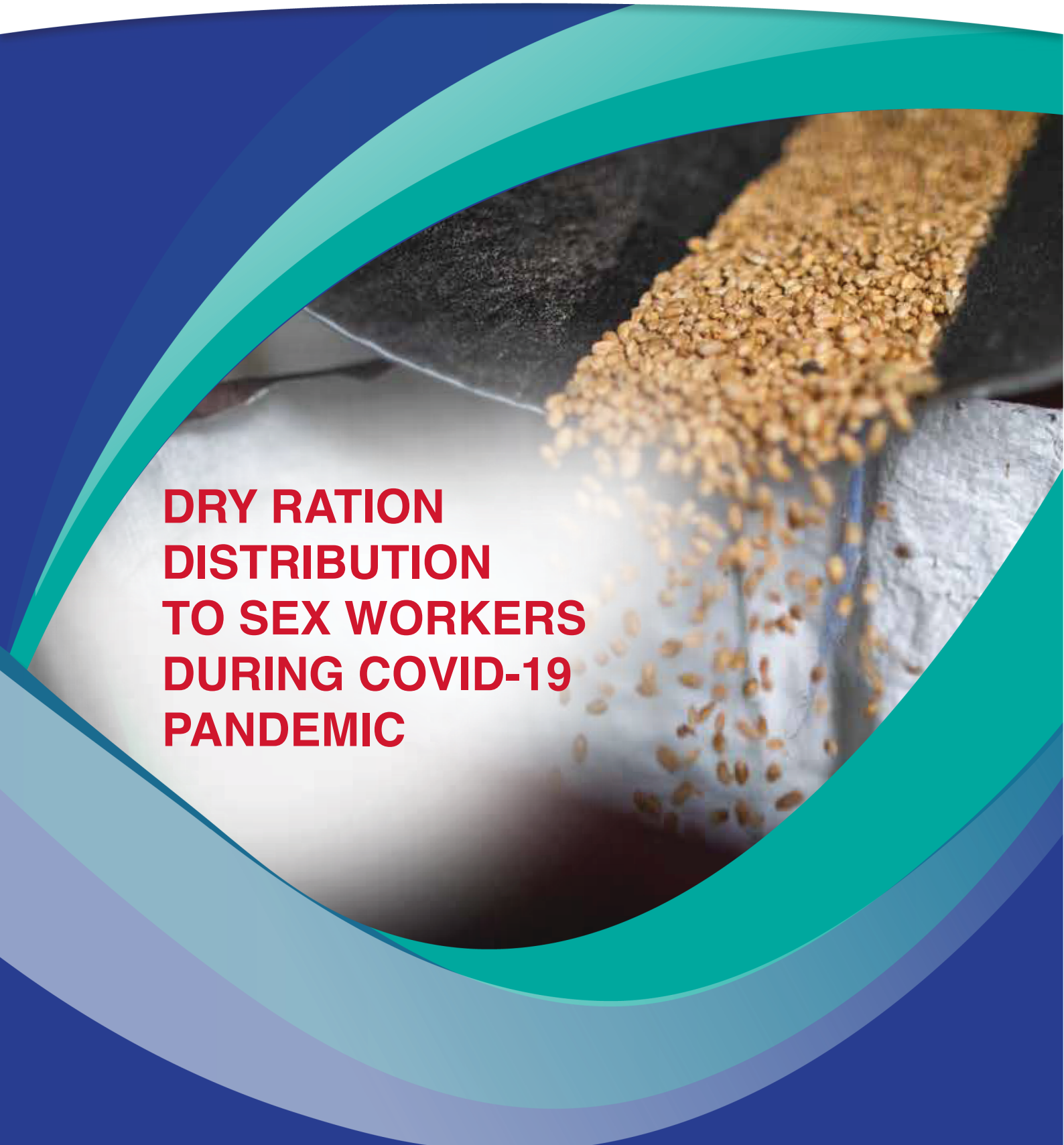




National AIDS Control Organisation  
India's Voice against AIDS  
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India  
www.naco.gov.in



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Ministry of Health & Family Welfare  
Government of India



# DRY RATION DISTRIBUTION TO SEX WORKERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Process Documentation Report  
2023

# DRY RATION DISTRIBUTION TO SEX WORKERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## Process Documentation Report

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### Suggested Citation:

National AIDS Control Organisation, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. (2022). Process Documentation Report: Dry Ration Distribution to Sex Workers during COVID-19 pandemic.

New Delhi, 2023



Supported by  
United Nations Development Programme  
55, Joseph Stein Lane, Lodhi Gardens,  
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वी. हेकाली झिमोमी, भा.प्र.से.  
अपर सचिव एवं महानिदेशक  
V. Hekali Zhimomi, IAS  
Additional Secretary & Director General



## FOREWORD

National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) aims to reach out to every subset of key populations who are at risk of acquiring HIV infection. NACP offers free HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services through its facilities and community settings to the key, vulnerable and other at-risk populations, and People Living with HIV (PLHIV) in a stigma and discrimination-free environment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, sex workers are reported to be disproportionately affected due to the imposition of restrictions which has resulted in the loss of livelihood, affected mobility, and access to HIV/AIDS services. Sex workers faced the difficult choice of isolation with no income or support and remain in the fear of being pushed further into the shadows.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India directed the Central and State/UT governments to provide dry rations to the sex workers who are enrolled under NACP. This directive paved the way to provide support to the sex workers who were otherwise struggling to manage their livelihood, surrounded by an environment of isolation and stigma. NACO took swift action to comply with the direction of the Hon'ble Court and issued an advisory to the States/UTs to reach out to the sex workers with the rations. The progress of the response has been remarkable.

NACO in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took a joint effort to document the entire process of distribution of dry rations to the sex workers. I believe that the findings and observations of this report will give strategic direction to policymakers, administrators, development partners, service providers, and civil society alike for proactively putting in place effective institutionalized mechanisms at appropriate levels to ensure continuous provision of basic amenities such as food for sex workers during such public health crisis.

I am confident that the learnings from this report will help India to plan and develop evidence-informed policies to protect sex workers from the catastrophic health and economic ramifications of COVID-19-like public health emergencies. I appreciate the efforts of the TI Division at NACO and UNDP for the process documentation of this initiative.

(V. HEKALI ZHIMOMI)

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आज़ादी का  
अमृत महोत्सव



राष्ट्रीय एड्स नियंत्रण संगठन  
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National AIDS Control Organisation  
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare  
Government of India



## PREFACE

The COVID-19 pandemic had affected the entire strata of society globally. The imposition of COVID-19 related restrictions had affected the human movement and so also the livelihood of many people in the society. Sex workers faced myriad challenges and had no access even to basic amenities such as food as their livelihood came to a complete halt. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the lack of regular income owing to the pandemic and the lockdown had a domino effect on their access to even basic necessities, including food and good nutrition, for themselves and their dependents. The situation was even more worrisome in the case of sex workers living with HIV/AIDS, older sex workers living with comorbidities, and pregnant women in sex work.

In this light, I am happy to share this report on a unique initiative related to the distribution of dry rations to sex workers in India during the COVID-19 pandemic as per the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India and the guidelines of the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The report cogently showcases how NACO has been able to effectively circumvent multiple challenges in the field to ascertain adequate provision of dry rations for sex workers during the pandemic. By collating the perspectives of different stakeholders, including the beneficiaries, and laying out specific recommendations, the report will enable us to identify the "best-buys" to ensure optimal food support for the marginalized sex workers in resource-constraint settings during public health crises. I am certain that the information and policy recommendations shared in this report will help India to sustain and accelerate progress toward building community resilience beyond COVID-19 by promoting inclusiveness and equity.

I congratulate the TI Division and IEC & Mainstreaming Division at NACO and UNDP for conducting the process documentation. I also appreciate the officials of the State AIDS Control Societies who provided all the information to the documenting team.

(Nidhi Kesarwani)

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### MESSAGE

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The COVID-19 pandemic witnessed increased burden on existing social and healthcare institutions and services throughout the globe. Many individuals including the High Risk Groups lost their livelihoods to fulfill their basic need and hunger during the pandemic.

The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) has been at the forefront to implement multisectoral and multistakeholder response to address HIV/AIDS through prevention, care, and support interventions. Under the mainstreaming efforts of National AIDS Control Programme (NACP), NACO and SACS attempts to bolster the programme interventions for risk reduction, awareness generation, link with social protection services, and enabling a stigma-free environment for the people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) and affected population. NACO's HIV/AIDS mainstreaming model also focuses to address deprivations rooted in socio-economic imbalances such as poverty, gender inequality, food insecurity, nutrition, and other related issues.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of India took multiple initiatives to provide social security and delivery essential services to the poor across the country. These services included the free distribution of dry ration, delivery of health and nutrition services, vaccines, etc. in the country in collaboration with the State/UT Governments. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India also directed the State/UT Governments to ensure free dry ration to the sex workers, identified by NACO. National and State teams of NACO/SACS successfully coordinated to extend all kinds of support to ensure the smooth availability and distribution of dry ration to the identified sex workers during the pandemic.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India has supported the NACO to document this novel initiative that provided dry ration to more than 3.5 lakhs sex workers every month during the pandemic and also enabled a platform for enrolling them into the existing social security programmes of the Government on a permanent basis. I congratulate UNDP, IEC & Mainstreaming and TI teams at NACO for this document, which can serve as a guideline to design similar interventions in future, if need arises.

  
(Dr. A. K. Puri)

Deputy Director General







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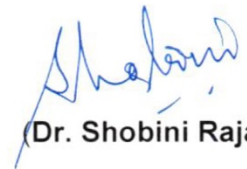
## Message

The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India aims to prevent HIV/AIDS transmission in India and provide HIV/AIDS health care services to all those who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. NACO works closely with communities, civil society organizations, various ministries, and departments. The COVID-19 Pandemic has resulted in the loss of livelihood and posed a threat to the social security of vulnerable groups including sex workers in India. The Government of India took several appreciable policy measures to grant relief to the poor such as the delivery of basic services, essential commodities, and financial packages to mitigate the risk and vulnerabilities triggered by the pandemic.

In compliance with the directions of Hon'ble Supreme court, NACO took swift actions during the pandemic to provide dry rations to the sex workers. The whole exercise from identification of beneficiaries and ensuring timely delivery of benefits was ably spearheaded by NACO with close coordination with State AIDS Control Societies and other Ministries and departments. This is one of the first of its kind aimed at ensuring timely relief to the marginalized community in a large scale. It is particularly noteworthy that access to essential commodities was enabled even for those who did not possess identification documents.

The development of process documentation has been a consultative process involving various stakeholders including communities, State AIDS Control Societies, and The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) actively supporting in this initiative. This is in line with our core principle of "Leaving no one behind" – a key driver to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

My heartfelt thanks to UNDP, India to collaborate with NACO to document the processes and best practices adopted by different states in delivering dry ration and other essential services to sex workers. I hope this report will be referred to as a guidance document so that in the future similar interventions for the marginalized communities are replicated in India and across the world.

  
(Dr. Shobini Rajan)





## MESSAGE

The COVID-19 Pandemic has led to an enormous healthcare and economic crisis globally. The socio-economic shocks due to the pandemic have widened disparities, resulted in the loss of livelihood, and posed a serious threat to the social security of vulnerable groups. India was no exception.

Amongst the most marginalised and vulnerable communities in the country are Sex workers. This marginalisation forces them to face numerous challenges, struggles, and deprivations due to stigma and discrimination.

The Government of India took several appreciable policy measures to grant relief to the poor such as the delivery of basic services, essential commodities, and financial packages to mitigate the risk and vulnerabilities triggered by the pandemic.

As the situation of sex workers has become acute due to the pandemic, to ensure their food security, the Government, especially the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), took important steps to provide them with dry rations. The whole exercise from identification of such beneficiaries and ensuring timely delivery of benefits was ably spearheaded by NACO with the close cooperation of State Governments.

I would like to congratulate the Government for this assistance to the sex worker community. This is one of the first of its kind targeted intervention aimed at ensuring social protection for this marginalised community. It is particularly noteworthy that this access to essential commodities was enabled even for those who did not possess identification documents.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is actively supporting the Government to empower vulnerable and marginalized communities by facilitating their access to social protection services for their secure future. This is in line with our core principle of “Leaving no one behind” - a key driver to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

We are honoured to work with NACO to document the processes and best practices adopted by different states in delivering dry ration and other essential services to sex workers. I hope this report will be referred to as a policy tool so that in the future similar interventions for the marginalised communities are replicated in India and across the world.

**Shoko Noda**  
*Resident Representative*  
UNDP India







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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

NACO gratefully acknowledges the contribution of different stakeholders including SACS, DOWCD, DOSJE DOFPD, NALSA, DLSA, CSOs & CBOs for providing active support in assisting the distribution of dry rations to the sex workers as per the directions of the Hon'ble Court.

We sincerely thank NACO's leadership for providing vision and insights for the successful implementation of the Honorable Supreme Court directive to provide dry ration to the sex workers including FSW, MSM, and TG/H identified by the National AIDS Control Organisation.

SOP developed by NACO became the stepping stone for all the states/union territories, coordinated by respective SACS at the state level to work out temporary, special, and permanent measures to secure dry ration for the identified sex workers.

We express our sincere gratitude to our senior leadership at NACO Ms. V. Hekali Zhimomi, AS& DG; Dr. U.B. Das CMO(SAG); Dr. Shobini Rajan CMO(SAG); Dr. Anoop Kumar Puri, DDG (IEC, MS & CST); Dr. Chinmoyee Das ADG; Dr. Saiprasad Bhavsar Deputy Director; Dr. Bhawna Rao (Deputy Director-IEC & MS); Ms. Nidhi Rawat (National Consultant-IEC & MS); Dr. Shantanu Purohit (National Consultant-Prevention), Mr. Utpal Das (Consultant-IEC & MS), who were instrumental in providing programmatic context and actively engaging in the process of preparing this document.

We extend our appreciation to Dr. Chiranjeev Bhattacharjya (NPM, HSS Unit- UNDP India) to collaborate with NACO to document the initiative at the national level and field observations in six different States.

Lastly, we acknowledge the efforts of the NACO Process Documentation Team to document the processes and best practices adopted by different states in delivering dry ration and other essential services to sex workers.

  
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# ACRONYMS

<b>AAY</b>	:	Antyodaya Anna Yojana
<b>AIDS</b>	:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>ANBA</b>	:	Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan
<b>CBO</b>	:	Community Based Organisation
<b>CSO</b>	:	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DAPCU</b>	:	District AIDS Prevention & Control Unit
<b>DLSA</b>	:	District Legal Services Authority
<b>DoFPD</b>	:	Department of Food and Public Distribution
<b>DoSJE</b>	:	Department of Social Justice and Empowerment
<b>DoWCD</b>	:	Department of Women and Child Development
<b>FSW</b>	:	Female Sex Worker
<b>GoI</b>	:	Government of India
<b>HIV</b>	:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HRG</b>	:	High Risk Group
<b>IDU</b>	:	Injecting Drug User
<b>LWS</b>	:	Link Worker Scheme
<b>MoHFW</b>	:	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
<b>MSM</b>	:	Men who have Sex with Men
<b>NACO</b>	:	National AIDS Control Organisation
<b>NACP</b>	:	National AIDS Control Programme
<b>NFSA</b>	:	National Food Security Act
<b>NGO</b>	:	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NHRC</b>	:	National Human Rights Commission
<b>NLSA</b>	:	National Legal Services Authority
<b>PDS</b>	:	Public Distribution System
<b>PHH</b>	:	Priority Household
<b>PLHIV</b>	:	People Living with HIV/AIDS
<b>PMGKAY</b>	:	Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana
<b>PMGKY</b>	:	Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana
<b>PMJAY</b>	:	Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana
<b>PMUY</b>	:	Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana
<b>RTI</b>	:	Reproductive Tract Infection
<b>SACS</b>	:	State AIDS Control Society
<b>SOP</b>	:	Standard Operating Procedure
<b>STI</b>	:	Sexually Transmitted Infection
<b>TDPS</b>	:	Targeted Public Distribution System
<b>TG</b>	:	Transgender
<b>TI</b>	:	Targeted Intervention
<b>UT</b>	:	Union Territory
<b>UNDP</b>	:	United Nations Development Programme



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant health crisis and affected the livelihood of many poor and marginalised population. Sex workers as one of the vulnerable communities experienced complete loss of earning and economic hardships due to COVID-19 lockdowns. Women, Men, and transgender persons who are engaged in sex work for their primary source of livelihood are considered sex workers and due to the nature of work and their living, they struggle to meet their basic rights and social protections. Sometimes they do not possess proper official documents viz., identity, date of birth, address, and income proof for enrolling into various social protection schemes of the government. Non-availability of these documents with these workers is linked to various factors such as estrangement from family, previous experience of being trafficked and contradictions in the name, date of birth and address. These documents are required to present the eligibility for several welfare schemes run by national and state governments in India such as 'free or subsidized dry ration', 'cooking gas', 'health insurance', 'widow pension', 'old age pension', and like.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India took cognizance of the situation of sex workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and directed the Central and State/ Union Territory governments for providing dry rations to sex workers who are identified by National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) without insisting on proof of identity. This direction also included the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) for providing active support in assisting the distribution of dry rations to the sex workers as per the directions of the Hon'ble Court.

In compliance with the directions of the Hon'ble Court, NACO issued an advisory to different stakeholders including authorities at the National level and at the State level to facilitate the provisioning of rations to the sex workers who are engaged under National AIDS Control Programme (NACP). NACO also developed a standard operating procedure (SOP) with a step-by-step guideline to obtain consent from the sex workers that are listed under Targeted Intervention (TI) and Link Worker Scheme (LWS) projects of NACO as well as others who are in sex work to facilitate access to dry ration distribution under the respective State government.

The SOP of NACO became the stepping stone for all the States/union territories, coordinated by respective SACS at the State level to work out temporary, special, and permanent measures to secure dry ration for the identified sex workers. As the TI and

LWS projects are implemented through civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), these organisations were asked to obtain consent from the sex workers i.e., female sex workers (FSW), men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender/hijra (TG/H) and share the compiled list to the local authority of Food and Public Distribution Department under supervision of DLSA and SACS. These CSOs and CBOs played a pivotal role in the entire process which started from obtaining the consent from beneficiary sex workers to the initial distribution of dry rations followed by organising camps in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare for making of permanent ration cards for these beneficiaries as per the advisory of NACO and directive of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

With this background, NACO proposed to compile the processes and practices adopted by different States for the distribution of dry rations to the sex workers and to disseminate the learnings for pragmatic improvements and replication of the best practices to reach out to the marginalised populations with social protection benefits. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India has collaborated with NACO to document the initiative at the national level and collate field experiences from six different States which included interactions with the beneficiaries (sex workers), SACS officials, allied departments and CSOs, and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects under NACP. Six Indian States namely Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal representing six different regions were selected for data collection on dry ration distribution in the States. Interview schedules were developed to collect information from the beneficiaries and other stakeholders including SACS officials. Field observations were conducted during November - December 2021 and the information collected were collated and analysed to see the relevance, document the best practices or otherwise pragmatic design corrections to maximise the enrolments of sex workers or other marginalised groups under social protection schemes of the government.

This process document report describes the various processes adopted by the States to provide dry rations to sex workers and the experiences of the beneficiaries, SACS officials and the stakeholders in the entire process of distribution. The subsequent sections of this report also captured the coverage of the initiative during the first six months of this intervention and later practices of the States towards continuation/ discontinuation of the benefits to the sex workers in different states.

This initiative supported the allocation of food grains (wheat and rice) to all the sex workers, listed by the CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects. The State also organised welfare camps for enrolling them under existing government schemes. Approximately 3.7 lakhs sex workers received dry ration every month in this scheme during its implementation.

# BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (MoHFW, Gol) launched the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) in 1992 to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country. The MoHFW, Gol has also set up National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) as an apex national-level organisation to strategize and lead the NACP response across the country through the State AIDS Control Society (SACS). The NACP strategies include HIV/AIDS - prevention, testing, treatment, care, and support activities vis-à-vis protection of the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) and those who are affected by HIV/AIDS. Equity, gender, and human rights are the cornerstone of all its interventions which protect the NACP beneficiaries from stigma and discrimination as well. The Gol also enacted the 'Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017' for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS to and provide protection to PLHIV and the affected persons in the country.

Targeted Interventions (TI) and Link Worker Scheme (LWS) which are the flagship prevention programme under NACP provides HIV/AIDS services to the key populations or high-risk groups (HRGs) such as female sex worker (FSW), men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender/ hijra (TG/H), injecting drug users (IDU) and bridge population (migrant and truckers). Awareness generation, promotion of safe behaviour, management of sexually transmitted infection (STI) and reproductive tract infection (RTI), condom promotion, harm reduction, and HIV testing are some of the components which are catered under the preventive efforts. NACO is also leveraging multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder responses for HIV/AIDS mainstreaming through evidence-based planning, leveraging public and private sector resources, and pragmatic responses to context-specific local needs. NACP is currently reaching 1.26 million (approx.) HRGs and 3.94 million (approx..) bridge populations through multiple interventions across the country<sup>1</sup>.

## Excerpts of the directions passed by Hon'ble Supreme Court of India on 29.09.2020

...COVID-19 has caused severe disruption in the normal life. Sex workers have been badly affected due to loss of earnings during the pandemic. Various schemes floated by the Union Government and the State Governments to help the destitute, have not reached the sex workers. The reason for the sex workers not having access to the schemes is lack of proof of identity. It is incumbent on the Central Government and the State Governments/ Union Territories to rescue the sex workers who are in dire straits. Starving sex workers are entitled to be provided with dry rations. Therefore, we direct the State Governments and the Union Territories to provide dry rations to the sex workers who are identified by National Aids Control Organisation (NACO) without insisting on proof of identity. The District Legal Services Authorities are directed to take active steps in assisting the distribution of dry rations to the sex workers without insisting on proof of identity...

<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, Annual Report, 2020-2

# SEX WORKERS IN HIV/AIDS RESPONSE AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Sex workers play an important role in HIV/AIDS response due to the risks and vulnerability associated with them. Women, Men, and transgender persons who are engaged in sex work as the principal mode of livelihood are considered sex workers<sup>2</sup> and covered under NACP. They are often marginalised and experiences stigma and discrimination in different forms. The emergence of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 impacted the livelihood of many especially those who were daily earners. The livelihood of sex also affected disproportionately due to lockdowns. The situation has aggravated due to the closure of places for solicitation and sexual activity, restricted communications in the city and the stigma attached to sex work. Beyond the health crisis due to COVID-19 on the already overstretched healthcare institutions in India, the country faced severe socio-economic consequences. The first lockdown, starting on March 25, 2020, enforced a total shutdown (excluding services such as healthcare institutions and grocery outlets) and the second one was an extension of the first lockdown that continued up to May 31, 2020. The government took several measures to mitigate the livelihood, economic, and health risks by granting relief and financial packages including delivery of basic services and essential commodities but many vulnerable groups including sex workers bear the brunt of COVID-19 pandemic.

NACP has covered approximately 1.2 million FSWs, MSMs and TGs under Targeted Intervention (TI) programme through a peer-led approach in partnership with local non-government organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). These NGOs/CBOs engage HRGs to deliver NACP services and act as catalysts to link these groups with various services and commodities. Sex workers are amongst the most marginalised groups and the pandemic made them more vulnerable. A recently published research study revealed that 90 per cent of the sex workers in red light areas would face the burns of debt in the COVID-19 pandemic and eventually would become bonded labour which is another form of modern-day slavery<sup>3</sup>. The sex workers are to be treated as equal members of society and afford access to social protection schemes<sup>4</sup>.

Studies suggest that loss of livelihood and lack of access to healthcare and social protection measures intensified their vulnerabilities where many were unable to sustain themselves and their families<sup>5, 6</sup>. The already stressed social and financial conditions of the sex workers got worsened, forcing them to be in a situation of poverty and major health hazards. COVID-19 has not only impacted these sex workers but also their family members due to the loss of already earned money and the closure of economic activities due to lockdown. They were also vulnerable to face uncertain work situations making it an optimum ground for further spread of COVID-19 as well.

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw\\_toolkit/115solution.pdf](https://www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw_toolkit/115solution.pdf) (last accessed on 18-02-2022)

<sup>3</sup>Shekhar, B. (2021). The debt trap, a shadow pandemic for commercial sex workers: vulnerability, impact, and action. *International Review of Victimology*, 02697580211035585.

<sup>4</sup>Platt, L., Elmes, J., Stevenson, L., Holt, V., Rolles, S., & Stuart, R. (2020). Sex workers must not be forgotten in the COVID-19 response. *The Lancet*, 396(10243), 9-11.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.businessinsider.in/india/news/enlist-sex-workers-also-in-battle-against-covid-19-hiv-expert/articleshow/75201998.cms> (last accessed on 18-02-2022)

<sup>6</sup>[https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2020/april/20200408\\_sex-workers-covid-19](https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2020/april/20200408_sex-workers-covid-19) (last accessed on 18-02-2022)



We were not able to go for the collection (begging) so there was no means of income for us. Whatever little saving was there, it got exhausted within the first twenty days of the lockdown. We were hard hit by the financial crisis and the food grains available with us got exhausted too. As our savings and food grains both got exhausted, we suffered a lot, and nobody was there to help us in this pandemic. Me and other transgenders living here contacted the NGO for help and got some help from them for survival. We are very thankful to them that helped our survival.

**Lakshmi** (changed name)  
A transgender from Chennai  
Tamil Nadu, India

I was earning around Rs. 20,000/- per month from sex workers to feed myself and my family. However, the sudden announcement of lockdown and closure of all kinds of business operations and transportation put a total break on my livelihood. I do not want to recall that hard time that my family suffered. I had no work, no clients, and no money to fulfill my daily needs. My entire family spent those days in fear. We had to take loans at high-interest rates for survival. The NGO working here under Targeted Intervention Project of NACO helped me to get ration from Government and other sources in the hard time which gave me hope in the toughest time of life.


**Chameli** (changed name)  
A female sex worker from Mumbai,  
Maharashtra, India

The Government of India announced relief packages to mitigate the multi-sector risks caused by the pandemic and took proactive measures for the prevention of COVID-19 new infection and treatment, social and economic wellbeing of the poor, and delivery of basic and essential services. However, sex workers do not have access to many provisions due to their inability to produce the official documents such as Voter ID, Ration Card, Aadhaar, due to their estrangement from family, previous experience of being trafficked, and contradictions in their name, date of birth and address. These hinder them from enrolling in various social protection schemes like 'free or subsidized dry ration' under the public distribution system (PDS), 'cooking gas' under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), 'health insurance' under Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), pension for widows and older women and like.

# RELIEF TO SEX WORKERS IN INDIA DURING COVID-19

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India took the cognizance of the fact that the various social entitlements provided by the Central and State governments to help the destitute have not reached the sex workers due to lack of proof of identity. In September 2020, the Hon'ble Court directed the State governments and union territories (UTs) '*...to provide dry rations to the sex workers who are identified by National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) without insisting on proof of identity*'. Compliance to the above direction, NACO took swift actions and developed a 'Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)' to facilitate the distribution of dry rations to sex workers across the country and extended technical support to the States/UTs through SACS and DAPCU to maximize the benefits to the registered sex workers (FSW, MSM and TG) under Targeted Intervention (TI) and Link Worker Scheme (LWS). The direction passed by the Hon'ble Court and the SOP developed by NACO served as the basis for SACS to coordinate with the Public Distribution System (PDS) of the States/UTs for providing dry rations to the sex workers at different levels.





In compliance with the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, NACO communicated to the line departments and legal authorities i.e., the Department of Food and Public Distribution (DoFPD), Department of Women and Child Development (DoWCD), Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DoSJE) and National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) to extend support in this initiative and issued directives to the State AIDS Control Society (SACS) to facilitate dry ration distribution along with other social protection measures in coordination with the local departments. NACO developed a 'Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)' to facilitate the entire process of ration distribution by SACS at various levels in collaboration with the government departments, civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs).

The flagship programme of NACO namely the targeted intervention (TI) project and link worker scheme (LWS) which deals directly with sex workers were roped in to comply with the directions of the Hon'ble Court. These two schemes are run by the CSOs and CBOs and work under the administrative control of SACS under the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP). These organisations were entrusted by the government to identify the sex workers and seek their consent for enrolling them with the appropriate authority for availing dry ration and other social entitlements.

The CSOs and CBOs involved in the implementation of TI and LWS projects of NACO extended their services based on the SOP while SACS facilitated State-level coordination with the government departments along with other administrative approvals and provided supportive supervision to implement the work on the ground. NACO extended its technical support in monitoring and supportive supervision of the overall activities as well as leveraging support from the central ministries, departments, and legal authority.

# STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOP) FOR DRY RATION DISTRIBUTION

The standard operating procedures (SOP) have been the stepping-stone for initiating the activities in compliance with the directives of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. This SOP served as the policy directives for the State governments to make necessary provisions of food grains for the sex workers and at the same time leverage CSOs and CBOs to identify the beneficiaries based on the recommended guidelines and link them with the related departments/ authorities to avail dry ration and other services at the local level. The salient features of the SOP are as follows:

## Listing of beneficiaries

All-State AIDS Control Societies were suggested to prepare a matrix of sex workers i.e., FSW, MSM and Transgender persons enrolled under TI and LWS projects of NACO and obtain their consent for their enrolment into the public distribution system for availing dry ration and other benefits in line with the directions of Hon'ble Court. Based on SOP, all the sex workers who were availing services under TI and LWS were required to be contacted for their willingness and consent by the CSOs and CBOs implementing these schemes. The SOP also made provisions to identify the sex workers who were not registered under these projects but residing in the catchments of TI and LWS projects to maximize the benefits. In order to protect the privacy of sex workers, personal particulars of the sex workers were shared with the line departments only after obtaining consent from them and ensuring no breach of confidentiality under the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Act, 2017. This task was led by the CSOs and CBOs implementing the TI and LWS projects under the direct supervision of SACS.

## Coordination with the line departments

All the SACS were requested to coordinate with the line departments at the State level and facilitate the administrative approvals for the distribution of dry rations to the sex workers as well as their enrolment into other welfare measures. At the grass-root level, the CSOs and CBOs played a pivotal role which included sharing the list of beneficiaries with the Department of Food and Public Distribution, Department of Social Welfare, Department of Women and Child Development and District Legal Services Authority. These organisations were also asked to organise camps for the sex workers who were hesitant of providing consent. These camps aimed to facilitate the preparation of ration cards, the opening of bank accounts and the enrolment of sex workers into various available social protection schemes.

Preparation  
of Ration  
Card



Opening  
of Bank  
Account



Social  
Protection  
Scheme





## Facilitation of dry ration distribution

The CSOs and CBOs shared the compiled list of all the sex workers who gave consent for availing of dry ration from the government. Based on these lists, these CSOs and CBOs facilitated the distribution of the food grains which have been described in the subsequent sections.

## Monitoring and Supportive Supervision

At the national level, NACO and different SACS at the State-level and DAPCU monitored the progress and provided supportive supervision to the CSOs and CBOs for ensuring a smooth service delivery mechanism for the beneficiaries to avail dry ration and other services. These included leveraging the support of State/district level community advisory boards (CAB) involved in the implementation of 'Programmatic Mapping and Population Size Estimation' activities of NACO. The Technical Support Unit (TSU) of SACS oversee the identification of the correct target population. A committee under the chairmanship of the Project Director/Additional Project Director including Joint Director (TI), Joint Director (IEC), TSU officials and representatives from sex workers were asked to monitor the activities and report to NACO every week for first four weeks and thereafter on monthly basis.



# METHODS OF PROCESS DOCUMENTATION FOR DRY RATION DISTRIBUTION TO SEX WORKERS

In order to document the entire process of dry ration distribution to sex workers and understand the implementation process, data was collected purposively from the selected States namely Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. The documentation team collected primary and secondary data from various stakeholders and document the history and background of the initiative (backdrop against the dry ration distribution to sex workers was initiated), objectives (why the initiative was launched), implementation processes (institutionalized mechanisms at Central, State and district levels), impact generated (what was achieved through this initiative), and way forward (replicating and scaling up the initiative/ or designing similar interventions).

In the beginning, the documentation team had an inception meeting with officials of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) to discuss the various aspects of this initiative in the context of directives of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, advisories, and guidelines of the NACO to facilitate the entire process. This also helped the team to comprehend the expectations of the government from this process documentation activity in the context of dry ration distribution to the sex workers.

Six States namely Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal were selected for the fieldwork, and the team discussed and interacted with the government and non-government stakeholders and beneficiaries (sex workers). An interview schedule was developed for data collection from different stakeholders and beneficiaries to understand the dry ration distribution process as well as facilitation of other support for the social protection of sex workers (FSW, MSM and Transgender persons). It also aimed to document case studies, practices, as well as varied experiences from the field on how differently State governments executed this initiative, and innovations made to reach out to the maximum number of beneficiaries in a short period. The learnings from this exercise also aimed to inform policymakers about actionable strategies while designing similar interventions for vulnerable populations like sex workers. Field work included in-depth discussions with the sex workers, CSOs, and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects, SACS and DAPCU officials along with the officials of stakeholder departments/ authorities. The selection of districts and the NGOs/CBOs was done in consultation with the respective State AIDS Control Society (SACS).

Information was gathered through in-depth interviews (IDIs) with the service providers, facilitators, and the beneficiaries (sex workers) registered under the TI and LWS projects of NACO. Interviews were held with all the three categories of sex workers belonging to FSW, MSM, and Transgender communities who had consented to avail dry ration from the government. The documentation team also interviewed some sex workers who had not consented to avail the benefits to understand the triggers that influenced them to take such decisions. During field observation, apart from the SOP issued by NACO for distribution of dry ration to sex workers, the recommended action points developed by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) were also looked into that aimed to support organisations facilitating food distributions in India to minimise the COVID-19 risk exposure to their personnel, partners and the beneficiaries.

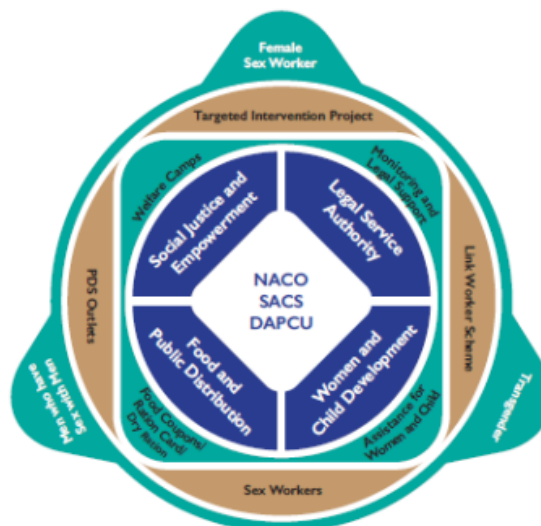


Meeting of documentation team with the SACS officials in West Bengal

Various steps reported to have been adopted at the national and state levels are mentioned in steps in the subsequent sections:

## Step I - Inter-departmental Coordination

The key stakeholders identified for facilitating the dry rations distributions at the national level are the Department of Women and Child Development (DoWCD), Department of Food and Public Distribution (DoFPD), National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), and Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DoSJE). Similarly, SACS engaged these departments at the State level to ensure the distribution of dry rations to the sex workers under the Public Distribution System (PDS). SACS continued to be the facilitators in the entire process through CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects along with monitoring and supportive supervision of the activities. The national, State, district, and sub-district level departments and other stakeholders mentioned in the subsequent sections played major roles in ensuring dry rations distribution to sex workers as per prescribed guidelines.





## Targeted Intervention Programme and Link Worker Scheme Under NACP

The Targeted Intervention (TI) programme of NACO provides services to the population identified to be at the risk of acquiring HIV infection such as FWS, MSM, TG/ Hijra, and People who Injecting Drugs (PWID) and Bridge populations such as Migrants and Truckers. HIV/AIDS services are provided to the communities through a peer-led approach involving people from high-risk communities (peer educators) who act as catalysts for linking the targeted population with various services and commodities offered by the government. Similarly, Link Worker Scheme (LWS) provide services to the high-risk groups (HRGs) and vulnerable populations (at-risk population who stays in rural areas). Demand generation activities and a stigma-free environment are created in rural areas with information, knowledge, and skills for HIV/AIDS and STI prevention and risk reduction. These two schemes are implemented by the grassroot level CSOs and CBOs and have a wider reach. In 2020, these CSOs and CBOs had more than one million listed beneficiaries in the categories of FSW, MSM, and TG. These NGOs/CBOs have been the main players in the entire process of dry ration distribution starting from the identification of beneficiaries, obtaining consent from them, coordination with the PDS and SACS for allotment of dry ration under PDS, and facilitation of the ration distribution.





## Department of Food and Public Distribution

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The public Distribution System (PDS) functions under the Department of Food and Public Distribution that manages food grains distribution at affordable prices. PDS is operated under the joint responsibility of the central and state governments where the central government manages procurement, storage, transportation, and allocation of food grains to the state governments. State governments have operational responsibility for intra-state allocation, identification of eligible families, issuance of ration cards, and supervision of the PDS outlets. Food grains such as rice, wheat and coarse grains are distributed through these outlets on the government-subsidized rates to the AAY and priority households under NFSA, 2013. PDS is the scheme that distributes dry rations to the identified households having ration cards and the same was leveraged by the states/UTs to distribute the dry ration to the sex workers as well. Based on the directives of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India and the SOP of NACO, the dry ration was made available by the Department of Food and Public Distribution for the sex workers for distribution through TI/LWS - NGOs/CBOs and PDS outlets. The Department also played a pivotal role in issuing Ration Cards to the sex workers as per the direction of the Hon'ble Court.



## District Legal Services Authority

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The District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) is responsible to organise 'Lok Adalat' in the district and to encourage settlement of disputes, hold legal literacy camps to create legal awareness amongst the people with a focus on women and weaker sections of the society about their rights, benefits and privileges guaranteed by the constitution of India. DLSA acts under the supervision of the Hon'ble District Judge and makes special efforts to enlist the support of civil societies working at the grassroot level and perform various functions conferred on or assigned to DLSA

under the Act. In the process of dry ration distribution to the sex workers, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India directed them to take active steps in assisting the distribution of dry rations to the sex workers without insisting on proof of identity. The DLSA team supported the TI/LWS - NGOs/CBOs for all kind of legal support and coordination for ensuring smooth distribution of dry ration to the sex workers and permanent enrolment of sex workers with PDS for Ration Card..



## Department of Social Justice and Empowerment

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The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DoSJE) is mandated to empower the socially, educationally, and economically marginalized sections of the society with the vision to build an inclusive society wherein the targeted groups can lead productive, safe, and dignified lives with adequate support for their growth and development. DoSJE has been one of the key stakeholders of NACO that supports the development of welfare scheme aiming at social inclusion and empowerment of TG, addresses the risk of HIV transmission amongst substance users, empowerment of discriminated and vulnerable groups e.g., victims of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, FSWs, TGs by nurturing a supportive and congenial environment by safeguarding human rights, providing social protection, and rendering psycho-social care. It has included FSWs and TGs as the target group for social defense and works for reducing social stigma and discrimination. DoSJE has also been instrumental in organising the welfare camps for sex workers in collaboration with the CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects and stakeholder departments/agencies for enrolling them under various welfare schemes. The DoSJE team supported organisation of camps for the enrolment of sex workers for Ration Card as well as other social welfare/ protection schemes of the Central and State Governments.





## Department of Women and Child Development

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The Department of Women and Child Development (DoWCD) is the nodal department for the development and empowerment of women and children. It has taken multiple initiatives for social and economic empowerment of women including HIV/AIDS mainstreaming activities to prevent new infection and provide support to the children who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. It also implements 'Ujjawala Scheme' for the prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. DoWCD has also established many protective and rehabilitative homes that provide basic amenities such as food, clothing, medical care, legal aid, education for rescued children and vocational training to support alternate livelihood options. Some of the state governments have also provisioned pension schemes for PLHIV women and their dependent children. In the COVID-19 pandemic, some state governments have advocated for supporting women and children in distress with livelihood and financial assistance which also includes FSWs.



Reports

- PMGKAY NEW
- Detailed Transactions NEW
- RC Details
- Nominee Cards Abstract NEW
- Stock Register
- FPS Status NEW
- % Distribution Status NEW
- Beneficiary Verification NEW
- UID Status Abstract NEW
- Covid-19
- NACO NEW



**PDS Transactions - January '2022**

<b>Total Cards</b> 1,15,99,860	<b>Availed Cards</b> 1,00,80,219	<b>Portability Cards</b> 5,62,092
<b>Total Shops</b> 25,759	<b>Active Shops</b> 6,931	<b>Month Trans %</b> 86.89
<b>Month Trans</b> 1,10,17,426	<b>Todays Trans</b> 2,09,512	<b>PMGKAY Cards</b> 1,00,17,379

Last Refreshed : 31-01-2022 18:30:02

Language -Select-

Year: 2022

- Civil Supplies
- Helpline
- Mail: [wsd-mp\[at\]nic\[dot\]in](mailto:wsd-mp[at]nic[dot]in)
- Toll Free: 1967
- Awards
- Related Links
- Price Chart
- Search Details

Visitors : 6,67,32,572



<http://epos.mp.gov.in/index.jsp>

## Step II: Planning for Dry-Ration Distribution

In order to comply with the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court and the SOP issued by the NACO, respective SACS in the State facilitated joint planning meetings at the State level which had participation from other stakeholders and govt. departments. This planning meeting helped the States to workout different mechanisms to respond to the immediate need i.e., the dry ration distribution to the sex workers without any delay and the making of ration cards to facilitate systematic distribution in the future. District-level planning included allocation of food grains i.e., 4 Kg wheat plus 1 Kg rice or 1 Kg wheat plus 4 Kg rice or 5 Kg of any of these two food grains to all the sex workers who were listed by the CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects and organisation of welfare camps for enrolling the sex workers under various government schemes. In this process, government departments and other stakeholders undertook the following activities:

### Convergence Meeting at the State and District Levels

The state-level convergence meeting convened by SACS aimed to facilitate administrative approval and allocation of food grains for distribution of sex workers under PDS. It also aimed to delegate responsibilities to the district authorities for making the food grains available for distribution either through PDS or other means as per the administrative approval granted by the State authorities. The initial plan put forth by almost all the States/UTs was to make available the required food grains i.e., wheat and rice to CSOs and CBOs involved in this process for the first 3-4 months. States/UTs also planned to simultaneously work on the models to integrate the sex workers into the mainstream process which included the making of permanent ration cards or food coupons generally known as 'Patrata Parchi' in the local language. States/UTs also appointed a Nodal Officer in the district for managing the entire activity. However, the practices varied from State to State.



## Listing of Eligible Beneficiaries

In 2020, there were more than one million sex workers/HRGs (FSW, MSM, TG) registered under the TI and LWS projects of NACO in India<sup>7</sup>. CSOs and CBOs implementing these projects closely work with these targeted populations through a peer led approach to provide various services as per the guidelines/ directives of NACO and SACS. The CSO and CBOs through the peer educators who also are from the same communities reached out to the targeted populations or sex workers and obtained consent for enrolment into the dry ration scheme. Besides consent, the required personal details were also obtained and shared with the department for receiving food grain from the government. In some States / districts, these CSOs and CBOs organised camps in collaboration with the DoSJE, DoWCD and PDS for making ration cards for sex workers and their enrolment into the other welfare schemes including the opening of bank accounts under Jan Dhan Yojana.

It was a very happy moment for all when we heard from the SACS that the sex workers registered under TI/LWS would be given dry ration by the government. We were asked to obtain consent from the sex workers and share the details with the PDS officials and SACS to enable the allocation of dry ration for them. Our organization had around 2400 registered FSWs at that time whom we started contacting for their consent to enroll in the scheme. Initially, we received consent from 637 FSWs whose details were shared with the PDS officials and SACS. In Delhi, the government had decided to distribute the dry ration through TI/LWS - CSOs and CBOs based on our list. However, the required quantity of food grains was not allocated to these populations, and this hampered the smooth distribution. And due to the non-availability of required food grains, we had to stop the consent-taking process. However, we continue to follow up with the local PDS officials here as well as the distribution of dry ration.

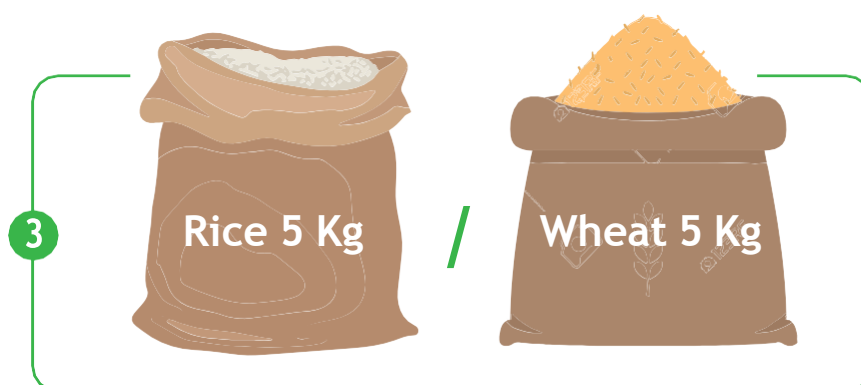
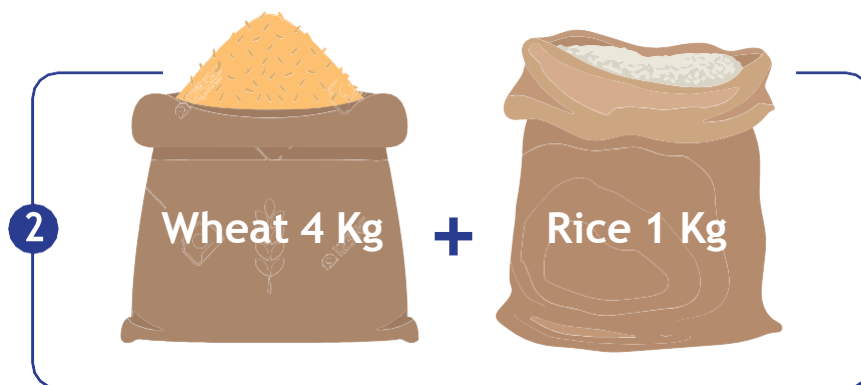
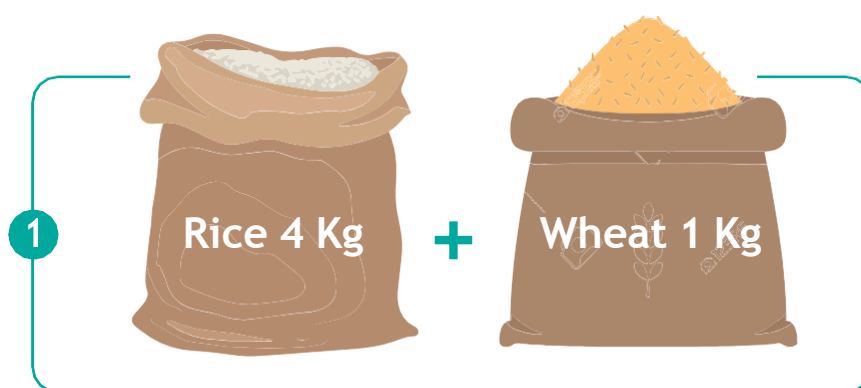
**MANCH (TI)**

Community Based Organisation, Delhi

<sup>7</sup>Annual Report, 2020-21, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India

## Allocation of Food Grains

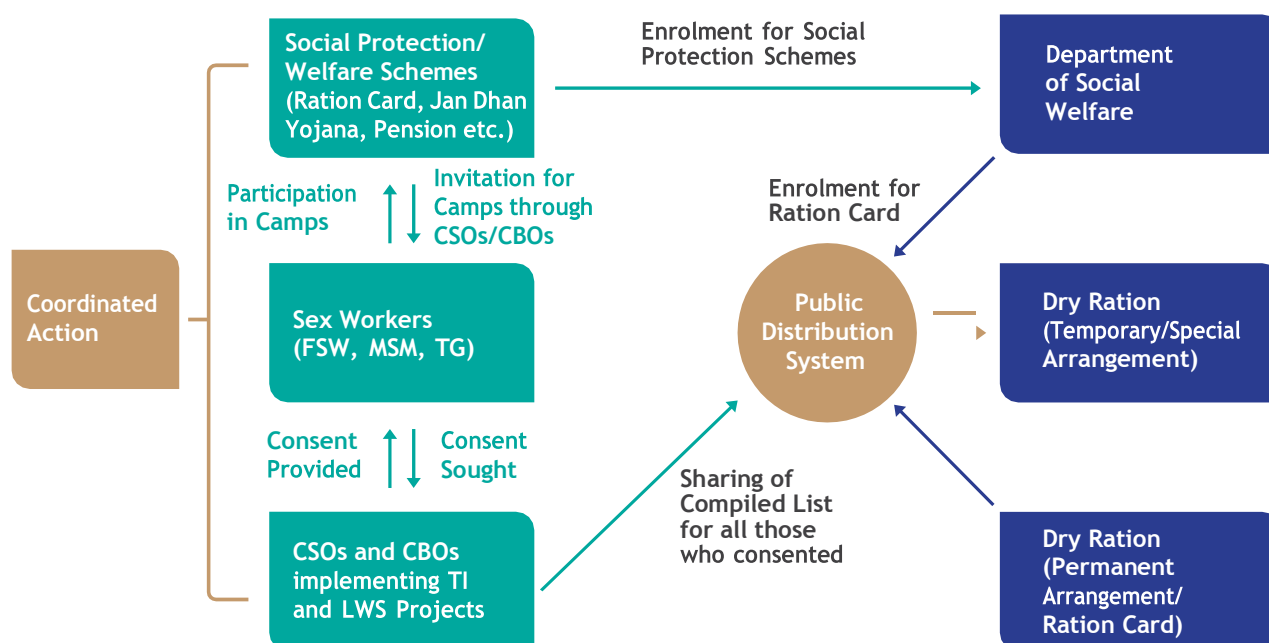
SACS facilitated the administrative approval at the State level for the allocation of the appropriate quantity of food grains based on the estimated number of sex workers registered under the TI and LWS projects. Based on the State-level approval, these CSOs and CBOs provided the list of sex workers who consented to avail the scheme to the local authority for providing food grains under the public distribution system (PDS). Initially, almost all the States decided to distribute the food grains (dry ration) to the sex workers through the CSOs and CBOs only till the time they make some temporary, special, or permanent measures to integrate them into the mainstream system. A person was eligible to receive a maximum of 5 Kg food grains i.e., 4 Kg wheat plus 1 Kg rice or 1 Kg wheat plus 4 Kg rice or 5Kg of any one of these two items.



## Step III: Practices for Dry Ration Distribution and Other Services

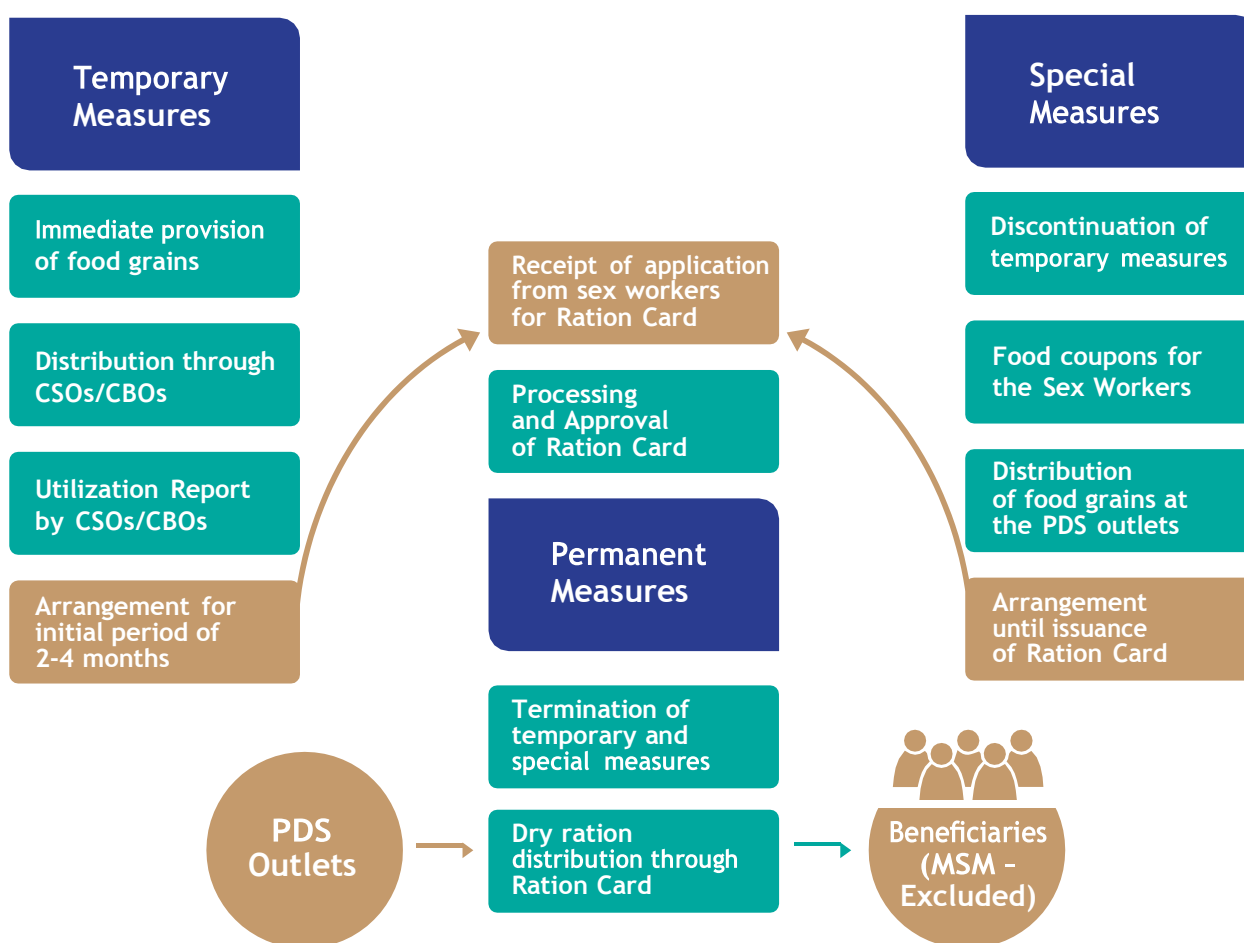
### Beneficiary Identification and Enrolment

Based on the SOP of NACO and further advisory from SACS, all the CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects obtained consent from sex workers (FSW, MSM, TG). The compiled list of the beneficiaries was then shared with the line department to allocate food grains as well as distribution. These CSOs and CBOs also maintained this record with them for their official records. SACS and DLSA officials were marked in all important communications with the local PDS authority in the respective district for monitoring and supervision purposes as well as seeking technical support to smoothen the on-ground operational challenges. Simultaneously, Social Welfare Department in the district also organised welfare camps for the enrolment of sex workers into different social welfare schemes and ration cards including the opening of bank accounts. During the visit to the six study states, such initiatives of organising welfare camps were seen in four states namely Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.



## Distribution of Dry Ration

Most of the State governments allocated wheat and rice to districts under the regular pool of PDS by adding the sex workers into it as per the list received from CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects of NACO. Besides above, it was also observed that, majority of States leveraged support of various sources and channels for distribution of food grains e.g., Delhi leveraged the food grains allocated for non-PDS card holders (temporary arrangement) for providing dry rations to the sex workers through CSOs and CBOs. These States coordinated with various CSOs and CBOs only to distribute the dry ration to the sex workers rather than the regular PDS outlets/camps. This immediate arrangement was made for an initial period of 3-4 months and then after, the States either absorbed the distribution process through their mainstream system or discontinued the scheme. These organisations were required to submit the utilisation certificate to the PDS after the distribution of dry ration to the sex workers.







During the process of dry ration distribution, SACS found to have adopted temporary measures, special measures, permanent measures, and also other social protection measures which are explained in subsequent sections.

## Temporary Measures

As an immediate relief, the majority of the States initially adopted temporary measures for the distribution of dry rations to the sex workers. These States allocated the 5 Kg of wheat or rice or both to the beneficiaries identified by the CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects of NACO. In this process, the coordinating CSOs and CBOs received food grains from the local authority under the Department of Food and Public Distribution for distribution to the sex workers. They were also required to submit a utilization certificate of the food grains to the respective authority. The CSOs and CBOs in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal reported receipt of the required quantity from the department and had a smooth experience. In Delhi, these organisations had to collect the food grains from non-PDS ration distribution points set up by the government at the schools at their own cost for transportation and logistics. This arrangement was made for an initial period of 3-4 months and later the State governments either discontinued the benefits completely or shifted to special/ permanent measures.

Receipt of demands for food grains from CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS Projects of NACO by the Department of Food and Public Distribution

Supply of required quantity of food grains to the CSOs and CBOs by the local authority of Department of Food and Public Distribution

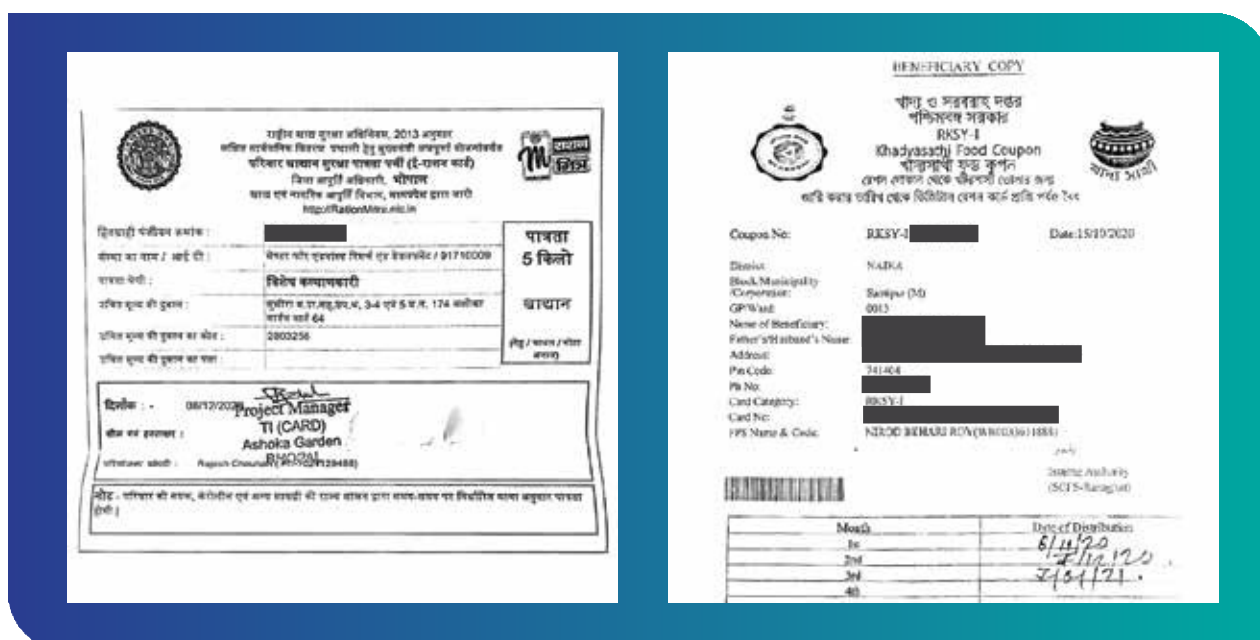
Distribution of food grains by the CSOs and CBOs to the sex workers and submission of utilization certificate to the Department of Food and Public Distribution

We were contacted by the MANCH NGO for our consents to receive government ration. We were happy that government is doing something for us in the COVID-19 pandemic. We received rice and wheat from this NGO twice in the pandemic.

**Chandani** (changed name)  
A female sex worker in Delhi

## Special Measures

The States either moved to special/permanent measures to guarantee food grains to the sex workers or completely discontinued the distribution after the initial period of 3-4 months which focused temporary arrangement of dry ration as an immediate relief. The States of Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal took a special initiative to enroll the sex workers into the mainstream system by issuing e-coupons for the distribution of food grains to the beneficiaries. This coupon was valid for availing dry ration from the PDS outlet (also known as the fair price shop) in the vicinity. Maharashtra referred to the compiled list shared by the CSOs and CBOs to distribute dry ration through PDS outlets while Tamil Nadu went a step ahead and started working on permanent measures to enroll the beneficiaries under NFSA, 2013 (discussed in detail in the subsequent section). Delhi did not continue dry ration distribution to the sex workers while dry ration distribution started late in Mizoram.



Food coupons were issued by some of the State governments to allow the beneficiaries for receiving food grains from the PDS outlets until they get a permanent ration card from the Department of Food and Public Distribution. Beneficiaries interviewed by the documentation team shared that they had a smooth experience while using these food coupons at the PDS outlets for a couple of months, but many outlets were not accepting the food coupons later after some period. This problem was reported mainly in the urban areas such as Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh) and Kolkata (West Bengal), where beneficiaries reported that these coupons were not accepted later at the PDS outlets to provide food grains. However, in the rural areas, as reported by the beneficiaries in these two States i.e., Chhindwara (Madhya Pradesh) and Vardhman (West Bengal), this coupon is still accepted for the distribution of food grains. These two State governments also initiated the process to provide permanent ration cards to sex workers (FSW and TG). In Madhya Pradesh, this e-coupon was required to be validated and signed by the respective CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects of NACO while in West Bengal, it was through the respective department.





Figure 1: A FSW holding e-coupon in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

The Government of Madhya Pradesh initially provided dry rations for couple of months for their distribution through the CSOs and CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects of NACO based on the list of beneficiaries received from them. In the meantime, the government worked out an electronic mechanism in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in the state for issuing of e-food coupon to the sex workers which was made valid at the PDS outlets (also known as fair price shop). A person was eligible to get 5 Kg of dry rations every month through this e-coupon, validated and signed by the respective CSOs and CBOs.

Centre for Advanced Research & Development (CARD) - TI  
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh



## Permanent Measures

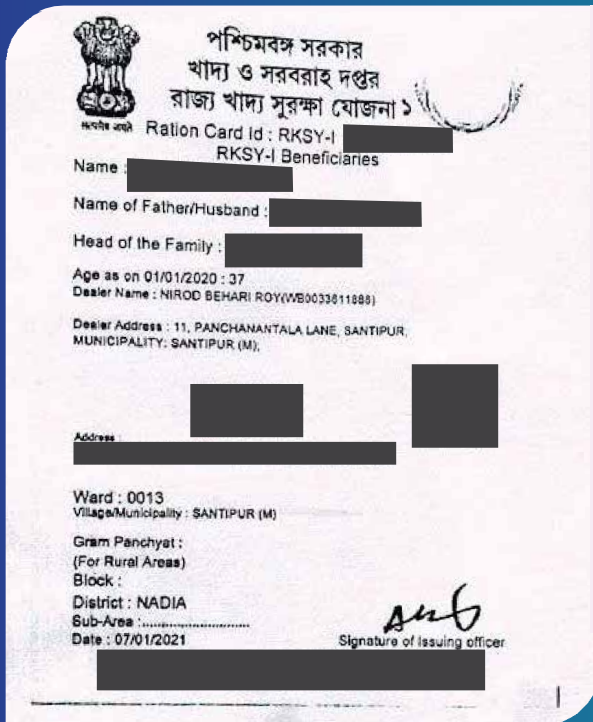
Four out of six States visited by the documentation team namely Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, had organised welfare camps for making ration cards and enrolment of beneficiaries in other social welfare/ protection schemes. In Mizoram, it was reported that majority of the sex workers are already having ration cards and receiving benefits

States that took initiative to provide ration card to the sex workers consider the FSW and TG but none of the states considered MSM for this facility. Delhi did not take any effort for making ration card for the sex workers. Mizoram considered 17 people after almost a year after Hon'ble Supreme Court's direction to provide dry ration. However, this state also didn't provide ration card to the beneficiaries.

The States of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal took steps to provide ration card to the sex workers under PDS. However, the ration card-making status was observed in the primitive stage in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal while in Tamil Nadu, the majority of the eligible beneficiaries (except MSM) reported receipt of the ration card. Access to ration cards was reported by a very minimal number of interviewed sex workers in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal. The documentation team also observed variations in determining the eligibility to access the ration cards by FSW, TG, and MSM. The state governments considered FSW and TG for issuing ration cards but did not consider MSM for it. State officials were of the view that giving a separate ration card to the MSM would be a duplication of efforts as this population subset is already covered through their family. At the same time, MSM reported their concerns on such stand of the government as many of them either live separately or are excluded from their households.

Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal took the initiative to make ration card to the sex workers. However, the efforts are still in nascent stage. Tamil Nadu demonstrated good progress in issuing ration cards to the sex workers.

The permanent measures put forth in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal were observed in a very primitive stage as the documentation team could identify the trace but a very minimal number of beneficiaries out of the total interviewed sex workers reported availability of ration card despite the submission of their applications and completing required formalities advised by the respective authorities.



A snapshot of the ration card issued to a beneficiary (FSW) in West Bengal

In West Bengal, 12,309 FSWs out of a total of 16,726 FSWs who consented for availing dry ration, already had ration cards to avail the benefits under NFSA, 2013. The government has taken steps for making new ration cards for the remaining registered FSWs, but the administrative record of the government suggests issuing of new ration cards to only 12 per cent remaining (#527).

Tamil Nadu is the only state which leveraged the initial 3-4 months' time to come up with a concrete plan for making ration cards for the FSW and TG/H. Based on the interviews with the government officials, stakeholders and beneficiaries, the documentation team observed that Tamil Nadu already had better reach in terms of issuance of ration cards to the FSW and TG communities in the past while the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court allowed them to consider new applications as well without insisting on proof of identity. Sex workers in Tamil Nadu reported that the government processed their applications in 20-30 days and provided ration cards to them in the COVID-19 pandemic. All the beneficiaries who had received ration cards reported receipt of 5 Kg of food grains per person per month.

Though the FSW and TG groups were considered for issuing permanent ration card, none of the states considered the other category of sex worker i.e., MSM as identified by NACO.



A snapshot of the ration card issued to a beneficiary (TG) in Tamil Nadu



A beneficiary submitting her application to the authority for making Ration Card in Tamil Nadu

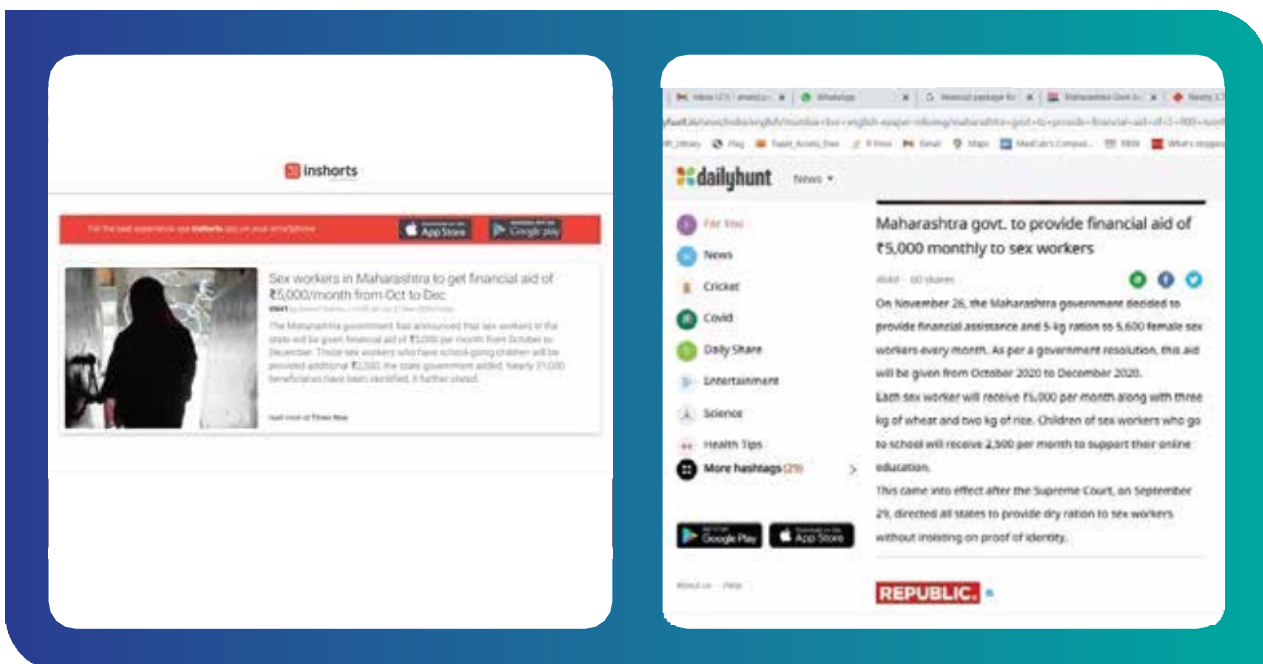
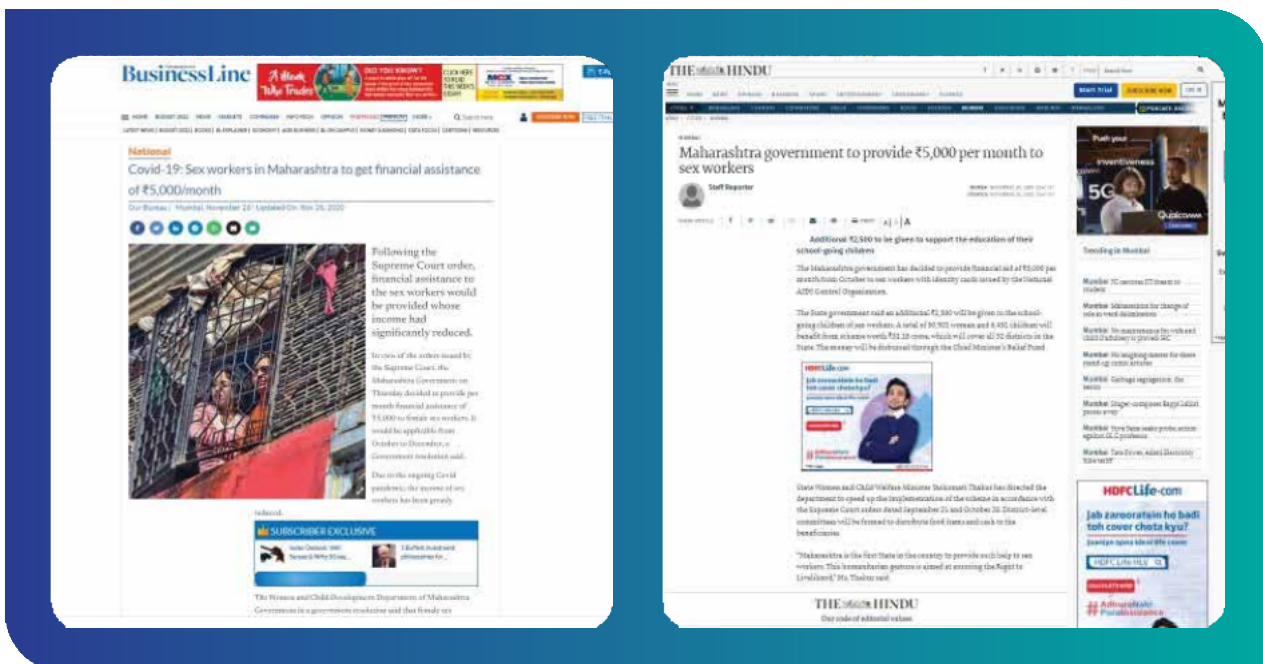
I came to know about the government initiative for making ration cards during COVID-19 pandemic through a WhatsApp group run by our peer transgenders. Our peer group is very active in this type of work and so they took part in this process to ensure that all the needy get the desired support. I live separately from my family and such an initiative from the government side is a big help to ensure our essential needs. The government had taken the special initiative to enroll us for ration card and I went there on a date fixed by the government for this purpose. When I submitted my application, the government matched my record and deleted my name from the ration card of my parents where I do not live now. This allowed the government officials to process my application to issue a fresh ration card to me on my name. The government officials clarified my doubts and with minimum documentation, they accepted the application. Then, they advised visiting the office after 20 days to collect the card. I have received my ration card and currently, I am availing dry ration from PDS.

**Shanthi** (changed name)  
A transgender in Chennai, Tamil Nadu



# Other Social Protection Measures

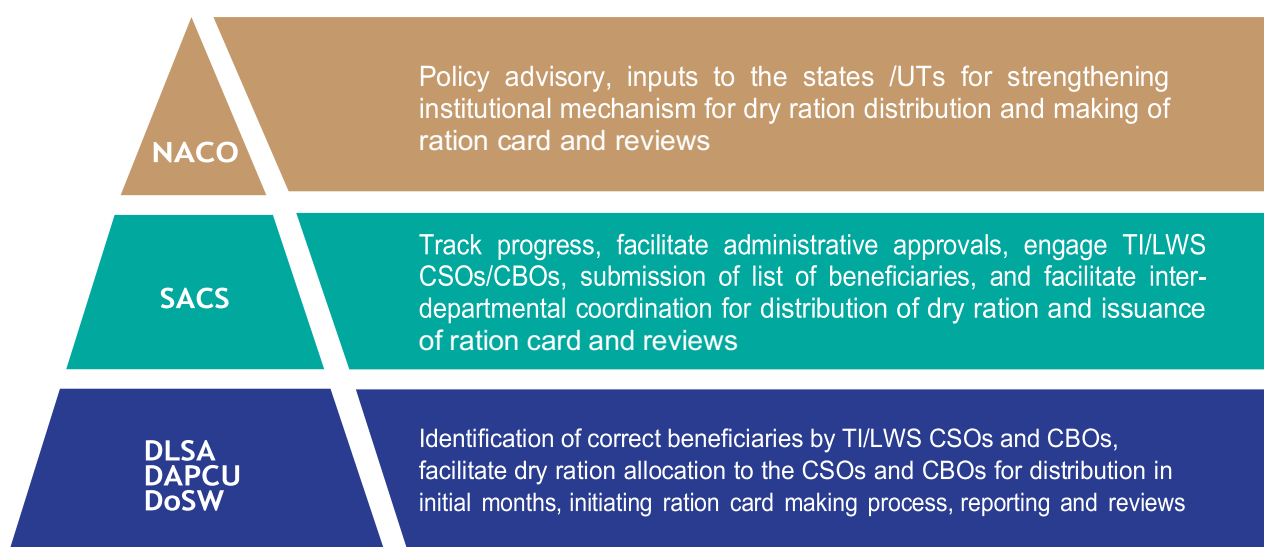
The Government of Maharashtra provided financial assistance along with dry rations to the sex workers until the COVID-19 pandemic is over. The government provisioned for financial assistance of ₹5,000 per month along with three Kg of wheat and two Kg of rice. Additionally, the school-going children of sex workers were provided with ₹2,500 per month to meet the education expenditure. These workers were identified by the government in collaboration with the SACS. State also informed the organisation of camps/ support for getting enrolled into other social protection schemes and the opening of a bank account. However, the majority of the beneficiary already had bank accounts.





# MONITORING AND SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION AND REPORTING

A three-tier monitoring and supportive supervision system was placed by NACO for the dry ration distribution activity in the state. This system defined the roles and responsibilities of the various functionaries at the national, state and district levels. At the national level, NACO led the monitoring and supportive supervision while at the state level functionaries of SACS and the Food Supply and Public Distribution Department were engaged in the process. DAPCU, DLSA and Social Welfare Department were engaged at the district level for the regular monitoring and handholding support to the service providers and beneficiaries to get enrolled into PDS and to avail the services.

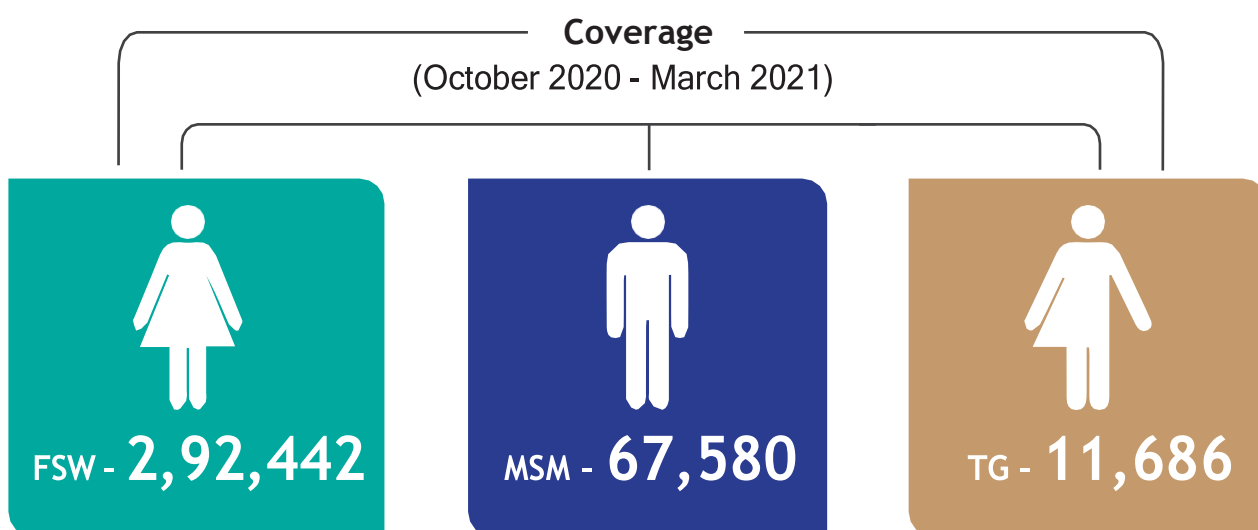


Regular monitoring and supervision of the activities by NACO and SACS has played an important role in increasing the scale and coverage of dry ration distribution to sex workers in India. The Targeted Intervention (TI) Division of NACO developed a template of reporting to track the progress initially on weekly basis for one month and thereafter that reporting system was made monthly. Regular feedback on these reports and sharing of best practices from good-performing states helped many SACS to streamline the activity at state and district levels. NACO also organised a meeting of the Project Director of SACS to highlight the progress and leverage swift actions to achieve desired outcomes. SACS prepared a district-wise matrix of the CSOs and CBOs that were implementing TI and LWS projects of NACO along with the number of sex workers working in the respective districts. Sensitization workshops of CSOs and CBOs were organised by SACS in collaboration with various stakeholders such as SLSA/DLSA and line departments. DLSA and DAPCU extended their support for the listing of the beneficiaries as well as the distribution of dry rations as well. Local review meetings by the district officials also helped to review the progress as well as expedite the local level planning in terms of allocation of appropriate quantity of food grains and enrolment of beneficiaries for ration cards.

The documentation team observed the participation of DLSA in the entire process at the district level. However, some districts lost momentum in between. The districts that have active participation from DLSA still reported dry ration distribution through e-coupons e.g., Vardhman (West Bengal) and Chhindwara (Madhya Pradesh). However, in other places, either the beneficiaries have been provided permanent ration cards or the benefits have been discontinued by the government. The CSOs and CBOs have also conducted awareness on COVID-19 appropriate behaviour i.e., social distancing norms, frequent handwashing, or sanitization of hands with hand sanitiser, wearing of masks etc. at the grass-root level. These organisations are also supporting the COVID-19 vaccination drive of the government and conducting community mobilization activities for the vaccination of sex workers. The majority of the sex workers interviewed by the documentation team (4 out of every 5 workers) had received both the dosages of vaccine till January 2022.

## A peek into the progress reported by States/UTs

In the dry ration distribution process, NACO through SACS and the Department of Food and Public Distribution were the two main agencies at the state level responsible to comply with the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. NACO developed a reporting mechanism to get the progress reports from states on weekly basis for the first month followed by monthly submission of reports by the states. In this process, it was the duty of SACS to compile information at the state level and share the same with the NACO at the appropriate interval. As the CSOs and CBOs that were implementing TI and LWS projects of NACO were directly involved in this process and the distribution of dry ration also took place through them for a couple of months, the initial reporting was done by them to the SACS for onward submission to NACO. However, as the states gradually moved to special and permanent measures, the onus of reporting shifted to the Department of Food and Public Distribution. In the initial period of the first six months i.e., October 2020 to March 2021, on an average 3.7 lakhs sex workers were provided dry rations every month.




# LESSONS LEARNED AND WAY FORWARD

In September 2020, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India directed the State governments and union territories to provide dry rations to the sex workers identified by NACO without insisting on proof of identity. This has been a very progressive step towards ensuring the delivery of essential services to the marginalised communities like sex workers who are generally left behind and not covered under social protection schemes of the government due to lack of official documents. NACO coordinated with SACS and its district-level institutions viz., DAPCU to facilitate inter-departmental convergence towards allocation of food grains for the sex workers identified by the CSOs/CBOs implementing TI and LWS projects. NACO issued advisory and SOP to the States to use as the reference document for SACS to coordinate with the Food and Public Distribution Department of the state for obtaining administrative approvals and allocation of required food grains to the districts for distribution.

The majority of the states initially took interim measures to provide immediate relief and provided food grains to these CSOs and CBOs for distribution to the sex workers based on the list compiled under the supervision of SACS. This interim solution also allowed the states to work out special and permanent measures for enrolling the sex workers into the mainstream system without insisting on the proof of identity as per the directives of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. Progress of Tamil Nadu was found to be very encouraging in terms of coverage and institutional support to the beneficiaries for enrolling into the public distribution system for getting dry rations on monthly basis through fair price shops (PDS outlets).

States like Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal introduced e-coupons for the distribution of food grains through fair price shops (PDS outlets) while Maharashtra continued to provide food grains through these outlets based on the list compiled by the CSOs and CBOs. New ration cards were found issued to the sex workers in Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. States considered FSWs and TGs for issuing permanent ration cards but none of the states considered MSMs for it as they consider these populations already covered through their households. However, many of the MSMs reported that they live separately from their families and demanded their inclusion as well for ration cards. Denial of services (rations) to the beneficiaries were also reported in some of the areas where distribution was made through e-coupons as the fair price shop demands for ration cards and the majority of the beneficiaries have not received ration cards from the government.



In January 2022, the Hon'ble Court has further directed to expand the coverage of dry ration and advised the states/ union territories not to restrict on the list prepared by NACO for issuance of ration cards but rather to allow the CSOs/CBOs to share the list for verification by DLSA/SACS and issuance of ration cards / voter cards by maintaining the confidentiality of their identity. Based on the observations of the documentation team and experiences reported in this document, it would be worthwhile to mention that there is a strong need to stimulate the convergence practices and set up a strong monitoring and reviewing system at various levels as part of HIV/AIDS mainstreaming. During the study, many sex workers reported that they had consented for dry ration and other benefits from the government.

More than one-third of the sex workers received dry rations during the first six months of the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. The recent directive of the Hon'ble Supreme Court has expanded the coverage of this initiative and included other services as well to offer to the sex workers. Currently, NACO is the only institution in India that works directly with the sex workers at a mass level under the national flagship 'National AIDS Control Programme (NACP)'. NACO to continue to anchor this initiative with expanded coverage of services in collaboration with the stakeholder departments and issue a joint advisory and national guideline allowing various social protection benefits to the sex workers as part of HIV/AIDS mainstreaming. The Organisation may also conduct a study to assess the needs and impact of the existing social protection services on the lives of sex workers and systemic challenges to maximize the service coverage.







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