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*Happy
New Year*

“Change is inevitable. Change will always happen, but you have to apply direction to change, and that's when it's progress.”

— Doug Baldwin

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UCS POV : A RECAP OF MAJOR LABOUR LAWS UPDATES OF 2023

SHAIJU MATHEW
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

“Wishing all our valued clients and readers a prosperous 2024! With 2023 in the rear-view mirror, here is a recap of significant labour laws that generated buzz across industries.”

- **Higher Pension Implementation:** The judgment of the Honourable Supreme Court dated 04.11.2022 granted employees to enrol under the voluntary higher pension scheme under the EPF Act. Given the higher pension circular issued and to facilitate many members to opt for the same the EPFO had extended the application filing timeline for the employees to apply for the scheme which ended by July 2023 and for the employer to approve the applications by 31st December 2023. The scheme is open to applications from PF members whose PF wages exceed Rs. 15,000 and whose contributions are not limited by the ceiling limit. Only a small portion of PF members have filed for the scheme, and given the many verification criteria, fund distribution under EPS, and other factors, the approval of the application by EPFO may take longer than expected. The members approved under the scheme shall receive the pension after attaining 58 years on the last 60 months' average PF wages X Number of years of membership/70.
- **The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 Revoked:** The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 was enacted to reserve 75% of new jobs for local candidates in private sectors including private establishments, societies, trusts, and limited liability partnership firms. On 17th November 2023, the Punjab and Haryana High Court termed the 75% of such domicile reservation quota for locals in Haryana as 'Unconstitutional'. The court also remarked that the said statute is deemed to be unconstitutional and violates Part III of the Constitution of India and is accordingly held ultra vires the same and is ineffective from the date it came into force. Thus, the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 is ineffective from the date it was enacted.

- **KN Standing Orders Exemption Intended to be withdrawn:** The existing Karnataka State Government Standing orders exemption is coming to a closure on 24th May 2024. The Karnataka government plans to withdraw the exemption granted to IT/ITES/BPO/KPO firms from the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 as per the Press note released by the Karnataka Labour Department. This exemption was initially granted in 2014 to support the growth of these emerging industries but has been extended twice due to concerns about job creation and economic impact. The reason for withdrawal is mentioned as Increasing number of industrial disputes, labor disputes, unfair labor practices, and employee grievances in the IT sector.



- **UAN Freezing/De-freezing SOP on suspicious Accounts:** EPFO Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Freezing/de-freezing of MID/UAN/Establishment has been published. It outlines the procedures for identifying, executing, and intimating the freezing of cases within the EPFO system. The freezing of accounts is aimed at protecting the members' funds from fraudulent activities and ensuring proper verification before allowing transactions.
- **Should Maternity Benefits Extend Beyond the Contract Expiry Period?** According to the Honourable Supreme Court judgment on Dr. Kavita Yadav vs. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare dated 17th August 2023, maternity leave should be provided to contract employees even if the period for which an employee claims such benefits exceeds the contractual period. The Honourable Supreme Court judgment has overruled the Lower Court judgments in this matter based on certain provisions under the Maternity Benefit Act. In this particular matter, the Supreme Court had concluded that the appellant has fulfilled the entitlement criteria and has directed the payment of maternity benefit as prescribed under the Act which is beyond the contract period.

- **Poor Implementation of the POSH Act:** The Supreme Court on 12th May 2023 expressed displeasure with the poor implementation of the provisions of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (POSH) Act 2013, even after a decade of its enactment. The Supreme Court observed lapses in the implementation of POSH procedures in workplaces. In order to guarantee that the provisions are strictly observed, the court directed the District Collector, who is the appropriate authority under the Act, to begin inspections of establishments to ascertain whether the businesses are adhering to the POSH compliances. As per the provision of the Act, the Internal Compliance Committee is to be formed with an external member, that self-defense training be given, that POSH policy awareness to be provided and Annual returns to be filed with the concerned authority.
- **PF Joint Declaration Compliance:** The EPFO issued a notification making it mandatory to obtain a Joint Declaration (under Para 26(6) of the EPF scheme) for the employees whose PF contribution is on wages more than the PF wage ceiling of Rs.15,000 pm. The Joint Declaration may become a mandatory document for the employees while applying for withdrawal of their EPF and it is also a mandatory document for the Higher Pension scheme. The companies can issue the Joint Declaration to the employees while they apply for withdrawal of their EPF. However, it is advisable to complete the Joint Declaration for any new joiners as part of the onboarding procedures.

KARNATAKA MULLS REVOKING LABOUR LAW EXEMPTION GRANTED TO IT FIRMS

“Karnataka is the only state to have exempted IT/ITES industries from the provisions of the Act and this exemption is in force since 2014.”

Having received hundreds of complaints from employees of IT and ITES industries about unfair work practices in their respective companies, the government is thinking of revoking an exemption given to these industries from the Industrial Employment (Standing Order Act, 1946), in a bid to impose strict regulations on them. The government is examining the possibility of revoking the exemption from the Standing Order Act, which will help the government closely monitor regulations followed by these companies, a release from the department said. Ranging from unfair termination, mass retrenchment, ID blocking to long work hours and other unfair work practices, the labour department's inboxes are full of complaints from employees, department officials told DH. Since the industries are exempted from the Act, the government cannot directly intervene and it acts as a protective shield for them, Mohammed Mohsin, principal secretary of labour department, said.

Karnataka is the only state to have exempted IT/ITES industries from the provisions of the Act and this exemption is in force since 2014. It was introduced in an effort to encourage the growth of the IT sector in the state.

At present, there are 8,785 IT/BT companies in the state, which employ close to 19 lakh people, according to data available with the labour department. The department is in the process of examining the complaints and will call a stakeholders' meeting soon to decide on revoking the exemption, Mohsin said.

Independent director and former CEO of Nasscom Foundation Ashok Pamidi opined that the government would be boosting the IT sector growth by continuing the exemption. “A majority of the IT industries in Karnataka are export-oriented and hence they already follow globally accepted procedures, for instance the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards. Adding further local procedures would limit their functioning,” he said.



SOURCE | DECCAN HERALD

IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPREME COURT VERDICT IN EPF

As per directions contained in paragraph 44(ix) read with paragraph 44(v) and 44(vi) of the Hon'ble Supreme Court judgment dated 04.11.2022, online applications were called by Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) on 29.12.2022, followed by corrigendum dated 05.01.2023, from pensioners who had retired before 01.09.2014 and had exercised joint option for contributing in pension fund on salary exceeding wage ceiling before their retirement but whose joint options were rejected by the EPFO (on account of cut-off date). Joint options were to be filed on or before 03.03.2023. The date upto which online joint options were to be filed was extended upto 03.05.2023, thereafter upto 26.06.2023 and thereafter up to 11.07.2023. As per directions contained in paragraph 44(iii) & paragraph 44 (iv) read with paragraph 44(v) of the judgment of Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 04.11.2022, instructions were issued by EPFO on 20.02.2023 for online joint options to be filed by the employees who were in service prior to 01.09.2014 and continued to be in service on or after 01.09.2014 but could not exercise joint option under erstwhile proviso to paragraph 11(3) of Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), 1995. Joint option form was to be filled on or before 03.05.2023. The date upto which joint options were to be filled was extended upto 26.06.2023 and thereafter up to 11.07.2023.

In order to implement the directions contained in paragraph 44(vii) of the judgment, the Government has issued two notifications viz. S.O. 2060(E) and S.O. 2061(E) dated 3 May, 2023.

In case of pensioners/members found eligible for pension on higher wages, in compliance of Hon'ble Supreme Court judgement dated 04.11.2022, demand notices are being issued to the pensioners/members. The amount of pension payable on higher salary will vary from case to case.

The pension fund under the EPS, 1995 is a pooled fund. In the pension fund, individual accounts are not maintained. Members of EPS, 1995 are eligible for Withdrawal Benefit or Pension depending on their eligibility based on the number of years of Service. As per actuarial evaluation of the fund as on 31.03.2019, the pension fund is in deficit.

SOURCE | PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU

WHAT IS THE TAXATION ON WITHDRAWAL OF PF?

The Employee Provident Fund (EPF) Act and Scheme does not impose any restriction with regard to the timeline till which a member may keep EPF membership and thus remain invested in the Fund. However, an EPF account becomes inoperative, where an employee retires from service after attaining of 55 years of age and does not apply for withdrawal of accumulated balance within 36 months from the date it becomes payable. Once an EPF account becomes inoperative, no interest is credited to that account from that date. It is assumed that you will retire from your organization after attaining 55 years of age and will not be employed with any other covered establishment. In the absence of any specific restriction, the EPF account can be retained until the time you wish to retain membership. However, interest for cases where the employee retires after attaining 55 years of age is payable to the EPF account for next 3 years post the last month of EPF contributions. As per the Income-tax (IT) Act, accumulated balance to the employee's credit on the date of cessation of employment, is exempt from tax, if the employee has rendered continuous service with his employer (including previous employers if PF has been transferred) for a period of five years or more; or if such continuous service (being less than five years) was terminated due to ill health or contraction or discontinuance of employer's business or any other cause beyond the control of the employee.



Thus, the withdrawal of accumulated balance in your PF account shall not be taxable if you have rendered more than five years of continuous service and have contributed to the EPF for such period. However, the interest accrued on the accumulated balance, post retirement from employment (i.e., the period when no contribution is made to the EPF), is taxable, irrespective of your total contribution period with EPF.

With respect to gratuity, it is assumed that your employer is covered under the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 (POGA). As per the provisions of POGA, gratuity becomes payable to an employee on the termination of his employment on superannuation or his retirement or resignation, provided he has rendered continuous service for not less than five years. Further, the employer is required to pay the amount of gratuity within thirty days from the date it becomes payable.

With respect to taxability of gratuity, the same is exempt from tax subject to the prescribed formula and other conditions, with a maximum prescribed limit of INR 20 Lacs under the IT Act. The same is taxable in the financial year that the same becomes due and payable to you.

SOURCE | LIVE MINT

WHY MANDATORY PERIOD LEAVE MAY NOT WORK

A recent parliamentary debate put minister of women and child development Smriti Irani's stance against paid menstrual leave under the spotlight. Irani asserted that menstruation isn't a handicap, but a natural process. Although this statement has faced some backlash from the public and opposition for being regressive, some important aspects of why implementation of menstrual leave in India is challenging cannot be ignored. While the impact of the menstrual cycle varies for every female, the discomfort it brings may heavily affect their efficiency as workers.

If a female employee already going through problems like PCOD or PCOS, work-related stress may make it even worse, which may eventually translate to more complex issues like infertility, diabetes, or even heart disease. Monthly paid menstrual leave may help them cope better at work and may bring in efficiency. However, economic and societal pressure already work against women. There is a risk that implementing paid menstrual leave might hinder rather than empower women, apart from likely impacting only a handful in the formal sector and neglecting the majority in the informal and unorganised workforce.

Data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) highlights the post-Covid feminisation of agriculture, with over 85% employed in the unorganised sector where existing government rules are seldom adhered to. In the formal sector, women are notably underrepresented, encountering bias during hiring, leading to difficulties securing employment, which is why many women either accept lower-paying jobs or turn to care work. Studies show that during economic distress, women are first in the line to lose jobs, the most distressing part of which is that when there are limited options to secure a job, men are perceived as better candidates.

It is often seen that if two employees, with the same skill set and experience but of different genders, are candidates for a higher position, males are generally preferred as women are perceived to have household responsibilities that can impact their performance. If the menstrual leave policy is enforced, it may further disincentivise employers to hire female employees owing to the additional burden of paid leave every month. Female employees are already burdened with care-work, wage gap, and underrepresentation; on top of that, employer bias against female employees would take a serious toll on female employment.

Japan, Spain, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Zambia have adopted paid menstrual leave. Among these, Japan, Spain, South Korea, and Taiwan, belonging to the high-income group, might have faced different scenarios during implementation. On the other hand, Indonesia and Zambia are both from the Global South and in some respects similar to India. In the cases of Indonesia and Zambia, discomfort linked to menstruation is evident, exacerbated by poor workplace hygiene and limited breaks during work shifts. Furthermore, there's a prevailing doubt regarding whether workers taking leave actually get adequate rest, given the perception that household chores are 'women's responsibility' persists.



Additionally, male counterparts might develop feelings of discontent if they suspect that female employees taking leave aren't using it for rest. In Zambia, dissatisfaction among colleagues and employers arose when women on menstrual leave used this for personal matters instead of using it to cope with menstrual discomfort. This susceptibility can potentially lead to discrimination in the workplace. A mixed response to menstrual paid leave has been observed among the countries implementing this policy. It appears more beneficial for countries that are relatively affluent and have overcome social taboos associated with menstruation. Certain Indian startups like Zomato, Swiggy, Byju's, and Gozooop have adopted paid menstrual leave, positively addressing challenges related to women's menstrual cycles. Encouraging other organisations to voluntarily adopt similar policies might be more effective than mandating it to all the organisations. Nonetheless, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) in India reflects a positive impact of the tax cut on sanitary pads announced on July 21, 2018 where GST on sanitary pads were reduced from 12% to 0%. It reveals a notable increase in women aged between 15 and 24 using hygienic menstrual sanitation products, rising from 57.6% to 77.3% between 2015-16 and 2019-21.

Moreover, there's been a significant convergence between urban and rural women during this period. While in 2015-16, a considerable gap existed, with 48.2% of rural females aged 15 to 24 using hygienic methods compared to 77.5% of urban females, by 2019-21, this gap had significantly narrowed to 72.3% of rural females and 89.4% of urban females using hygienic methods. Similar to the tax-cut policy, simpler interventions may play a more prominent role in addressing issues linked to menstruation. Mandating sanitary pads and tampon vending machines at workplaces and educational institutes may help female students and workers cope with their menstrual cycle. Comprehensive sex education, which covers menstrual cycle information, is crucial for both young girls and boys, especially in rural areas lacking menstrual sanitation facilities. Advocating the need for hygienic toilets would have a huge impact, helping more women and girls to attend work and education.

Furthermore, instead of obliging employers, the government could incentivise menstrual leave through tax exemptions for companies offering it or by introducing additional gender-neutral leave policies for all employees. Government aid, such as covering leave costs via Direct Benefit Transfer, could also be explored. In the Indian context, menstrual paid leave may benefit only a minority of the female population in the short run and may have serious impact on female employment in the long run. To truly benefit from a menstrual paid leave policy, widespread awareness and the eradication of societal taboos associated with menstruation must be addressed.

SOURCE | FINANCIAL EXPRESS

MANDATORY KANNADA LANGUAGE ON NAMEBOARDS

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has issued a notice mandating using the Kannada language on the nameboards of all commercial establishments within its jurisdiction. This initiative aligns with efforts to promote the Kannada language in Bengaluru.

Key Points:

- **60% Kannada Requirement:** Enterprises must display their names in Kannada with at least 60% of the content, including shops, hotels, companies, and other licensed businesses.
- **Prominent Display:** Kannada should be prominently displayed at the top of the nameplates.
- **Compliance Deadline:** While the BBMP Notice mentions January 15, 2024, the Chief Minister's press release states February 28, 2024, as the deadline. Please stay updated for official clarification.
- **License Implications:** Non-compliance will result in license cancellation.
- **Ordinance:** The ordinance is expected to be passed soon, possibly before the state assembly session ends in January 2024.

Action Steps:

- Assess your current name boards: Determine the changes needed to comply with the new regulation.
- New nameboards: Have new nameboards ready well before the confirmed deadline to avoid last-minute issues.

Additional Information:

- The Labour Department has not yet issued any circular on this subject.
- Please discuss with your legal team any additional details/deadlines and do the needful.



SOURCE | BBMP NOTICE

DELHI HC ORDERS DOORDARSHAN TO REINSTATE 5 WORKERS, UPHOLDING TRIBUNAL'S AWARD IN 22-YR-OLD CASE

Sixteen years after an industrial tribunal ordered Delhi's Doordarshan Kendra to reinstate the employment of five casual workers, the Delhi High Court has upheld the award. The workers were dismissed in 2001, and the tribunal had ordered their reinstatement in October, 2007, also asking DD to pay them 25 percent of the wages they missed out on as back pay. However, the high court stayed this award in May, 2008, and the stay remained in force through the intervening years. There were no substantial developments until now, with the court treating it as a 'regular matter' — one that's not heard on priority.

But now, the high court has rejected the state-run broadcaster's arguments against the tribunal's award. In the high court order made public, Justice Chandra Dhari Singh observed that in India, labourers, who mainly come from marginalised backgrounds, "are forced to live at their employers' whims and fancies". This, he said, was because "oftentimes, there's huge disparity in the bargaining power of the said labour force". The case pertained to a labour dispute under the Industrial Disputes Act 1947 (IDA). In its writ petition filed on 13 March, 2008, the DD Kendra had challenged the tribunal's order in the HC, arguing that there was no employer-employee relationship with the workers in the first place since they were hired through a contractor. It also argued that the onus was on the workers to prove that they had worked for 240 days in the year immediately preceding the date of their alleged termination.

The court, however, rejected this contention on the ground that "workmen belonging to the poor strata of society are uneducated and cannot be expected to maintain all the records of their employment". It further said that the settled position of the industrial disputes law states that the referral of a dispute to an industrial tribunal would directly lead to the assumption of the existence of an employee-employer relationship.

Employer-employee relationship

In its ruling the Delhi HC noted that DD Kendra had entered into a contract with an agency 'M/s Navnidh Carriers for Transport, Loading & Unloading Contraction Service' on a commission basis in 1998. It was based on this that the broadcaster had argued that the workers were employed by the contractor. Advocates Shruti Sharma and Pranav Giri, who represented DD, told the court that the tribunal failed to take into account that the state-run broadcaster had no authority or oversight over matters such as hiring, firing, promotions, wage determination, workplace assignment, transfers, or other employment conditions of the workers employed by the contractor. They further argued that the contractor was not registered under the Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970 (CLRA) — a mandatory condition for the supply of labour. They also claimed that even if the contractor was not registered under CLRA, the tribunal should have at the most considered it a violation of Sections 7 (registration of certain establishment) and 12 (licensing of contractors) of the Act and hence, the conclusion that the workers were DD's employees was "legally incorrect and unsustainable". Another argument they made was that the workers' entry or gate passes — which the respondents in the case had used as evidence to establish an employer-employee relationship — were issued after a request from the contractor. It also claimed that the tribunal did not appreciate that DD was not paying the workers any wages. On their part, the workers, who were represented by senior advocate Sanjoy Ghose and advocate Prakhar Bhatnagar, claimed that they had been working at DD for five years without any break in their service and that they were entitled to be regularised. Instead, they were arbitrarily terminated from service on 1 February, 2001, the workers argued. The workers — identified as Mohd. Shahbaz Khan (42), Dhanvir (44), Hans Raj (51), Tej Pal (47) and Manohar Paswan (51) — also contended that they were under DD's direct employment, control, and supervision until the day of their termination.

Control test

The HC looked into two issues — first, if the provisions of the CLRA were applicable and adhered to, and, second, if there was an employer-employee relationship between the workers and DD Kendra. The HC observed that the non-adherence to the mandate of Sections 7 and 12 of the CLRA Act does not directly establish an employer-employee relationship between the parties (workers and DD Kendra). Instead, it looked at other circumstantial evidence to conclude that there indeed was such a relationship even before the contractor came into the picture. The establishment of such a relationship is essential for the workers to avail the benefits under the ID Act.

To establish the employer-employee relationship, the HC relied on a 'control test', used by the Supreme Court and high courts in various rulings. Under this, to prove that an employer has control over an employee, control must exist in two aspects — the nature of work performed and the manner in which work is conducted. However, the court acknowledged that gate passes — which, in this case, were issued between 1996 and 1998 — may not always establish an employee-employer relationship. Instead, it relied on other material evidence, such as an appreciation letter that DD issued directly to some of the workers. The court held this as a compelling piece of evidence to prove such a relationship, saying that it established a direct control over them, therefore meeting the conditions of the control test. The court also held that while the contractor was hired in July 1998, gate passes were issued to the employees even before this. This showed that a relationship between them existed before the contractor came into the picture, the court held. "This court does not find any infirmity with the findings of the learned tribunal as the circumstantial evidence is sufficient to establish the direct relationship of an employee-employer between the parties," the HC said. "The learned tribunal did establish a relationship of such a nature where the petitioner (DD Kendra) was solely in control of the functioning of the respondent workmen and thereby directly terminated their employment."

SOURCE | THE PRINT

EPFO - FAQ FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF JUDGMENT OF HONORABLE SUPREME COURT

Frequently asked Questions (FAQs) for the implementation of the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 04.11.2022. The circular is dated 13.12.2023 and is intended for the reference of the Zonal and Field Offices. The circular emphasizes the need for compliance with the EPF Scheme 1952 and the commitment to adhere to the provisions of the scheme and its related sub-schemes. The document includes a revised set of FAQs and a performa for joint request under paragraph 26(6) of the EPF Scheme 1952, which is related to the implementation of the Hon'ble Supreme Court judgment dated 04.11.2022. Overall, the document serves as a guide for EPFO officials and employees to address common queries and ensure compliance with the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

Para 26(6) Performa:

As per the provided FAQ circular, the employer is required to file a joint request under paragraph 26(6) of the EPF Scheme 1952 for the purpose of enrolling the member or existing member who has been paying contribution on actual pay exceeding the statutory wage ceiling, or existing members whose actual pay exceeds the statutory wage ceiling.

PF Performa Compliance Recommendations for Establishments:

1. Integrate Performa into Joining Process: Include obtaining/submitted the Para 26(6) performa as part of your standard onboarding formalities.
2. Obtain Declarations from Exiting Employees: Ensure all departing employees who haven't previously submitted the declaration complete it before leaving.
3. Collect Declarations from Existing Employees: Initiate a process for existing employees to submit the performa to the Department.

4. Attach Supporting Documents: When filing the joint declaration, enclose the employee's joining month payslip/appointment letter along with the performa.

SOURCE | GOVT. NOTIFICATION

YEAR END REVIEW- MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT

More than 29.23 crore unorganised workers registered on eShram portal.

National Career Service platform has more than 3.64 crore registered Jobseekers, 19.15 Lakh employers and more than 1.92 crore vacancies since its launch in 2015

Rs. 10,043.02 Crore have been given to 60.48 lakhs beneficiaries through 1,52,499 Establishments under Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana

ESIC expanded its coverage to 611 districts, including Lakshdweep, with a network of 161 hospitals and 1574 dispensaries and number of Insured Persons has increased to over 3.72 crore providing social security to more than 12 crore beneficiaries

EPFO credited 8.15% interest in over 24 crore accounts

A total of 75+ bilateral meetings held by Ministry of Labour & Employment under India's G20 Presidency

e-Shram Portal

Launched on 26.08.2021 to create a National Data Base for unorganised workers. eShram won "Gold Award" under "Public Digital Platforms – Central Ministries Departments" category in Digital India Award-2022. The President of India graced the Awards ceremony and conferred the award on 7th January 2023.

From January 2023 to November 2023, total 69.26 lakhs unorganised workers have been registered on eShram portal. Overall, as on 17th December 2023, more than 29.23 crore unorganised workers have been registered on eShram portal. e-Shram portal has also been integrated with NCS, SID portal, PM-SYM, myScheme & DISHA portal.

The other initiatives/ achievements with regard to eShram is as follows:-



- E-Shram data is being used for formalisation of other schemes.
- E-Shram registrants' information was shared with MSME for formalisation of PM-Vishwakarma Scheme.
- Data sharing guidelines/ SOP prepared for States/ UTs.
- Data Sharing Portal was developed and launched. All 36 States/ UTs have been onboarded on Data Sharing Portal and have access to eShram registrants' information of their respective States/ UTs.
- Data sharing guidelines/ SOP prepared for Central Ministries/ Departments.
- Sharing of information related to Construction Sector workers registered on eShram, with State Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards has been started. This will facilitate identification and registration of all such workers with State BOCW boards, based on their eligibility.
- Ex-Gratia module has been launched to provide benefits to the eShram registrants who met with an accident during a specified period, resulting in death or permanent disability.

National Career Service (NCS)

- National Career Service (NCS) Project is a Mission Mode Project launched on 20.07.2015 for transformation of the National Employment Service to provide a variety of employment related services in an online mode like job matching, career counseling, vocational guidance, information on skill development courses, apprenticeship, internships etc. through a digital platform [www.ncs.gov.in]. As on 30th November 2023, NCS platform has more than 3.64 crore registered Jobseekers, 19.15 Lakh employers and more than 1.92 crore vacancies since its launch in 2015. The portal has registered unprecedented more than 13.49 lakh active vacancies during November, 2023.
- NCS portal is integrated with 28 State/UTs to develop a comprehensive pan-India network. Besides states, NCS has also established integration with multiple private portals like monster.com, Freshersworld, HireMee, TCS-iON, Quikr, Qness Corp etc. to post vacancies. NCS is interlinked with Skill India portal of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Udyam Portal (MSME), e-Shram, EPFO, ESIC, DigiLocker etc. aimed to create an ease for NCS stakeholders to get maximum benefit from NCS portal.
- Ministry will soon launch advance version namely NCS 2.0 to facilitate better job matching and search facility for jobseekers along with recommendation engine for skilling by the use of latest technologies and leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning (ML). Thereby facilitating Jobseekers in getting decent jobs as per their skills and will help employers in fulfilling their requirement.

Atmanirbhar Bharat RozgarYojana (ABRY) To boost employment generation and to minimize socio-economic impact of Covid-19 pandemic, Ministry of Labour & Employment on 30.12.2020 notified EPFO-linked Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana (ABRY) scheme. As on 05th December 2023 total benefits of Rs. 10,043.02 Crore have been given to 60.48 lakhs beneficiaries through 1,52,499 Establishments under ABRY.

Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)

- ESIC has significantly expanded its coverage to 611 districts, including Lakshdweep, with a network of 161 hospitals and 1574 dispensaries.
- The number of Insured Persons (IPs) has increased to over 3.72 crore providing social security to more than 12 crore beneficiaries.
- To provide better cancer treatment, since May 2023 ESIC has introduced Chemotherapy services in 38 of its hospitals with 100 beds or more across the country.
- The ESIC is actively improving medical infrastructure, with the number of medical colleges increased to 8, MBBS seats increased to 950, and MD/MS seats increased to 275.
- The other initiatives includes "Kahin bhi, kabhi bhi"; Referral Policy with a real-time dashboard for doctor/specialty-wise referrals, home delivery of medicines and telemedicine for I/Ps or beneficiaries unable to visit the hospital.
- For preventive health, ESIC's has set up public health unit and undertaken mapping of occupational diseases.
- Launch of a 5G Ambulance service provides advanced information on patients en route to the hospital.
- IPs can now avail treatment in hospitals empaneled under the PMJAY scheme.



Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)

- Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has undertaken various key reforms to provide ease to its beneficiaries. These reforms include the transparent computer-generated inspection system, the introduction of an e-Passbook, Onboarding with UMANG, reduction in administrative charges, simplified monthly electronic challan cum return, etc.
- In addition, EPFO has credited 8.15% interest in over 24 crore accounts.
- To guide members, FAQs on the implementation of higher pension have been released.
- The organization also launched the Nidhi Aapke Nikat 2.0 program on January 27, 2023, across all the 692 districts in India. Every EPFO office conducts outreach program at district level on the 27th of each month.

India G20 Presidency

- The G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting 2023 concluded on 20-21 July, 2023 in Indore successfully with unanimous adoption of three G20 Outcome Documents on G20 Policy Priorities on Strategies to Address Skill Gaps Globally, G20 Policy Priorities on Adequate and Sustainable Social Protection and Decent Work for Gig and Platform Workers and G20 Policy Options for Sustainable Financing of Social Protection.
- A total of 75+ bilateral meetings were held by Ministry of Labour & Employment under India's G20 Presidency at disaggregated level.
- The G20 Leaders' Summit was held on 09-10 September, 2023 in New Delhi and it concluded with unanimous adoption of G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration (NDLD). In the NDLD, Para No. 20 on 'Preparing for the Future of Work' and Para 64 on 'Enhancing Economic and Social Empowerment' related to EWG priority areas have been adopted in the G20 Leaders' Summit.

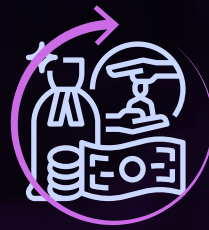


Handbook on Convergence Union Minister for Labour & Employment and Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav released a Handbook on Convergence of various organizations under Ministry of Labour & Employment on 17.11.2023. The handbook consists of Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) for achieving convergence at the field level through collaborative efforts amongst verticals for information exchange, grievance redressal of workers and creating awareness regarding availability of various services of the Ministry and its Organizations.

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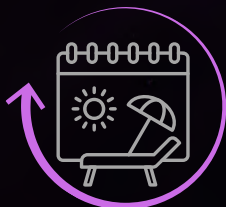
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