

# MIGRANTS TO GET CHEAP HOUSING, UNIVERSAL RATION

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

The Centre made the use of ration cards portable, allowing migrants to use them at any fair price shop in the country

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday offered free foodgrains and affordable housing to migrant workers who have been stranded in cities without jobs or money to sustain themselves during the lockdown.

The measures, part of the 20 trillion package to revive the Indian economy, include providing free rice, wheat and gram or chickpea for the next two months; allowing nationwide usage of public distribution system (PDS) ration cards, and an affordable rental housing scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

The government has faced criticism for overlooking the plight of migrants who have been worst hit by the lockdown. Thousands of migrants have tried to flee cities on foot, trying to make way to their villages, hundreds of miles away.

On Thursday, the government addressed some of their problems. It made the use of ration cards portable, allowing migrants to use them at any fair price shop in the country. About 630 million beneficiaries in 23 states will be covered under the scheme by August while full portability will be achieved by March next year.

"Those who are not card holders, that is, who are not covered under the National Food Security Act or are holders of any state government card, they shall be given 5kg per person of wheat or rice and 1kg of chana (chickpea) per family," Sitharaman said in her second press conference to unveil details of the stimulus package.

This is expected to benefit 80 million migrant workers and will cost the Centre 3,500 crore. The measure aims to ensure affordable food is available to people who migrate to cities for work but can't access fair-price shops as they do not have public distribution system cards in places where they work. The government had already announced additional allocation of rice and wheat under PDS.

Also a 5,000 crore special credit facility for street vendors will be implemented. The government will also convert state-funded housing into affordable rental housing complexes under a public-private partnership. This may encourage poor migrants to stay in the cities.

The covid-19 pandemic has hit India's poor the hardest as locked factories and other workplaces rendered them jobless and penniless.

Sitharaman said 146.2 million person-days of work has been generated till 13 May under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for returning migrants and a drive is being undertaken to enrol them.

According to the government, the actual expenditure has been around 10,000 crore and work has been offered to 23.3 million wage seekers in 187,000 gram panchayats. Also, plans are on

to continue MNREGS works in plantations, horticulture and livestock farming during monsoon .

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