provided cash transfers to construction workers who were COVID positive and INR 5,000 to all auto and rickshaw drivers as income support due to the impending lockdown (Kejriwal, 2021).

Vaccination Priority

West Bengal (Team MP, 2021) included artisans, handloom weavers and other tourism industry informal workers in the vaccination priority list. Assam did the same for auto drivers. Tamil Nadu prioritised vulnerable groups for the vaccination (The Hindu, 26 May 2021)

Miscellaneous

Groups like auto drivers, rickshaw drivers, and scores of other gig workers were declared as essential service workers by states like Maharashtra, Delhi, Assam. These essential service declarations were not present in the previous lockdown, which resulted in harassment by the police and resident welfare associations (RWA) for many worker groups when they were forced to look for work during the pandemic out of necessity. The official orders released during the second wave provide the necessary legal cover for vulnerable groups to carry on their business in the aftermath of the pandemic/ lockdowns.

Assam was also one of the few states to recognise and provide free rations to sex workers in the Silchar area after a district court order (Assam Tribune, 2021). Uttar Pradesh announced cash transfers to anganwadi workers who died during COVID duty while Gujarat ensured canteens and hostels for all migrant workers stranded due to the lockdowns.

	Construction Workers	Domestic Workers	Street Vendors	Migrant Workers	Gig Workers (Delivery Workers, Taxi Drivers, Bus Conductors, etc)	Miscellaneous
Karnataka	Cash transfer (INR 3,000)	Cash transfer (INR 2,000)	Cash transfer (INR 2,000)	Cash transfer (INR 2,000)		Cash transfer (INR 2,000) for all barbers, tailors, mechanics, blacksmiths, potters, etc
Punjab	Prioritised for vaccine; cash transfer (INR 3,000)		Prioritised for vaccine;			
Tamil Nadu	Vaccination given by Welfare Board				Prioritised for vaccine	
West Bengal						Vaccination priority for artisans/ weavers/ handloom workers
Kerala				Prioritised for vaccine		

Table 6.2- Matrix of relief for informal workers by various states¹

Analysis

Cash Relief

In Karnataka, the cash transfer announced for unorganised sector workers included 11 categories of workers, such as barbers, domestic workers, tailors, mechanics, blacksmiths, potters, construction workers, street vendors, among others. Each registered worker was to get a one-time compensation of INR 2,000. The government order said that workers from outside the state will also be eligible for this relief. The Punjab government announced INR 3,000 cash transfers for all registered construction workers. The Odisha government announced a one-time transfer of INR 10,000 to ASHA workers, only for the purpose of improving their work during the pandemic by enabling them to buy umbrellas, footwear to travel easily and conduct tests and provide healthcare to remote locations.

Vaccination Priority

West Bengal prioritised artisans, handloom weavers and other informal workers in the tourism sector for the vaccine. Kerala has put all migrant 'guest' workers in the vaccination priority list and has also initiated a campaign to further worker registration for migrants (Nambudiri, 2021).

¹ This table does not include all the other 18 states' measures, only a list of some of the progressive orders being taken by some states. It should not be confused for a comprehensive list of all relief measures of all the 18 remaining states.

	Transgenders	Women	Children	Homeless	Persons with Disabilities	Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups
Centre	Cash transfer for registered transgenders (INR 1,500)		Financial assistance, education, ensuring guardianship, need-based mapping and support to all COVID orphans	SoP for vaccination without ID cards and for homeless in shelters		
Assam	Prioritised for vaccination	Financial support (INR 50,000) and 1 tola gold for girls of marriageable age who lost parents	Financial support (INR 3,500 per month) for COVID orphans			
Delhi			Financial support (INR 2,500 per month) for COVID orphans and free education	Prioritised for vaccination	Exclusive vaccination centre	
Madhya Pradesh			Free education and financial support (INR 5,000 per month) for COVID orphans			
Gujarat			Financial support (INR 4,000 per month) for COVID orphans Hostel expenses, skill development Free rations			
Chhattisgarh	Prioritised for vaccination		Financial assistance of INR 500 (for primary school students) and INR 1,000 (for secondary students) for COVID orphan students and priority admission in state run schools	Prioritised for vaccination	Prioritised for vaccination	
Uttar Pradesh		Vaccination priority for women with co-morbidities	Financial assistance to orphans (INR 4,000 per month)			
Odisha			Financial assistance to orphans till they turn 18 years (INR 2,500 per month)			Special ration kit; incentive to stay in COVID care facility; distribution of free masks and sanitising materials

Table 6.3 Matrix of relief by various states for marginalised groups

Analysis

The Homeless

In June 2021, nearly six months since the COVID vaccination drive started across the country, hundreds living in Delhi's shelter homes hadn't received a single dose. According to the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), there are over 209 shelters across the city. These include temporary structures housing more than 4,000 people, most of them daily wagers. However, by the end of June 2021, a small fraction of them had been vaccinated (Sinha, 21 June 2021). The Chhattisgarh government made its vaccine policy in line with global standards by including the homeless and slum dwellers in their priority lists for the vaccination along with many other vulnerable and displaced populations.

The central government in two of its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) issued on 6 and 13 May 2021, provided a path to vaccinate those without ID cards and those in homeless shelters under National Urban Livelihoods Mission—Shelters for Urban Homeless [NULM (SUH)]. These SOPs included the establishing of district task forces to be commandeered by the state government to help identify and safely vaccinate homeless persons in all states.

Transgender Community Members

Members of the transgender community are facing a plethora of issues, from losing their sources of income to not being able to access vaccines or normal healthcare. Their livelihood has been severely hit due to the lockdowns, given that their two main sources of income are begging and sex work. Activists say that the infections of the transgender community are grossly underrepresented (Madhavan, 2021) and there are thousands more dying due to inaccessibility to basic healthcare, ignorance of doctors and medical staff of transgender issues and a high likelihood of HIV and other infectious diseases in the community. While the Centre announced INR 1,500 one-time subsistence support for members of the community on 23 May, the conditions set by the government for INR 1,500 will make most of them ineligible for the support (Sofi, 2021). It mandated that the beneficiary's identifying documents should indicate that they are a transgender person whereas most of the transgender community are abandoned by their families, do not have Aadhar cards or certificates establishing their gender issued by the district magistrate (as per the Transgender Welfare Act 2020).

Women

In Assam, the government provided 1 tola gold under the Arundhati Gold scheme and one-time financial assistance of INR 50,000 for girls of marriageable age who lost their parents (Nath, 2021). Some states like Himachal Pradesh have also prioritised lactating mothers in their vaccination drives (United News of India, 2021).

Children

Almost all states and the central government have recognised the vulnerabilities of children who have

lost both parents or the sole breadwinner in their families because of COVID and have provided much needed financial surety to these children.

Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh are providing children who are COVID orphans a sum of INR 4,000 per month till adulthood (The Economic Times, 30 May 2021).

Chhattisgarh will fund the education of COVID orphan students and provide them a stipend of INR 500 (below 10) and INR 1,000 (10-18) per month till adulthood (India Today, 14 May 2021).

Assam and Delhi provided ex gratia payment of INR 3,500 and INR 2,500, respectively, to COVID orphans and free education guarantee. Madhya Pradesh provided INR 5,000 per month to COVID orphans along with free rations.

Persons with Disabilities

Delhi announced the establishment of exclusive vaccination centres for persons with disabilities (PwD) with the help of local NGOs who lease out spaces for PwD to be exclusively vaccinated in less crowded places. Chhattisgarh included persons with disabilities in their vaccine priority list along with many other marginalised groups.

Conclusion



For informal sector workers, the economic realities of what a lockdown means cannot be diminished, even though the second wave lockdown was not as absolute as the 2020 lockdown. Lockdowns and the restriction of people's mobility affects workers' groups much more viscerally in every way. The informal sector had hardly recovered from the devastating impacts in early 2021 when the second wave struck. Dealing with the financial burden after not being paid by most employers for a major part of 2020, the informal sector workforce also had to tackle the public health crisis while being denied proper healthcare.

The unemployment rate in India had been on the rise even before the pandemic. But a bad situation became worse at the time of the national lockdown in 2020. As per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), some 121 million jobs, 91 million out of which were daily wage labourers and workers in the unorganised sector, were lost. Although the unemployment rate had started improving from October 2020, it climbed to double digits yet again after the second wave of COVID-19 hit India. During May 2021 when the second wave ravaged the country, over 15 million jobs were lost, the CMIE said in a report.

The informal workforce faces a grim future as India has still not overcome the virus and is not close to it either, with the pace of vaccinations not picking up significantly. In this context, the solutions for workers have to go beyond short-term measures providing food, shelters and minimum wage guarantees. The Labour Standing Committee of the Parliament had recommended in 2020 that the Centre put in place a credible database of unorganised workers, especially migrant labourers, to ensure seamless delivery of relief packages to them in times of distress. In light of the recommendations made by the parliamentary committee, the Labour Bureau, an attached office of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, is conducting five All India Surveys on labour (PIB, 2021).

The government response on the whole has succeeded in recognising the vulnerabilities and variance within the informal sector by naming them in vaccination priority lists, essential services and by providing cash transfers to many different types of worker groups, who had previously been left unrecognised. Although the government response the second time around has been a bit more nuanced, the fundamental problem of lack of social protection remains. It is also important to understand the degree of vulnerabilities the informal workforce suffers from. It is in the nation's best interests if these groups are formalized as much as possible and prioritised for relief in times of crisis.

Relief based social protection													
	Food Security		Livelihood Protection							Health and Safety			
	Cooked food	Dry ration	Registration initiated	Cash transfer	Loans	Pension	Essential service declaration	Grievance redressal	Others	COVID testing, safety SOP, PPE provision, health checkups	Vaccination priority for informal workers	Health insurance	TOTAL
Government of India		2		1	0	0				0	0	0	3
State Governments	1	6	5	9	1	0	6	1	0	1	3	0	33
Total	1	8	5	10	1	0	6	1	0	1	3	0	36

Table 7.1 Relief initiated specifically for construction workers, domestic workers, street vendors waste pickers (1 April 2021- 10 June 2021)

When the country was reeling from the devastating impacts of the second wave of COVID, major lockdowns followed a public health crisis. From the beginning of April (end of March in states like Maharashtra), lockdowns lasted in their most extreme forms till mid June. It is disconcerting that the central and state governments did not proactively react to the economic, social and health needs of the 4 largest groups of urban informal sector workers (seeing as the outbreaks in the early stages were confined to urban areas). Only 3 orders were passed by the Union Government of India, specifically in favour of the 4 groups of construction workers, street vendors, waste pickers and domestic workers during the second wave. These groups barely recovered from their well documented woes from the 2020 lockdown but the national government still remained largely unresponsive, except for very generalised relief measures. 2 out of the 3 orders were related to the continuous provision of dry rations to all PDS cardholders. Only one circular ordered the registration of domestic workers in the country as a directive to states.

In the same period from 1 April to 10 June the 10 states which have been examined in this report released a total of 33 orders specific to the 4 worker groups. 7 orders were related to provisions of rations and cooked meals to vulnerable groups, 5 orders calling for registration drives for workers, 9 out of 10 states ordered cash transfers for some of the worker groups, 1 ordered the widening and continuation of a financial loan scheme, 6 states released orders declaring some of the groups as essential workers and 1 order setup a grievance redressal mechanism for workers to be assisted. Although most states ordered financial assistance to COVID orphans, only 3 states ordered the inclusion of these most vulnerable worker groups in their vaccination priority lists.



Recommendations to Ensure a Social Protection System for Urban Informal Workers

1. Towards Ensuring Livelihood Protection for Urban Informal Workers

The recently passed four Labour Codes (Code on Wages; Industrial Relations; Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions and Social Security) amalgamate 44 existing central labour laws. The existing legal framework (and associated schemes) for informal sector workers like the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008; The Building and Other Construction Workers Cess Act, 1996; The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970; The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, etc are in a state of abeyance. As for the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, only recently in July 2021 did the central government announce the active implementation of the Inter State Migrant Workers Protection Act (The Telegraph, 27 July 2021). Since the codes lack clarity and are not yet notified, the question on social and legal protection of urban informal workers becomes critical at this point. This is especially because a legal framework helps build a strong social protection system.

In the current context, the inclusion of workers in existing schemes and initiatives should be prioritised based on the following principles and measures

1.1 Enumeration and registration through a national database:

Recognition via registration as workers is the first step to ensure social protection. There is a need for visibility and recognition through involvement of workers in a large-scale profession based enumeration process. The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008 mandates the registration of unorganised workers along with the provision of entitlement rights. This is, however, largely unimplemented. With the Ministry of Labour and Employment introducing the national database process in the 2020 monsoon session and the Supreme Court order of 29 June 2021 giving further impetus to the same, its urgency has been highlighted. This process needs the participation of grassroot organisations, non-profits, unions, welfare boards and collectives to collect data. The ministry should make the methodology and strategy of this database initiative transparent and comprehensive. Existing data like the periodic labour force

data, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data, Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) data, BOCW data and other existing worker's databases can also be used in this process.

1.2 Strengthen the pre-existing boards for informal workers:

The existing workers' welfare boards like the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (BOCW-WB), Domestic Workers Welfare Board and Unorganised Sector Workers' Board must be protected and improved. The sustainability of these will ensure surveys, registrations, entitlements, social security benefits like pension, compensations, maternity benefits, insurance, etc. are availed by workers. Dilution of existing laws only result in undoing decades of work by both the state and civil society. To ensure these boards function, a robust mechanism for social audits and monitoring must be enforced and transparency and accountability must be ensured at all levels.

1.3 Formation of independent worker boards:

Various informal livelihoods require proper consideration from the centre as well as states to visibilise their work, protect them and also ensure their social protection is financed. Worker's boards are one way to ensure this along with the participation of workers and ensuring accountability from employers. One dedicated board for unemployment and migrant workers is also essential. All the boards must have a toll-free local number so that workers can file their grievances, which can be recorded in a database and transparently resolved.

1.4 Issue guidelines and orders in favour of workers:

Informal workers have been on the frontlines during the pandemic while suffering from a lack of work, being evicted from their residence and being targeted by authorities. It is important to recognise the work and contribution of groups like waste pickers and they must be included as essential service providers. This includes permitting workers to continue their essential work without any restrictions and penalties. Second, at the time of crisis and disaster, the government needs to respond immediately when it comes to workers' welfare. Rights of informal sector workers' must be included in disaster preparedness rules and details.

1.5 COVID recovery support:

Income support measures should be taken at the level of both the central and state governments. A fair and equitable system for support pay should be calculated on the basis of expenses and loss incurred due to COVID-19 and must be subsequently transferred to workers. Apart from this, the government must also focus on a strategy of recovery in terms of housing, shelters, education, childcare, mobility, and sanitation. The government must also push for the restoration of lost livelihoods of workers through monetary and tangible support like compensations or providing working equipment measures like cart, rickshaw, machines, etc.

1.6 Involvement of non-profit organisations, collectives and unions in decision making:

There must be an equitable participation of workers themselves, non-profit organisations, worker's collectives and unions in multiple supportive initiatives like the registration process, surveys, COVID–19 relief measures, skill upgrading programmes, awareness programmes, healthcare and vaccination drives, and most importantly in running the workers' welfare boards that respond to social protection needs of workers.

2. Towards Ensuring Food Security for Urban Informal Workers

Surveys show that an overwhelming majority of poor households are receiving food rations and were doing so in the previous lockdown as well. Extension of the free ration provisions is an important step taken by the government. The Public Distribution System (PDS), however, leaves out millions of extremely vulnerable families. Further, even for those who are covered, PDS is little more than a protection against hunger. It cannot ensure adequate nutrition, let alone a decent standard of living (Drèze, 25 May 2021). Multiple efforts can be taken to ensure workers and their families are food secure.

2.1 Expand items provided through PDS and expedite one nation one ration card process:

In the context of the pandemic, and taking into consideration the large migrant worker population which has moved back and forth from their homes to the destination as the second wave subsides, the One Nation One Ration card idea is a welcome step. This process, however, needs to be expedited. Currently few households are able to reap its benefits. It is also prudent and efficient to provide a combination of food options to all urban poor communities. Ration kits have been used by states like Kerala very effectively and economically. In fact the additional cost of providing the other essential items for six months to all NFSA families across India would come to about INR 20,000 crore which amounts to a meagre 0.09 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) 2021–22 (Chintan, 2021).

2.2 Establishment of More Worker Canteens and Community Kitchens:

Low cost or free food canteens are being replicated in many states under different names. Models like Amma canteen (Tamil Nadu) and Aam Aadmi canteen (Delhi) can be replicated. These canteens should be encouraged close to places of work. Community kitchens should be linked with community based organisations to ensure livelihoods and nearness to informal settlements.

2.3 Establish help desks for grievances and information, ration card registration drive, regularity of supply and monitoring of PDS shops at the community level:

The robust infrastructure around the PDS system must be strengthened with services like grievance redressal, ration card issuing being seamlessly offered to all.

2.4 Non PDS card holders to have easy access to rations in periods of crisis:

In current and future lockdowns or other situations of crisis, state governments should announce schemes where all workers without ration cards would also be provided rations on the basis of their Aadhaar card which has a much higher coverage as compared to PDS cards.

2.5 Mid-day Meal Scheme and Integrated Child Development Service component of the NFSA must be immediately universalised and implemented efficiently:

The nutritious and regular meals provided by the mid-day meal scheme and the ICDS system are essential in ensuring early child development and healthcare. In the event of a public health crisis, the fundamentals of children's healthcare must be focussed on to create resilience. Most malnutrition occurs due to the severe infections, ailments, ignorance of family members about early childcare and lack of micronutrients in food. The ICDS and mid-day meal program must be implemented effectively even during the pandemic, through training, supply chain management and regular monitoring and data analysis.

3. Towards Ensuring Health and Safety of Urban Informal Workers

The pandemic has brought public health to the forefront. However, a public health crisis is not limited to a pandemic or an epidemic. Almost 4 per cent of the entire country's population is just one health shock away from being pushed into poverty according to the World Bank (Ahmad, 2019). Both long and short term measures are required to provide meaningful, quality and affordable healthcare to informal sector workers in urban areas. Apart from that, state schemes and national schemes (listed below) must be integrated, made user friendly and funded more generously so that the sheer number of stakeholders do not overwhelm the system.

3.1 Investment in public health must be higher:

The twin problems of inordinate out of pocket expenditure and the massive gulf between private and public healthcare institutions can be solved by investing more in programmes

that push the needle towards universal health coverage. The Economic Survey 2020–21 strongly recommended an increase in public spending on healthcare services from 1 per cent to 2.5–3 per cent of GDP, as envisaged in the National Health Policy 2017. This could significantly reduce the out-of-pocket-expenditure from 65 per cent to 35 per cent of the overall healthcare spend. The government has consistently averaged health expenditure of not more than the 1.28 per cent of GDP in the previous 3 years. Low health expenditure by the government has led to a highly developed private health care sector. Private hospitals make up more than half of the country's healthcare infrastructure, while private insurance is usually the norm for the middle and upper classes (Statista, 2021). Simultaneously, mohalla clinics, primary healthcare centres and temporary health camps should be made functional and staffed.

3.2 Inclusion in existing health schemes and initiatives:

The Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) health insurance scheme (5 lakh annual coverage for 40 per cent of the poorest) is an important scheme. Currently, beneficiaries under PMJAY are either identified by the Socio-Economic Caste Census, 2011 or are already registered in the existing Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY). However, eligibility for registration under PM-JAY must be more inclusive; for eg, the inclusion of all ration/Aadhar/welfare board card/union card holders, and registration for all informal sector workers with the end goal of moving towards universal coverage. Such inclusive eligibility rules will undoubtedly raise programme costs significantly, but the PM-JAY programme can significantly reduce costs by covering only basic primary healthcare treatment costs and out of pocket expenditures for generic drugs and small procedures for all and restrict or exclude expensive and complex procedures such as surgeries and major operations which are much rarer. The focus of PM-JAY should be to promote preventive care at the source for the masses and not only to provide insurance for expensive medical procedures.

At the same time, inclusion of informal workers can be further enhanced through state schemes like Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY), Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi and Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA), which provide financial assistance to the patients below the poverty line who are suffering from life-threatening diseases, or pregnancy complications which need expensive medical procedures and must avail medical treatment at super specialty hospitals/institutions. State Health Insurance Schemes must be kept functional until they are properly subsumed under one simplified national health insurance scheme (the management and budgets of which should be decentralised)

3.4 Door to door vaccination through community led campaigns in urban slums:

In the context of the pandemic, smaller localised and community led vaccination drives

should be the chosen course of action. Walk-in facilities must be located either in informal settlements or near clusters of small units that can benefit workers, and must operate at hours that are most conducive to workers. Door-to-door awareness using volunteers from the community should be pursued. These campaigns should involve urban local bodies (ULBs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-profits already working on the ground to expedite the vaccination of all persons.

3.5 Health guidelines:

Housing accessed or developed by workers are especially vulnerable due to their close living and working quarters and density. However some communities have been very successful in minimising the effects of the pandemic through strict policies of testing, awareness building, relief provision and involving the communities to be a part of the solution. SOPs regarding social distancing, effects and diagnosis of COVID and how to help community members isolate or deal with infections in such communities should be released by ULBs.

3.6 Health and sanitation:

The Swachh Bharat Mission, Solid Waste Management rules must be implemented and followed up in every city. Urban slums should be ground zero for the implementation of the principles of the Swachh Bharat mission with access to basic amenities in communities and settlements. This includes regular sanitisation, clean sanitary drains, availability of drinking water, handwashing spots, community toilet maintenance and so on.

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About IGSSS

Indo-Global Social Service Society is a non-profit organisation working with the mandate for humane social order used on truth, freedom, justice and equity. Established in 1960, IGSSS works for development, capacity building and enlightenment of vulnerable communities across the country for the effective participation in development.

With its presence all over of India, IGSSS has set its thematic focus on promoting sustainable livelihoods, energising the youth as change makers, protecting lives, livelihood and assets from the impact of hazards, advocating for the rights of CityMakers (Urban Poor Residents) and developing a cadre of leaders from the community and civil society organisations. Gender and Youth are underlying themes across all its interventions.



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About YUVA

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) is a non-profit development organisation committed to enabling vulnerable groups to access their rights and address human rights violations. YUVA supports the formation of people's collectives that engage in the discourse on development, thereby ensuring self-determined and sustained collective action in communities. This work is complemented with advocacy and policy recommendations on issues.



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