

Greetings from Indian Society of Labour Economics!

PRESS RELEASE

- **India's top economists, social scientists, workers' organisations, and former civil servants appeal for urgent intervention from PM/CM of States to ameliorate the impact on Vulnerable Workers and Populations induced by COVID-19 lockdown:**

-“The Centre and States together should try and ensure a minimum transfer of at least Rs 6000 per month to each JDY woman account holder with a major part borne by the Central Government over the next three months”

-“All state governments should ensure that at least 10 kg free rations per person per month, along with other necessary items, is available for all eligible households”

-“Three to four fold increase of the current short-term relief package for impacted informal workers”

As the corona pandemic and the measures to contain it, unfold, India is witnessing a humanitarian and economic crisis of unprecedented proportions. While welcoming the Central government's Rs. 1.7 trillion package and various measures taken by state governments, the Indian Society of Labour Economics (ISLE) and the signatories to this letter strongly appeal to the Government of India for a *three to four fold increase in the current relief package.*

Nearly three hundred economists, academicians, activists and former civil servants have appealed to the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers of States to scale up the measures being taken, given the magnitude of the crisis that the country as a whole is facing. In the letter to the Prime Minister and the State Chief Ministers, they have proposed urgent additional measures that are required to address critical gaps that exist in the short-term relief measures announced so far.

The proposal encompasses immediate short term measures needed by the government to provide the following:

1. Cash transfer of Rs. 6000 per month .to each household which does not have a person in formal employment or is not a tax payer. The estimated burden of about Rs 360,000 crores for three months to be borne principally by the Centre but shared between Centre and States.
2. Food and subsistence requirements- Ten kg cereals and other essential items per person per month free of cost through the PDS and food for the homeless and most distressed, to meet the basic food requirement of the poor in the informal economy who have lost jobs and incomes.
3. Retention of contract employees: All public sector entities should issue immediate orders for the retention of contract employees and payment of full wages to them. The Central government has been requested to come out with a scheme to compensate the unorganised and MSME sector for payment of wages to contract and temporary employees during the lockdown.
4. Ex gratia payments: They have urged the governments to provide ex gratia payments and to ensure that no needy person or household remains outside the social protection net being created to cope with the current calamitous conditions
5. Steps to deal with the stranded population- A large numbers of informal workers in the urban economy are migrants who are currently without employment, wages, or shelter. They estimate that out of a total of forty to fifty million wage employed seasonal circular migrants in the informal economy, a large proportion – especially those in construction, manufacturing or transport/travel industries – are currently without employment and want to head back to their villages, with their accompanying family members. These figures will increase if the lockdown extends.The facilities and space at the disposal of the Centre and the States should be utilized such that there is no over-crowding for migrants who stay back and food and subsistence facilities should be made available; States should step up community feeding programmes; NDMA should immediately and urgently oversee a coordinated arrangement for transporting migrant workers who are already on the road by special trains, buses, or trucks. etc. to their home states/districts. Preference should be

given to isolating / self-isolating returnees at or near their homes, following established health protocols. Compulsory quarantine only where required.

6. Measures to ensure safe harvesting and post-harvesting activities in rural areas - Procurement at MSP and storage by the FCI and State agencies needs to be enhanced to prevent a famine like condition from evolving.
7. Support of civil society and voluntary workers be enlisted in identifying vulnerabilities and assisting with the deliverables to augment government's capacity and preparedness to face the outcomes of the pandemic
8. Ensuring the safety, security, and welfare of the front-line workers, including those engaged in essential services on behalf of governments (such as sanitation workers), or private firms (delivery workers, workers in chemist shops etc.)
9. Release under-trial persons and political persons, or those in jails for minor issues, in order to immediately decongest prisons and jails and release resources.
10. Revision of NDMA Guidelines customized to the characteristics of the majority of the poor Indian population and to allow people to produce, deliver, as well as access essential services, while maintaining social distancing and other public health related measures necessary under the present circumstances.

The signatories have appealed to the Government of India that as a sovereign institution which alone has the fiscal capacity to raise significant financial resources, it should immediately increase the current relief package, including support to states, by three to four times. They have also asked for more effective consultation and coordination between centre and states.

[The signatories to the letter include Prof. Deepak Nayyar, Former Chief Economic Advisor and President, ISLE; Dr. Alakh Sharma, Conference President, ISLE, Prof. Ravi Srivastava, Dr. Indira Hirway, Prof. D. N. Reddy, Dr. Ajit Ghose, Prof. Jayati Ghose, Prof. Abhijit Sen, Prof. Prabhat Patnaik, Prof. S. K. Thorat, Prof. K. P. Kannan, Prof. S. S. Gill, Prof. S. Mahendra Dev - all Former Conference Presidents of ISLE; Prof. Pravin Jha, Prof. Ritu Dewan, Prof. Lakhwinder Singh, former & present Vice Presidents of ISLE; Prof. I. C. Awasthi and Prof. Nripendra Mishra, Gen. Secretary and Treasurer, ISLE, Dr. Rakesh Mohan, former Deputy Governor, RBI; Dr. Ashok Gulati, ICRIER; Dr. Bina Agarwal, Former Director, IEG, Dr. N. C. Saxena (Former Member Secretary, Planning Commission); Ms. Sujata Rao (Former Union Health Secretary); Mr. Amitabh Pandey (Former Secretary, Interstate Council); Lord Meghnad Desai (British Economist and Labour Politician); Prof. Jeemol Unni, Ahmedabad University; Prof. Rakesh Basant, Dr. Ernesto Noronha (IIMA) Prof. Amita Bhide, Prof. Ramakumar R. and Prof. Aseem Prakash (TISS); Dr. Alpa Shah (LSE); Prof. Meera Tewari (University of East London); Prof. Carol Upadhyay (NIAS); Dr. Ajit Ranade (Chief Economist, Aditya Birla Group); Dr. Shiva Kumar (Development Economist), Prof. Madhura Swaminathan (ISI, Benagluru); Dr. Jean Dreze (Visiting Professor, Ranchi); Prof. Mrigank Sur (MIT); Mr. Bezwada Wilson (Safai Karmchari Andolan); Dr. Dinesh Awasthy (former Director, EDI, Ahmedabad); Prof. K. R. Shyamsundar (XLRI); Prof. Ishita Mukhopadhyay (Univ. of Calcutta); Dr. Nagesh Kumar (UNESCAP); Dr. Poonam Muthreja (Population Foundation of India); Mr. Vidya Sagar Giri (AITUC); Mr. Vrijesh Upadhyay (BMS); Mr. Gautam Mody (NTUI); Dr. Indu Agnihotri (Former Director, CWDS), Mr. Rajiv Khandelwal (Ajjevika Bureau)]

The proposal is enclosed herewith.

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Information about the **Indian Society of Labour Economics** is available on www.isleijle.org

Looking forward to your endorsement to the cause and immediate coverage,

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