



Date: 18.05.2021, Tuesday

To,
Shri Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray,
Chief Minister
Government of Maharashtra

Subject: Urgent demands to extend help to workers in informal sector during the state-wide lockdown

We, worker organisations from Maharashtra, who have been engaged with informal worker constituencies throughout the pandemic and consequent lockdowns, address this letter to you to put forth some of our pressing concerns regarding Maharashtra's new restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19. The current restrictions, which are similar to the experiences of last year's Lockdown, are raising panic within workers from the unorganized sector. We are once again witnessing migrant workers, although in small numbers, thronging the stations wanting to leave the city. This time, it is not just the migrant workers but workers, in general, wanting to return as there is uncertainty about the duration and intensity of the lockdown like restrictions – such as loss of livelihood, availability and access to loans, police harassment, restricted mobility and the fear of disease.

We applaud the relief measures announced by the government for registered workers. However, there are some demands we would like to make to reach the benefits of the various relief measures to a larger number of workers, especially those who are not registered. We request the government to consider these practical and constructive demands from the organisations that have been actively working with the various constituencies they represent. We have experienced that the large section of the unorganised sector which are unregistered face difficulty in accessing the relief package. Therefore, we insist, the current pandemic should be considered as a disaster and all necessary provisions should be made according to the disaster management act.

In line with this, we want to raise following concerns with the government and urge them to relook the following demands which would help to benefit a larger portion of unregistered workers in the unorganised sector:

1. **Temporary inclusion of unregistered workers in the PDS system.** Aadhar Card without biometrics can be used as an entitlement document. With regard to temporary ration cards or new ration cards being issued, the ration card (RC) number must be mentioned because other schemes are based on this RC number. This is a crucial social protection measure.
2. **Sustenance Money for a period of the lockdown.** The mechanism for transfers can be explored in collaboration with the government and occupational organisations and associations. There must be a **decentralised mechanism to register workers** with the help of local corporators, unions and civil society organisations. This will help in ensuring state benefits like cash transfers, for example:
 - **For Domestic Worker:**
 - Those who are registered but not renewed
 - Those who have a union card, society card or home owner's or employers letter
 - Identity cards issued for Domestic Workers by the Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board do not have ID card numbers. The google form shared by the Labour Department does not accept the form without an ID card number.

- As per latest conversations with YUVA and Maharashtra Gharelu Kamgar Samnvay Samiti, the Board is going to consider registrations made up to 3 May 2021 as the cut off date for registration. This should be changed and more domestic workers should be encouraged to apply.
- **For Street vendor**
 - Any acknowledgement of the Municipal Committee
 - Acknowledgement of self-registration
 - Registration within Municipal Surveys
 - Some documents of the practice of agriculturally generated markets or businesses
 - Union or Association card
 - **For Naka Worker or construction worker:**
 - Letter from previously worked owner
 - Union card
 - A camp on 'NAKA' to self-declare and register through verification
 - Kamgar Ekta Union requests that Construction Workers must be allowed to produce a 90 days certificate based on the terms allowed in the 2015 UDD GR. Online registration is becoming cumbersome, the government should allow offline submission of forms.
 - **For Own Account and Home-Based Workers -**
 - Acknowledge self-registration
 - Slum survey
 - Organization or Association cards
 - Credit for manufacturing and market for the product
 - **For Manufacturing Workers**
 - Union, Organization or Association cards
 - Acknowledgement of self-registration
3. Still, there are many sectors which are not covered in the above suggestions. For those, a **system of self-certification at the local government office (ward for the city) can be developed for immediate remedy.** This self-certification can have the bank account details of each person for bank transfers.
 4. WPC did rough estimate of the budgetary allocation required for this has been calculated based on rough estimated and deliberation with the following occupational sectors- hawkers, domestic workers, informal transport workers are also part of GIG economy like uber/ola, platform workers like Swiggy/Zomato/Amazon, own-account workers, recyclers and others. It is roughly estimated that around **40% of Maharashtra's population is informal workers, i.e., 4 crores approximately.** Out of which **approx. 50% will be paid through their employer** like platform/GIG economy workers, contract workers at MSME, manufacturing sector. And for the rest, the government can allocate money to ensure one-time income transfer. We can take the ceiling of the recent notification of PCMC which has announced **Rs 3,000 as a one-time income transfer.** We have roughly calculated the budgetary need accordingly, and **it has come to around 6000 crores.**
 5. The government has asked the workers in the manufacturing sector, constructors, transport sector to conduct RTPCR test every 15 days. This is a burden on the workers when the income has drastically reduced. **Government is making necessary arrangements for RTPCR tests or rapid tests for these workers free of cost, this would be a positive step.**
 6. These are workers who provide critical services, manufacturing and recycling links in the city. For the health of the city, it is in the interest of **the worker's provisions that vaccination should be made for them as a special category. Moreover, this vaccination must be conducted through a decentralised network of centres with an offline (on the spot) registration option.**
 7. **For Nurses and healthcare workers:** (suggestions by United Nurses Association (UNA))
 - The government needs to create a Taskforce of Nurses to handle the issue related to Covid and profession,

- New recruitment rule of 90% reservation to women and 10% male nurses should change to previous one,
 - 50% of the total vacant posts in public health is reserved against the candidates studied from Government institution, and the remaining 50 is allocated for private candidates, the ratio between public and private institutions has a huge gap, so the recruitment should be completely on merit,
 - The state nursing council do not have a general council to rule since 2017, and the election process is getting postponed, this shall be taken on priority,
 - Implement minimum wages recommended by the Supreme court for nurses,
 - Senior position in nursing departments should be filled with immediate effect,
 - Govt should rework on Bombay Nursing Home Act, in relation to Patient Nurse Ratio
 - **All health workers irrespective of government or private should be covered by the insurance policy announced by the centre during COVID-19**
8. A large majority of migrant workers in informal manufacturing live on site. In Mumbai's western suburbs, for instance, this share is 74% according to the Aajeevika Bureau's mapping of over 3600 workers in the area. The CMO "Break the Chain" guidelines allow manufacturing units regardless of whether they produce essential services or not to operate if their workers live onsite. **Despite this, the police do not allow these units to remain open, often enforcing the law by force. If large, formal manufacturing units are allowed to remain open, surely these smaller informal units should also be allowed to function without hindrance.** This will allow small producers to have some income and pay workers' wages, just so that they survive this lockdown. Along with this, there must be inquiries into police officials who are incorrectly implementing the guidelines by forcing these units to close and charging them bribes to remain operational. **Allowing these units to function is also in keeping with the public health interests of the state: since workers live and work onsite, they rarely come into contact with others,** except while accessing public toilets or for ration/meals (which they will do whether the unit is open or not).
9. **Moratorium on eviction:** Workers should not be evicted from their homes due to non-payment of rent or due to demolition of slums/bastis during the pandemic. We suggest a moratorium on evictions during the curfew/lockdown period to protect workers from becoming homeless during the pandemic. This will help families to remain safe and prevent the infection chain of the virus. In addition, manufacturing workers work in units that are rented by small producers who are themselves marginal players in the supply chain. Rent moratoriums should be extended to manufacturing units which operate in informal settlements.
10. We feel it would be very useful if **the state could create large relief camps with help of constituencies in different areas** for ragpickers, homeless workers & the poor destitute where they will get shelter, medical relief and 3 meals a day during the lockdown.
11. **For workers returning to rural Maharashtra**
- Urban poor workers who are migrating back to rural areas are often dependent on the NREGS. There is currently no or very minimal NREGS work being taken on in rural blocks due to the pandemic. Summer (February to June) is also the time when there is little agricultural work. The level of joblessness is high. Delays in NREGS payments have also been reported from many blocks.
 - In this situation, cash transfers of INR 1500 to Job Card holders must be made as has been promised for select urban workers. Simultaneously, individual based and individual farm based work must be included within NREGS work - eg intercultivation and sowing work on agricultural lands, building sheds, weeding, developing bunds, deepening wells etc etc
12. **For GIG economy and informal transport workers**
We acknowledge and appreciate the initial efforts of the state govt for announcing @1500 Rs cash transfer for informal transport workers. We feel that it is a very significant step for addressing transport workers in the city's economy and will go a long way in ensuring their social protection.

- However, the situation of transport workers, whether they are associated with multi-billion dollar companies like Ola/Uber or RTO registered informal transport workers like Rickshaw, Tempo, Local taxi have become worse since the new lockdown order chains are being imposed. Maharashtra App Based Transport Workers Union, Rickshaw Panchayat have done a detailed assessment in MMRDA region, Pune, Pimpri Chinchwad, Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur, Auranagabad and Nagpur. **They have found that there are a number of issues that need urgent attention by the state govt and can be easily resolved by taking some stringent policy action under the Epidemic act and disaster management act.**
- An urgent Government order to be issued to all insurance companies for postponing all insurance premiums mortgaged against vehicle loan and 100% waiver of interest charges for the entire period of lockdown and additionally three month as cooling off period.
- **An inter-ministerial task force** (Transport and labour ministry are a must, including trade unions working with such workers and companies) to be constituted for ensuring vaccination drives to be undertaken by companies who can easily afford such expenses. And on the basis of last year's practice, a 'crisis cash transfer' can be announced by these companies. The amount can be decided through tripartite negotiation. It is pertinent to mention that Uber has announced a massive vaccination drive for their workers but nothing is being initiated so far. For informal transport workers associated with RTO, will be managed by the state govt in a similar format.
- Stop the seizure of vehicles during the Corona period
- Inspection/renewal of all documents related to RTO (including insurance) should be postponed for one year.
- Authorisation fee of Rs 500/- under Motor Vehicle Act has been changed to Rs 25000/-, which is not only unethical but also exploitative and illegal. We demand that the Government must suspend this anti worker clause for the period of lockdown. Later this fee can be re-calculated with proper consultation.

13. For Mines and Mineral workers

- Relief fund from District Mineral Foundation
- Ration distribution through Aadhar Card
- Free access to Shivbhojan

14. For Recyclers:

- Registering recyclers with the Recyclers association to access PDS and relief measures
- Vaccination on temporary ID
- Give them the free testing facility
- Stop eviction as most of them live on worksites
- Set up centres at recycling hubs for distribution of relief and monetary support

Findings from the YUVA study of 30,000 workers in 2020 on Impact of COVID-19 on Urban Poor:

- Out of 6937 surveyed construction workers, only 30% were able to receive relief fund
- Out of 2253 surveyed domestic workers only 12% were registered with Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board
- Out of 14,133 households, 82.78 per cent were enrolled with the PDS
- Among these 45.49 per cent had ration cards registered within the MMR
- Among 4,805 households living on 16 construction sites, 10.38 per cent had ration cards in the current city
- 18 per cent ration card not linked to Aadhaar card
- Possession of a ration card didn't directly imply access, availability or adequacy of ration
- Only BPL families eligible for the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), a majority of the urban poor still have to pay to access cooking fuel.
- 6,418 households (63.27 per cent) had a family member with a bank account
- 3,412 households (23.13 per cent) had a bank account in the name of a female family member. Not all were PMJDY accounts where the cash transfer was made.

- Lack of awareness between a zero-balance account and a PMJDY account; many having the latter - ineligible for the cash transfer.

WPC will continue to help as many workers as possible through this difficult time, but our resources are limited. We believe this government is committed to the well being of workers in the city and it is with this belief in mind that we urge you to take immediate action to address the extreme distress experienced by migrant and informal sector workers. We urge you to take concrete steps towards these genuine and pressing demands that we are putting forward on the behalf of various constituencies of workers that we represent.

Signatory Maharashtra Chapter of the Working Peoples' Charter (WPC) Network, India

1. Bastu Rege, Dagadkhan Kamgar Vikas Parishad
2. Bilal Khan, Ghar Banao Ghar Bachao Andolan
3. Chandan Kumar, Hamal Panchayat
4. Jibin J, United Nurses Association, Maharashtra
5. Kashinath Nakhate, Kashtikari Sangarsh Mahasangh, Maharashtra
6. Macanzy Dabre, National Hawkers Federation, Maharashtra
7. Madhukant Patharia, Nirman Mazdoor Sangh
8. Marina Joseph, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action
9. Meena Menon, WPC & Labour Axis
10. Prashant Bhagesh Sawardekar, Maharashtra App-Based Transport Workers Union
11. Pravin Yerunkar, Girni Kamgar Sangarsh Samiti
12. Raghav Mehrotra, Aajeevika Bureau
13. Raju Bhise, Kamgar Ekta Union
14. Shweta Damle, Habitat & Livelihood Welfare Association & Labour Axis
15. Vinod Shetty, Dharavi Recyclers Collective

Please contact us with any questions,

Shweta Tambe

Ph no: +91 9833700196

Bilal Khan

Ph no: +91 9958660556

Rajendra Bhise

Ph no: +91 9145674847

Chandan Kumar

Ph no: +91 9717891696

WPC main office: 33 D DDA-SFS Flats, Vijay Mandal Enclave,
Kalu Sarai, Delhi-110016.

Email: workerscharterprocess@gmail.com;

URL: <https://www.workingpeoplescharter.in>

Twitter: @IndiaWpc

Facebook: @IndiaWpc
