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7th April, 2020

Dear Mr. Rabindra Panwar,

As you may be aware, National Commission for Women is the apex level national organization of the Country with the mandate of promoting and protecting the interest of the Women. As India goes into lockdown in an effort to contain the spread of Covid-19, thousands of migrant workers especially women and children are stranded across the nation.

Since women are the most adversely affected in situations of crisis, it becomes extremely pivotal that safety and security of women migrants is ensured. In view of this, the Commission has formulated comprehensive guidelines/advisories to address the needs of "Internal Women Migrants in India during the Covid-19 lockdown."

I request you to take appropriate measures to ensure adherence of the attached advisories for identification of specific vulnerabilities and challenges faced by different groups of women migrants and address them during the Covid-19 Lockdown. The various organizations functioning under the administrative control of your Ministry may be also advised to implement the advisories so as to address the challenges faced by women migrants.

Regards,

(Rekha Sharma)

Encl: as above.

Mr. Rabindra Panwar
Secretary
Ministry of Women and Child Deve
Shastri Bhawan
New Delhi-110001

Advisory to address needs of internal women migrants in India during COVID-19 Lockdown

The CoViD-19 epidemic has affected many countries and the World Health Organization has declared it 'Pandemic'. Government of India (GOI) has been taking several proactive preventive and mitigating measures to contain the spread of this virus early on. The announcement of 21-day lockdown by the Hon'ble Prime Minister came in the wake of this outbreak to enable 'social distancing', an effective non-pharmaceutical prevention and control intervention. The far-sighted and unprecedented step of lockdown however saw a large scale movement of migrant workers across the country due to lack of livelihood, food and shelter.

National Commission for Women is aware that the Government of India has been relentlessly working for the welfare of these migrants and checking of any exodus during this lockdown. The Commission being the apex statutory body to work for women empowerment in the country deems itself duty-bound to propose certain interventions in light of its mandate.

In these testing times, it is extremely pertinent to respect the dignity and fundamental rights of all migrant women and girls by ensuring food, safety, shelter and healthcare. India is established as a welfare state by the Constitution and is responsible for social security of its citizens through Directive Principle of State Policy. Article 39, 42 and 47 of the Constitution are dedicated to ensure social security including appropriate healthcare, food, shelter and safety to its citizens especially workers.

Since women are the most adversely affected in situations of crisis, it becomes extremely pivotal that safety and security of women migrants is ensured. In view of this, the Commission issues this advisory on **07.04.2020** to address the following needs of 'Internal Women Migrants in India during COVID-19 lockdown'.

1. Food
2. Shelter/ Accommodation
3. Safety and security (from Gender based Violence)
4. Health
5. Mental Health
6. Hygiene

1. Food

- a. Ensure migrant women and girls have access to nutritious food prepared in hygienic conditions and safe drinking water. Free provision of essential food and medicines to be ensured for migrant women irrespective of their entitlement or registration status.
- b. Ensure provisions like cooking oil, other essential food items and cooking fuel to all migrant women and girls.
- c. Government should work towards identifying marginalized migrant workers and provide uninterrupted supply of essential commodities to them, in particular, door to door ration delivery should be arranged keeping in view the WHO and MoH&FW guidelines of sanitization and hygiene in place

2. Shelter/ Accommodation

- a. Family separation should be avoided as much as possible when reallocating accommodation due to crisis and children should not be left unaccompanied.
- b. Ensure that migrant women and girls do not live in congested arrangements that heighten their vulnerability to COVID-19 infection.
- c. Inspect accommodation facilities provided by industrial units to women and girls regularly or as needed. For those migrant workers living in employer-provided accommodation, ensure the provision of information and promote practices to prevent infection including physical distancing and from being forcibly evicted.
- d. Any temporary shelter home arranged by the Government must ensure that women migrants can live there with dignity and that it maintains their adequate privacy by ensuring access to appropriate and safe sanitation facilities.
- e. Ensure distribution of sanitary napkins and special provision for lactating women in temporary shelters.

3. Safety and Security (Protection of Gender based Violence and harassment)

- a. Ensure that mechanisms are in place and human resources are ready at central, state, district and local levels to respond to the incidences of violence and harassment at central, state, district and local levels.
- b. Helplines to be setup or publicized widely with adequate number of counsellors to help women in distress.
- c. SLSAs and DLSAs may provide legal aid to women over phone and mail. They may also work towards providing a list of lawyers working at home under their legal aid program.

- d. Ensure the availability of shelters for those escaping from violence and harassment.
- e. Any such incident should be immediately reported and addressed preferably by women police officers.
- f. Strict action against any form of police excess on women and children to be taken by the appropriate government.
- g. Ensure availability of local grievance redressal mechanisms for the migrants especially women migrants that are accessible and inclusive in terms of language and distance.

4. Health care

- a. Ensure women migrants' access to medical care including mental healthcare, medicines, and other health care services depending on their health situation, including health care for children.
- b. Mobile CoViD screening units may be deployed in major residential pockets/shelters of migrants, for regular screening for symptoms and also providing healthcare services.
- c. Ensure women's reproductive health including access to maternal care and other pre-natal and post-natal emergencies that may arise.
- d. Urban Health Centres should reach out to migrant clusters for medical care and other health care facilities.
- e. Supply of contraceptives and sanitary napkins should be flagged as essential services that ought to be available to every woman. They should be provided from door to door, in vulnerable communities and as part of ration supplies.

5. Mental health

- a. Address specific trauma (including violence and harassment, managing unwanted pregnancies, abortions, miscarriages and deliveries) through mental health interventions and psycho-social services through helplines and physical help-desks where possible.
- b. Ensure that women migrants have access to means of communication to communicate with their families and relative, places of origin, etc.

6. Hygiene (Water and Sanitation facilities)

- a. Ensure that the sanitation facility is made safe and accessible for 24 hours while ensuring their privacy and access to menstrual hygiene.
- b. Ensure free provision of sanitary napkins and toiletries (soaps and sanitizers) to maintain hygiene. Handmade masks may also be provided.
- c. Ensure availability of running water.

7. Quarantine measures

- a. A gender-responsive and child-sensitive protocol should be designed, adopted and implemented with regards to the separation of children from mothers who are infected and in the absence of other family members.

8. Role of Government authorities (Central, State and local authorities):

- a. Sensitize, train and inform the government officials at all levels who have to specifically provide services to migrant women and girls for their specific needs. The topic should cover, but not limited to human rights, non-discrimination, violence and harassment prevention and response.
- b. Ensure that migrant women and girls have access to or are supported through all procedures such as registration with local authorities.
- c. Government authorities should ensure the availability and decent working conditions of officials, volunteers, and health care workers who speak the language of the migrants to provide assurance and informed support and guidance to migrant women and girls.
- d. Governments should carry out a quick survey/identification of migrants to assess the number of women and adolescent workers (with family and without family) for planning and ensuring benefits to the women and girls in an adequate and timely manner. CSOs can be actively involved in this exercise for maximum outreach.
- e. Ensure coordination between government authorities at all levels within State government, amongst States and between States and Central governments on all aspects of the protection of women migrant workers including providing them with adequate access to basic relief measures and decent quarantine conditions as per Government's Advisories and orders.
- f. Governments at all levels should collaborate with each other and with workers' organisations, employers' organisations, civil society organisations, medical health

providers, media, recruitment agencies and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the safety of migrant women and girls

- g. A special task force may be set up to document hardships faced by women migrant workers and to ensure that they receive benefits during and after the lockdown period.

9. Specific advisory for certain groups of women migrants

- a. **Women migrants from north east** working in several states and cities outside the north east region have been reported to face harassment **due to their physical features** identifying the contagion/CoViD crisis to their community. Law against prevention of atrocities should therefore be widely publicized and immediate action be taken against offender(s). Any such racist violence has to be discouraged with positive messaging by the Government.
- b. State government must ensure nutritious meals for **pregnant and lactating women**, health checks for pregnant women, supply of medicines and health care for pregnant women and provisions for safe deliveries. Health care for newborn babies and provisions for their nutrition must be provided.

Keeping in view the urgency and significance of the matter, the Commission requests support from all concerned Ministries and State Government/Authorities copied herein for effective implementation of this advisory.

National Commission for Women