

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO- 3115

ANSWERED ON- 13/12/2024

ENHANCEMENT OF CONSULAR SERVICES

3115 DR. BHOLA SINGH

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :-

- (a) the steps taken/proposed to be taken by the Government to enhance consular services for Indian nationals abroad, particularly in countries with a high concentration of Indian diaspora;**
- (b) whether the Government has implemented new digital platforms to streamline visa and passport services;**
- (c) if so, the details thereof;**
- (d) the total number of Indian nationals assisted through the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) in 2023-24; and**
- (e) the initiatives taken/proposed to be taken by the Government to ensure the safety and welfare of Indian workers in Gulf countries?**

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

(a) The Government has taken several steps to enhance consular services for Indian nationals abroad, through Indian Missions on priority basis. Grievances are responded through various channels like calls, walk-ins, e-mails, social media, 24x7 Helplines and Open Houses. Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras (PBSKs) have been set up at Dubai, Sharjah, Riyadh, Jeddah and Kuala Lumpur to provide assistance to Indian workers abroad. Shelter homes for distressed Indian nationals have also been set up at some Missions/Posts. Mission officials visit immigration offices and labour camps to address the complaints of Indian workers. Financial assistance to distressed Indians, if necessary, is provided through the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF). During emergency or crisis situations, our Missions/Posts abroad pro-actively help distressed/stranded Indian

nationals in terms of providing food, shelter, medicine and helping their return to India.

(b & c) The Government has implemented Passport Seva Project (PSP), an IT driven mission mode project, that has successfully provided an efficient, secure, user-friendly, transparent and accountable passport services to citizens across the country. Passport Seva System presently offers a unique method of service delivery which is at par with any global service delivery systems. The Government has simplified the passport issuance process in several ways. To streamline, liberalise and ease the process of passport issuance, the Ministry has taken several steps to simplify passport policy, benefiting citizens of India in applying for and obtaining a passport. The Passport portal (www.passportindia.gov.in) is user friendly, accessible to anyone, from anywhere and anytime in India. An applicant can apply for passport from anywhere in India. This citizen-friendly initiative has enabled applicants to choose the Passport Office (PO) and thus the desired PSKs/ POPSKs under the Regional Passport Office (RPO) where they wish to submit their application, irrespective of whether the present residential address specified in the application form lies

within the jurisdiction of the selected RPO or not. Citizens can also apply, pay and schedule appointments for passport services on mPassport Seva mobile app, and do not require access of computer and printer to apply for passport services. The mPassport Seva mobile app enables users to apply, pay and schedule appointments for passport services. It also provides passport related information, including the location of PSKs/POPSKs, applicable fees, submission methods and tracking of passport application status on a smart phone.

In parallel, the Government of India has also streamlined other aspects of international travel and immigration. Initiatives such as the e-Visa, which is available to nationals of 172 countries, alongside platforms like the Study in India Portal and the Medical & Ayush Visa Portal, further enhance India's global connectivity and ease of access to various services for foreign nationals. Collectively, these efforts signify India's commitment to modernizing and securing its passport and visa services, leveraging technology to improve the overall user experience for both citizens and international visitors.

(d) The total number of Indian nationals assisted through the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) in 2023 and 2024 (till September, 2024) is 25,951.

(e) The Government accords high priority to the safety, security and well-being of Indian workers abroad and has taken several initiatives such as Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojna (PBBY) and Pre-Departure Orientation & Training (PDOT) in ensuring that Indian migrant workers (including labourers) undertake safe migration, have decent working and living conditions in destination countries, are aware of their rights and have access to various welfare schemes of the Government. The Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) is a mandatory insurance scheme aimed at safeguarding the interests of Emigration Check Required (ECR) category Indian migrant workers going for employment to 18 ECR countries. The scheme provides an insurance cover of INR. 10 lakh and other benefits in case of accidental death or permanent disability leading to job loss, at a nominal insurance premium of INR 275/- for two years or INR 375/- for three years validity. PDOT is a one-day training programme on soft skills imparted by Ministry of External

Affairs (MEA) in collaboration with National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), State Governments and other stake holders.
