

Government may unveil informal workers' registry on 1 February

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- **Budget announcement will pave way for extending benefits under welfare schemes.**
- **IT will have info on informal workers in the 16-59 age group not registered with either EPFO or ESIC.**

Budget 2021-22 is likely to announce the creation of a database of up to 250 million informal workers and migrants, with the aim of ensuring that they get the benefits of the government's welfare schemes. This comes in the wake of last year's lockdown-induced flight of migrants to their hometowns and villages.

The so-called 'repository' to be implemented by the directorate of labour welfare will help the Centre and states roll out welfare schemes, pension benefits and other social security provisions for these segments of the labour market, according to two government officials who requested anonymity.

The scheme is expected to cost around ₹760 crore and is aimed at allowing informal workers to register under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) to access primary to tertiary healthcare facilities.

As of now, ESIC only caters to formal sector workers, especially industrial workers in establishments employing 10 or more people.

"The covid-19 backdrop will be evident in some of the announcements of Budget 2021-22. Both economic recovery measures and welfare measures will see a direct correlation in policy announcements. A national database or repository will be crucial for informal sector workers' welfare," said one of the two officials mentioned above.

The repository will have data about informal workers in the 16-59 age group, who are not registered with either the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) or ESIC.

Workers will have to register themselves with the over 250,000 common service centres across the country and more than 500,000 business correspondents associated with post offices.

The officials mentioned above said covid-19 brought to light two key issues, reverse migration and the lack of a structured support system for informal workers.

There was no database, no structure and hardly any information system on how to reach out to this community.

Authorities in both the home state and host state of unorganized workers and migrants were caught off guard. As a result, the implementation of welfare measures became a challenge.

"Once in place, at least half-a-dozen existing schemes can be linked with this database and repository for effectively rolling out contributory social security benefits, as seeding of Aadhaar and bank account will be compulsory for the unorganized sector," a second official said.

There is no official information on this, said a labour ministry spokesperson.

“If the individual is within the age group of 18 to 40, then he or she will be given the option to opt for Pradhan Mantri ShramYogi Mandhan... but the repository can tell if their monthly income fulfils the monthly income criteria," the second official said.

“Similarly, if someone opts for the small traders and self-employed persons pension scheme, their goods and services tax number can be verified through this platform also," the official added.

Authorities said schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri ShramYogi Mandhan, pension scheme for small traders and self-employed persons, Atal Bima Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana will be linked to the repository and there is a possibility that ESIC benefits and EPFO voluntary membership options can be built into this.