

To
Member Secretary,
State Legal Services Authority
Chhattisgarh

Respected Sir,

Greetings from Centre for Social Justice.

You are well apprised of the worrying situation of migrant labourers, students and other people who migrate and travel inter-state for work as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Presently, four categories of people need support.

1. People who are stuck in various places because of transportation not being available
2. People in transit, on foot, for distances as far as 400 kilometres
3. People who have returned and are not being allowed to enter their villages
4. People who have come back and are either not properly examined or even if examined need to isolate themselves for two weeks and are either not advised or have no such options.

NALSA Scheme For Legal Services To Disaster Victims mandates a multi-pronged response to address the needs of disaster affected people. This includes, amongst other things, facilitating safe transportation, uniting with family, coordinating with various departments

etc. <https://nalsa.gov.in/acts-rules/preventive-strategic-legal-services-schemes/schemes-for-legal-services-to-disaster-victims-through-legal-services-authorities>

NALSA Legal Services to the Workers in the Unorganized Sector Scheme, 2015 mandates setting up of special cell to identify, register, counsel, inform and facilitate the entitlements available to the unorganized labour under various government schemes. <https://nalsa.gov.in/acts-rules/preventive-strategic-legal-services-schemes/nalsa-legal-services-to-the-workers-in-the-unorganized-sector-scheme-2015>

The two schemes read together provide the most needed response mechanism to address the immediate and long term needs of the people affected by the lock down.

While we realize that the respective DLSAs are under equipped / resourced to implement the two schemes most relevant in today's time, with partnerships with local NGOs and colleges, it is possible to reach out to the vast majority of people who need the support.

Our efforts at seeking a collaboration in various districts have not been successful. Given the gravity of the situation, we draw your attention to the following and seek immediate action

1. Proactively seek NGO assistance, seek their list of village volunteers and replace them with the existing non performing-on-paper list of PLVs under the Paralegal Volunteer Scheme.
2. Set up a help line and ask the TLC and DLC to track routes on which people are walking to reach their destination, organize food and resting facilities and make arrangements for safe transit. While it promising to see that SLSA's national 15100 helpline is playing an active role, our experience so far suggests that the phone is under resourced. The response could be strengthened by engaging with law college students/NGOs to bolster capacity.
3. Set up spaces like prathmik shala, community centres, panchayat bhawans, schools etc. as spaces where people can stay in isolation for two weeks.
4. Involve colleges to create audio-visual print material on entitlements announced from time to time and circulate these to create awareness amongst beneficiary groups.
5. Compile a list of workers registered under various laws like the Unorganized Worker Social Security Act 2008, Interstate Migrant Workmen Act 1979, Building and Other Construction Workers Act (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1996, Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970 etc. as a base for facilitating their claims in the future. Develop appropriate communication and outreach strategy for facilitating their claims once the lock down is over
6. Design a three stage response strategy
 - First stage: ensuring immediate needs of food and shelter
 - Second stage: creating awareness of various entitlements
 - Third stage: monitoring and facilitating access and removing systemic issues

To effectively implement the three pronged-approach discussed above, we would like to propose that Centre for Social Justice conduct telephonic training for PLVs associated with DLSAs. This would take the form of a 3-4 hour input session, followed by regular feedback/information and action sharing follow up calls. Considering the exceptional circumstances we find ourselves in, a collaboration of this nature would allow us to synergise efforts and resources, and ensure the best possible response for those most affected by this lockdown.