E- Shram Portal

What is the issue?

e-Shram registration is a stepping stone towards protection of informal workers. It needs to be followed by restructuring social security and social protection programmes, and simplifying them

How impoverished are informal workers?

- Q2 2020-21 GDP estimate shows the Indian economy is nearing its pre-pandemic level.
- But the recovery is far from complete for informal workers, including **circular migrants**.

> Circular migration or repeat migration is the temporary and usually repetitive movement of a migrant worker between home and host areas.

- Pandemic has exposed the vulnerable status of their growth process.
- Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data show that the **employment-population ratio** for May-August 21 was 36.8% compared to 39.6% in the same period 2 years ago.
- The unemployment rate for both rural and urban areas is still considerably higher.
- It shows that most households perceived their current incomes as lower than their incomes two years ago.
- Persistent hunger and poverty underlie this low incomes and consumption.
- Further, greater health and educational deprivation threatens to increase the rich – poor gap even for future generations.

Why e-Shram portal was launched?

- The e-Shram portal is expected to create a unified database for unorganised workers to help them access various benefits of central and state government welfare schemes.
- The portal has by now registered more than 120 million workers, 61% from just 4 states — UP, West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha.
- Due to emergency requirements dictated by the pandemic Supreme Court ordered a time-bound inclusive and universal registration system for informal workers and circular migrants.
- It had also been recommended by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) and was already mandated under Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act.

What are the other social security measures provided to informal workers?

- The e-Shram portal merely lists 13 existing social security and social protection schemes and 6 other employment generation schemes for which some section of workers could be eligible.
- So far workers registered in the portal are entitled only to a pre-existing accident insurance policy that carries a tiny premium.

- Beyond this, no expansion of social security/protection presently appears to be on the cards.
- MGNREGA and the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in the above list are already covered by central legislations.
- NFSA has the widest coverage among social protection programmes.
- Despite cynicism in certain circles, both within and outside government, these two programmes have formed the major bulwark against joblessness and hunger in the pandemic period.
- All other schemes are non-statutory and carry differing eligibility criteria, some drawn from the Socio-economic Caste Census carried out in 2011, others related to poverty status, age etc.
- These criteria are far more demanding, and often quite different from the information, based on self-declaration, which is required for worker's registration on the portal.

What needs to be done?

- A move from a patchwork of existing schemes towards creating specific statutory entitlements for social security as envisaged in the Code for Social Security.
- The schemes have to be clubbed, and restructured with simpler eligibility criteria to make them universal and entitlement-based.
- **Funding -** The Code on Social Security does not propose any fresh funding mechanism other than one for gig and platform workers.
- Except during the crisis year 2020-21, expenditure on major social security programmes has shown a declining trend.
- Adequate funding for social protection is necessary.
- **Role Of The States** - The Code on Social Security restricts the scope of state schemes to a very few insignificant areas.
- Their role remains unclear in new schemes. Considerable thought has to be given as to how the new design will accommodate the role of the states.
- Several states had also developed registration mechanisms for delivering programmes that are difficult to synchronise with the new national registration mechanism.

Quick Facts

Employment-to-population ratio

- The employment-to-population ratio is a measure of the number of people employed against the total working-age population.
- Seasonal variations and short-term labor fluctuations do not affect the employment-to-population ratio.
- Unlike the unemployment rate, the employment-to-population ratio includes unemployed people not looking for jobs.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/e-shram-registration-informal-workers-7685990/

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