

## Daily Newspaper Editorial Analysis 6 January 2025

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Institute for IAS Examination

# Daily Editorial Analysis

Launched in May 2021 in response to the Supreme Court's directive, the portal aimed to address the distressing plight of migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic by creating a unified national database.

### Context

- The **Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoL&E) in India recently declared the e-Shram portal as the largest database of unorganised workers** globally, with over 300 million workers registered.
- **Launched in May 2021** in response to the Supreme Court's directive, **the portal aimed to address the distressing plight of migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic** by creating a unified national database.
- **Despite this ambitious initiative, challenges in its implementation and gaps in its utility highlight the pressing need for more robust measures** to ensure social protection and inclusion for India's vulnerable unorganised workforce.

### Historical Context and the Need for a Database

- The concept of maintaining a database for migrant and unorganised workers is not new.

- **The Interstate Migrant Workmen Act (1979) mandated contractors to provide detailed worker records**, and the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (2007) called for universal worker registration.
- Similarly, **the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (2008) proposed identity cards for workers**.
- However, **these efforts failed to gain traction**, leaving millions of workers invisible to policymakers and the public.
- **This historical neglect underscores the significance of the e-Shram portal** as a potentially transformative initiative.

## Understanding the Vulnerability of Migrant Workers

### • Socio-Economic Exclusion

- The lack of stable employment ties leaves migrant workers in a precarious situation.
- **Many are employed informally** in sectors such as construction, agriculture, domestic work, and small-scale industries, where job security is almost non-existent.
- **Without formal contracts, they have little to no bargaining power** and are frequently subjected to exploitative working conditions, including low wages, long hours, and unsafe environments.
- The **absence of unionisation further worsens their vulnerability**, as they are unable to collectively advocate for better terms or working conditions.

### • Challenges of Disenfranchisement

- Due to the transient nature of their employment, **migrant workers often lack access to fundamental rights like voting**.
- **Many are unable to register as voters in their place of work**, and their names are often missing from electoral rolls in their home states.
- This **disenfranchisement not only alienates them politically but also deprives them of a voice in decisions** that directly impact their lives, reinforcing their marginalisation.

### • Poor Access to Social Services

- **Access to essential services** such as healthcare, education, housing, and social security **is severely limited for migrant workers**.
- The **lack of portability of welfare benefits across states means that they often cannot avail themselves of government schemes** in their place of work.
- For instance, **migrant families may lose access to ration cards** or healthcare benefits when they move to a new location.
- Similarly, **their children are at risk of losing continuity in education due to frequent relocations**, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and vulnerability.

### • Stigma and Discrimination

- **Migrant workers frequently face stigma and discrimination** in host communities.
- They are **often viewed as outsiders and treated with suspicion**, which leads to social exclusion and sometimes even hostility.
- **This discrimination can limit their opportunities** to integrate into local communities and access resources, further isolating them.

- **Women migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and harassment**, both at work and in their living conditions, compounding their struggles.

## Persistent Challenges

### • Documentation and Eligibility Exclusion

- A significant challenge **lies in the exclusion of workers due to inadequate documentation.**
- **Many migrant workers lack essential identification documents** such as Aadhaar cards, ration cards, or voter IDs, which are often prerequisites for registration.
- Additionally, **issues such as unlinked mobile numbers, lack of permanent phone access, or inconsistent address details complicates their ineligibility.**
- For workers who are constantly on the move or live in temporary housing, **these documentation requirements become insurmountable hurdles**, effectively locking them out of social protection mechanisms.

### • Technological Barriers

- **Although the e-Shram portal aims to simplify access through technology**, digital illiteracy among unorganised workers poses a significant barrier.
- **Many workers, especially those in rural areas, are unfamiliar with online processes** or lack access to smartphones and reliable internet connectivity.
- This **digital divide disproportionately affects women workers**, who often have limited access to personal mobile devices.
- **As a result, many workers are unable to navigate the registration process independently**, relying on intermediaries who may exploit them.

### • Limited Portability of Benefits

- The **mobility of migrant workers creates a unique challenge in ensuring access to welfare benefits** across states.
- While initiatives like the **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** attempt to address this issue, **many schemes remain tied to a worker's place of origin.**
- This **lack of portability leaves inter-state migrants unable to access entitlements** such as subsidised food, housing, or healthcare in their destination states.
- **Without seamless integration of welfare schemes across jurisdictions, a large segment of the migrant workforce remains excluded** from critical support systems.

### • Fragmentation of Social Security Systems

- **India's social security landscape is highly fragmented**, with multiple schemes operating under different ministries and departments.
- While the **OSS attempts to integrate these schemes, the process is far from complete.**
- **Key welfare programs like PM Matru Vandana Yojana and Shramik Suraksha Yojana are yet to be linked with the e-Shram portal**, leaving gaps in coverage.
- Additionally, **overlapping responsibilities and bureaucratic inefficiencies slow down the implementation of a cohesive framework.**

## The Path Ahead

- To fully realise its potential, **the e-Shram portal must transcend its role as a mere registration platform and evolve into a comprehensive tool** for empowering workers.
- This **requires disaggregating migration data, enhancing portability of benefits, and integrating human development outcomes** into program design.
- **Non-profits and policymakers advocate viewing migrants as assets rather than burdens**, emphasising their critical role in driving economic growth.
- **The 2030 Agenda** for Sustainable Development warns **that poorly managed migration can impede progress.**

## Conclusion

- **Migrants and unorganised workers are indispensable to India's economy**, yet they continue to await recognition and rights.
- **The e-Shram portal and OSS are commendable steps, but achieving "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) demands well-designed social protection systems** that prioritise inclusion and equity for this workforce.
- While the e-Shram portal has laid the foundation for addressing long-standing challenges faced by unorganised workers, **its success depends on overcoming systemic barriers and integrating inclusive, sustainable policies.**

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

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