Database on unorganised workers gets under way

Ten years after passing a law that envisaged a portable smart ID card for unorganised workers, the Centre has started work to create a national database and Aadhaar-seeded identification number system to facilitate welfare delivery to 40 crore workers in the sector.

The Union Ministry of Labour has called for tenders to design, develop and run the new UWIN — Unorganised Workers Identification Number — Platform. In December 2017, Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Minister of State for Labour and Employment told the Rajya Sabha that the project would have an estimated cost of Rs. 402.7 crore. The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008 had first mandated that every worker be registered and issued a smart ID card.

According to the notice, the "single unified sanitised database" will assign a ten-digit UWIN to every worker and include details of both nuclear and extended families of unorganised workers. Apart from enabling the delivery of multiple social security services, it will also give the government a wealth of data to drive evidence-based policy making, help identify and enable skill development, and link employers with workers. Business services could also be provided to beneficiaries using IT apps and an open API layer.

The platform will be set up within six months of the contract being signed, and a third of the workers are expected to be registered in the first year, with the remainder to be registered in the second year.

While the Centre — through the service provider — will create and maintain the platform, it is up to the States to identify and register unorganised workers either through door-to-door surveys or facilitation centres and camps. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011 will be used as the base for the platform, and other worker databases — from the States as well as other Central Ministries such as Textiles and Health — will also be incorporated into UWIN. The Andhra Pradesh Social Security Board's Aadhaar-linked database with 2.2 crore workers will be used as an efficacy indicator for the national project.

Although the Supreme Court has not yet ruled on the legitimacy of making Aadhaar mandatory for entitlements, the entire UWIN platform is built around Aadhaar. "It is envisioned to have backend Aadhaar linkage to the UWIN number for the purpose of having an authenticated database," says the notice. The service provider "is expected to design processes by the means of which authentication of the unorganised worker is performed using Aadhaar information."

Those who have enrolled for Aadhaar but have not yet received it can provisionally enrol themselves into the UWIN system with their Aadhaar Enrolment ID. However, it is only when they are able to link Aadhaar with their dataset at a later stage that they will actually be assigned a UWIN number. The only exception provided is for "areas that do not have any Aadhaar coverage" which must be approved by the Labour Ministry, where other government identity documents will be allowed, with an option of linking Aadhaar at a later stage.