

# India: Sharp Fall in Number of MGNREGA Workers in Telangana After Union's Push Towards Aadhaar-Based Pay

Tuesday 13 February 2024, by [RAHUL N.](#) (Date first published: 6 February 2024).

**According to experts, the deletion of job cards outnumbered the additions under the scheme because of the new norm.**

**Hyderabad:** The modified Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS) for workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGA) made compulsory from January this year has rendered lakhs of workers ineligible for the scheme.

While the figure of deletion at the national level, according to a rough estimate, is 7.6 crore, in Telangana, about 18.04 lakh workers have been deprived of work in spite of holding job cards issued under the programme.

The employment for rural masses under the programme had served the purpose of minimising their distress on account of lack of work in villages as they were guaranteed a hundred days of wage employment in a year at Rs 272 a day. In comparison, they would earn Rs 400 to 600 a day if landowners could ensure them enough work in their fields.

Introduction of the ABPS deprived workers of even this meagre amount as the Union government mandated a new version that uses the 12-digit Aadhaar number as financial address.

The system, in its old form, envisaged IFSC code of bank branches and account numbers as financial address and was in use in Andhra Pradesh since 2014. But the addition of two more verifications for disbursement of wages in the new system has weaned away the lakhs of workers from the programme.

In addition to this, the government insisted on Aadhaar authentication with job cards which effectively meant that any mismatch between Aadhaar and job cards, including differences in spelling, will render the cardholders ineligible.

The second mandate was that the linkage of Aadhaar details with job cards should pass mapping by National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) which is a third party in the payment chain. The NPCI linking of bank accounts is different from Aadhaar linking of accounts prior to January 1.

Until now, the bank account number with the bank's IFSC code were the financial address of workers for direct transfer of money to their accounts. However, now the fund transfer order by local authorities is generated at a taluq level and referred to the Ministry of Rural Development which approves payments and sends the amount to NPCI together with Aadhaar numbers. The NPCI verifies Aadhaar numbers linkage with bank branches and remits payment to concerned banks for their internal crosscheck before the money is released.

By internal crosscheck, the bank's Institutional Identification Number (IIN) must itself be mapped

with the NPCI database. So, both Aadhaar and banks IIN must be mapped with the NPCI database.

A senior official in the rural development department of Telangana said the new system was introduced to check bogus cards. It will supplement the Aadhaar-based face authentication attendance to check bogus cards and fake muster rolls.

Apart from the changes in the ABPS, the Union government has also introduced changes in the National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS) app that is used to mark attendance of workers.

Earlier, the attendance was taken by taking a group photo of the workers and uploaded on NMMS. But this was misused and absentees were marked present and paid wages.

Instead of group photos, the Union has introduced options within the app to take attendance through iris and Aadhaar-based face authentication.

In many cases, the photos taken by field assistants of the programme did not show the workers' faces clearly and only their strength on the field was visible. Now, not only the faces of the workers are captured but also their geo coordinates, eliminating attempts to mark attendance without physically being present for work. The Aadhaar KYC is also completed through biometrics when the photo is taken for the first time.

Of the nearly one crore MGNREGA workers in Telangana two years ago, their number has sharply dwindled since April 2022 due to increased pressure on the state government to transition to ABPS.

According to Buddha Chakradhar, a senior researcher at Liberation Technology India, a research organisation focussing on public services, the deletion of job cards outnumbered additions because of the new norm.

He said that most banks had no idea about NPCI linking of bank accounts. Aadhaar linking was totally different from NPCI linking of bank accounts. The bank officials were also to blame for making ineligible a large number of workers due to lack of proper understanding, he said.

As the workers were vexed with mismatch in details of their Aadhaar and job cards, they gave up correcting the two documents after making frantic efforts in local revenue offices and computer aided facilitation centres. The field level officials checked the details of unsuccessful workers and sent them back from their workplaces.

The Telangana government made a last ditch effort by taking up the matter with the Union when the linkage was not possible for a large number of workers due to technical and other reasons. However, it had no other option but to implement ABPS from January 1. The Union government had given five extensions to state governments to bring the new rule into force till December 31.

The programme had run into trouble a couple of years ago when the previous Bharat Rashtra Samiti government was accused of sanctioning works against permission like construction of drying platforms in agricultural fields, accommodation for farmers gatherings in villages, cost escalation of work and duplication leading to double payments. A Union government team that toured the state had directed it to recover crores of rupees that was allegedly misused.

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