

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1- Society- social issue.

Migrant Workers in India – Unmasking the Contradictions in Our Concern for those Trapped in the Uttarkashi Tunnel

Migrant workers in India refer to individuals who move within the country in search of employment opportunities. This migration can be from rural to urban areas, rural to rural, within or between states, and can involve circular or seasonal relocations. A significant percentage of India's population, around 35-40%, is involved in internal migration.

These workers often come from economically disadvantaged states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand, seeking jobs in more prosperous regions such as Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Karnataka. The low availability of formal sector employment in India, approximately 22% according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2021-2022, contributes to this migration.

Challenges faced by migrant workers in India include unsafe working conditions, inadequate legal protection, discrimination and social exclusion, and poor living conditions. Instances such as the Uttarakhand tunnel incident highlight the risks associated with their work, and the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act of 1979, aimed at protecting their rights, is poorly implemented.

To address these challenges, the Indian government has introduced various initiatives:

1. **National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW):** Aims to create a comprehensive database with Aadhaar-seeded information, enhancing employability and social security access.
2. **Schemes for Welfare:** Initiatives like Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri SVANIDHI Scheme, Aatm Nirbhar Bharat, and others provide financial assistance and support.
3. **All India Survey on Migrant Workers:** Conducted by the Labour Bureau, this survey provides detailed insights into the conditions of migrant workers.
4. **Education and Scholarships:** Programs such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan offer free education to the children of migrant workers, and scholarships are provided through the National Scholarship Portal.
5. **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (OSH Code) 2020:** This code replaces the Inter-state Migrant Workmen Act (1979) and ensures better working conditions, wages, and social security for migrant workers.

To further improve the situation, it is crucial to develop comprehensive policies that specifically address the unique needs of migrant workers. These policies should cover healthcare, housing, and education for their children. Stricter safety measures in workplaces, especially in high-risk industries, are essential. Additionally, efforts should be made to create urban areas that are considerate of and accommodating to the needs of migrant workers, going beyond the concept of "smart cities" to focus on dignity and inclusivity.