

# 89% stranded migrants hadn't been paid wages during lockdown period Report

Last Updated at April 17, 2020 15:45 IST

**Almost three-fourths of migrants surveyed have less than half their daily wages remaining for the rest of the lockdown period.**

A report on how the lockdown has impacted the migrant workers in the country in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak shows a very high level of economic distress, with many of them being driven close to starvation.

The report prepared by SWAN (Stranded Workers Action Network), an NGO released on April 15, reveals that only 51 per cent of over 11,000 workers who were surveyed, had rations left for less than one day, while 72 per cent said they would run out of food in two days.

Owing to the lack of cash and food availability, many had been eating frugally and some had even been on the brink of starvation. The report highlights that among the respondents, there was much physical and psychological agony and trauma, and a desperation to return home.

The report, titled 21 Days and Counting: Covid-19 Lockdown, Migrant Workers, And The Inadequacy of Welfare Measures in India, is based on a survey of 11,159 migrant workers.

It reveals the ground reality of workers across India over the 21-day period of the lockdown, and shares findings with respect to food, cash and wages, apart from making recommendations to immediately tackle the lockdown and its impact on migrant workers.

While the announcement of the lockdown on March 25 caught the entire country off guard, it particularly left little time for the state governments and the bureaucracy to effectively plan for this emergency, and it was especially hard on migrant workers dependent on daily wages. The report notes that while millions of migrants successfully reached their home states, only to be quarantined in camps, many remain stranded far from home, with little money or food.

This report takes into account 11,159 migrant workers, of which almost 17 per cent are daily wage earners and factory/construction workers, eight per cent are non-group based daily wage earners (such as domestic workers and drivers) and eight per cent are self employed. (vendors, sari workers). The average daily wage of the workers is Rs 402, and the median is Rs 400.

## The findings of the report with respect to food, cash, and wages

Disclaimer: The content above is taken from the source mentioned

Resource: Business Standard, 17 April 2020

Copyright © 2019 Aparajitha Corporate Services Pvt., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

A key point made in the report is that the rate of hunger and distress far exceeds the rate of relief provided to the migrant workers. Two weeks into the lockdown, only one per cent of the stranded workers had received rations from the government and three weeks into the lockdown, only four per cent had received rations. Further, the report highlights:

96 per cent had not received rations from the government.

70 per cent had not received any cooked food.

78 per cent have less than Rs 300 left with them.

89 per cent have not been paid by their employers at all during the lockdown.

### **Wages and relief**

The report explains that the union and the state governments are legally bound to record migrant labour under laws such as the National Disaster Management Act (2005), the Interstate Migrant Worker Act (1979), and the Street Vendors Act (2014), among others. There are other wage laws that say that workers are entitled to the payment of full and timely wages, to displacement allowance, a home journey allowance including payment of wages during the journey.

The lockdown reveals a far more grim picture of the state of contract labour and the lack of accountability on the part of both, employers and the government.

According to the report, most of stranded workers were not able to recall the name of the main builder or company they had been working for. They had no social network to tap into at their place of work. Their only link to the city or town in which they were working was through their contractor.

They were only able to name their contractor, and were even unaware of the name of the registered company with which the contractor was associated. In most cases, contractors had switched off their phones, leaving workers to fend for themselves.

The report highlights that 89 per cent of the stranded workers had not been paid during the lockdown period by their employers, despite the directive of the Ministry of Home Affairs asking employers to do so.

Seventy four per cent of the migrant workers surveyed had less than half their daily wages remaining for the rest of the lockdown period.

With barely Rs 200 in hand, they not only had to get their rations in places where food staples or cooked meals were not available, but also had to buy for essentials such as soap, oil, cooking gas, sanitary pads, medicines, phone recharge and transportation cost to return home post lockdown. They had to pay rent (in the range of Rs 2,000-3,000) for their accommodation at a time when they had no income.

### **Compliance with the relief measures of the government**

Disclaimer: The content above is taken from the source mentioned

Resource: Business Standard, 17 April 2020

Copyright © 2019 Aparajitha Corporate Services Pvt., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

So far, over 350 orders have been issued by the union and state governments since the lockdown, to provide relief to the migrants. State governments have announced measures such as shelters and provision of cooked meals at feeding centres. However, these aren't sustainable for 21 days let alone the extension till May 3.

The report highlights the fact that since millions of stranded workers are not registered, the union government's announcement of aid to construction workers from the cess collected by labour welfare boards holds little meaning.

The report also highlights poor compliance with the ministry of Home Affairs' directive on payment of wages, without deduction and with no demand for rent. Only a few state governments have extended relief measures beyond shelters for migrants, such as provision of free rations to non-ration-card holders (as in Delhi's case) and Rs 1,000 cash transfers to stranded migrants.

### **Key recommendations**

The report proposes a diverse set of recommendations for migrants under different categories, such as (i) those who have returned home, (ii) those trying to reach home but were stopped and sent to relief shelters, (iii) those trying to reach home, were stopped but were not able to reach a shelter and are sleeping on roads and in public spaces, and (iv) those who have been living under miserable conditions in the cities where they work.

The report makes categorical recommendations on food security, wages and income support, social security, shelters and housing, and transport facilities. It specifies what should be done immediately to manage the crisis, such as doubling the PDS for three months, providing two cooked meals at conveniently located sites, releasing wages for 25 days into Jan Dhan accounts of all urban residents, using schools and empty locations to house migrants, paying full wages of workers in the informal sector, not allowing the closure of hostels, relief camps, and shelters, not allowing the eviction of tenants, arrangements for sanitation workers to reach home safely, among many others.

### **HOW SOME STATES FARED**

According to the report, the most prompt administrative response so far has been from Karnataka, and the most patchy, from Maharashtra.

#### **UTTAR PRADESH: 1,618 migrant workers reached out**

Average daily wages of Rs 291 are lower than some of the other states.

64 per cent of workers had not received any cooked food from the govt.

In addition to setting up shelters for migrants, UP govt announced a Rs 1,000 cash transfer for daily wage workers. Not a single person in the survey sample had received any money from the govt. On average, people are left with Rs 56, and 87 per cent have less than Rs 200 remaining. Every single person said that they would run out of rations within two days.

**HARYANA AND DELHI: 1,058 migrant workers**

Both the state govts announced issue of ration coupons to those without ration cards. One in three people have received cooked food from the govt or a local organisation. More than 82 per cent said that they had rations only for two days.

The Delhi govt announced Rs 5,000 cash transfers for daily wage earners but because of heavy policing in areas, it became extremely difficult to withdraw money or get rations. Haryana govt announced that workers registered at the district level portal will be given Rs 1,000 per week. None of the workers who called were aware of this cash transfer. The Haryana government, directed commercial establishments to not terminate contracts and pay full wages. However, 84 per cent have not been paid and 76 per cent have less than Rs 300 to survive for the rest of the lockdown period.

**MUMBAI AND MAHARASHTRA: 3,992 migrant workers**

Less than one per cent of groups have received any rations from the govt. 42 per cent had been able to access some cooked meals either from a local organisation or from the govt.

Almost 80 per cent of those who reached out are construction workers and 90 per cent said they would run out of rations within 2 days.

**PUNJAB: 322 migrant workers**

The state government announced distribution of 10 kg of flour, two kg of pulses and two kg of sugar, door-to-door for daily wage labourers. Workers outside Ludhiana had to face police brutality and felt discriminated against in the distribution of food and ration by locals. Punjab has not announced any financial assistance for workers who are not registered with labour welfare boards. Ration shops run out of ration by the time the poor can access it, because of a general disorganisation and corruption in distribution across large cities.

**KARNATAKA: 3,000 workers**

The Karnataka High court ordered the provisions of food packets to daily wage workers affected by the lockdown. However, 93 per cent had not received any ration supplies and 80 per cent had not received cooked food. On a positive note, the Principal Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, has responded with urgency to requests for rations to be delivered in different parts of the state.

**BIHAR:**

The Bihar government set up an app to disburse Rs 1000 to stranded migrant workers. 900,000 have registered but many have reported that money has not been deposited into their accounts despite receiving SMSs confirming the transaction has been completed. The state government is yet to start disbursement of entitlements under the PDS.

## **Making Corporate India Comply**

system, creating a crisis for even those who have been able to make it back to their native villages.