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Is 'security' work secure?

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Security services industry needs support

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Private security: Growing sector | Photo Credit: SHIVKUMARPUSHPAKAR



India's Smart Cities Mission is aimed at improving the quality of urban life. While there have been considerable investments in hard infrastructure, soft infrastructure, like the provisioning of safe and secure spaces, has not been targeted well enough.

Today, the urban population increasingly relies on private security solutions providers. In a study conducted by the authors, using monthly data released by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), for the years 2016-2022, shows that more than 50 per cent of the around 8,000 companies established to provide HR solutions were providing "security services".

Various reports estimate that the private security service industry in India employed 7-9 million as of 2016 and can employ 11-12 million individuals as of 2023 through more than 22,000 private security agencies. It is slated to be one of India's largest and fastest employment generators, with an estimated CAGR of 20-25 per cent by 2023.

Seventy-five per cent of this security service industry constitutes manned guarding. They cater to the demands of IT/ITeS, retail, commercial and manufacturing sectors, wherein 41 and 39 per cent of guards are deployed in the commercial and residential sectors, respectively.

The rest of the industry constitutes highly organised cash management services with 7-8 major agencies. With the establishment of these agencies, it is argued that this industry has become more organised.

Preferred cities

Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kanpur and Gwalior are the preferred cities for registration for security services firms. The workforce is primarily sourced from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Assam.

Specific regions with ex-army populations, paramilitary personnel and unemployed youth are the most significant contributors to this, according to a FICCI report. Thus, Tier II cities such as Kanpur and Gwalior are registering more HRCs than Tier I cities such as Chennai and Hyderabad, which points to the fact that they could be acting as hubs attracting labour from hinterlands to be deployed elsewhere in the country.

The proliferation of security service companies could be a combination of proximal and distal factors. The proximal factors include increasing concern for personal security, inadequacy of the public safety infrastructure — a low police-population ratio, a rise and spread of the number of banks and ATMs, declaration of private

security services as essential services during the Covid-19 pandemic, and so on.

The distal factors include a rise in urbanisation, changing ideas of risks in an increasingly globalised context. From a regulatory point of view, security service companies must also register under the Private Security Agencies Regulation Act (2005).

The Act aims to regulate security agencies operating in the country while ensuring that they do not intrude upon the duties of law-and-order enforcement mechanisms. However, the job involves much more risk than jobs, in general, owing to sudden exposure to unfavourable circumstances.

Thus, while emphasis has been given to training the security workforce to do biometrics and zero-touch approaches to enhance the standardisation of processes, equal or more emphasis should be placed on strengthening this first line of defence and protecting themselves during crises. This includes site-specific trainings, even if the workers are deployed on shifts to various sites.

There is also the need to support the participation of women in the workforce. It is thus imperative that the capabilities of this large army of security workforce is enhanced, ensuring that the quality of working conditions is improved with adequate breaks, pay and social security support and opportunities for skilling.

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