

# Govt eyes US pact with social security check

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In a move that could help seal the long-pending totalisation agreement with the US, the government is carrying out a national social security data-pooling exercise to assess the extent of social protection coverage in India.

The Union labour ministry has written to as many as 10 major states in the first phase of the exercise, asking them to share beneficiary data from various social security and welfare schemes they provide, according to a government official.

“This data-pooling exercise will not only strengthen India’s global reputation as a social protection pioneer but also help the central government, states, and Union Territories (UTs) optimise welfare spending and move closer to sustainable financing of social protection. The exercise will also reinforce India’s position in negotiating trade and social security agreements with other countries and reflect India’s commitment to promoting decent work in global value chains,” the official said.

India has long been trying to convince US authorities to sign such a deal,

## WIDENING NET

- Social protection coverage in India increased to 49% in 2024, according to an ILO report
- It may rise to 65% once data pooling exercise with states is done
- This will strengthen India’s global reputation as a social protection pioneer

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which could help bring back contributions made by Indians while working in the US, even though they were not allowed to avail of that country’s social security benefits. India is expected to push forward this demand as part of the ongoing negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement.

In the joint statement after the India-US Trade Policy Forum meeting in January last year, both sides said: “The ministers acknowledged the ongoing discussions on a social security totalisation agreement and receipt of additional information by the US from India. They also encouraged further engagement in order to establish a stronger basis for a future agreement.”

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# India's welfare reach rose to 49% in 2024: ILO report

The data-pooling exercise is being carried out ahead of the 113th annual session of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva in June.

The states that have been asked to share data with the Centre include Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Gujarat.

Recently, in its latest World Social Protection Report 2024-26, the ILO noted that India has made huge strides in enhancing its social protection coverage, as the proportion of India's population covered under at least one branch of social protection increased to 49 per cent in 2024 from 24.4 per cent in 2021.

"This was possible as the ILO acknowledged beneficiaries of existing central social protection schemes that hadn't been considered earlier. The ILO now considers beneficiaries of a total of 34 major central schemes, such as the rural job guarantee scheme, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation, Employees' State Insurance Corporation, Atal Pension Yojana, and the mid-day meal scheme.

Earlier, only seven central schemes were considered," the official said.

In a bilateral discussion held last week between the Centre and the ILO, the United Nations (UN) agency shared that providing welfare benefits like housing and food security is also part of a set of extended indicators to be considered as social security, based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. India believes the present social protection coverage assessment by the ILO (48.8 per cent) is still an underestimation, as it does not account for in-kind benefits and social protection provided by states.

"Therefore, beneficiaries of all these welfare schemes will now also be considered by the ILO while computing the extent of social security coverage in the country. Initially, only

10 states have been identified for the exercise, which will then be extended to include all states and UTs in the country. By utilising encrypted Aadhaar as a unique identifier, we hope that nearly two-thirds of the population in the country with at least one form of social security will be captured," the official added.

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