

Construction firms turn to apps in search of labour

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Walk-ins, call centres, print ads, and mobile apps weren't the top-most options for Indian construction and capital goods companies when it came to hiring labour. They mainly depended on sourcing through contractors, but in the Covid-19 affected world, every option is being looked at afresh.

These companies require labourers in large numbers, but face a crunch because of the exodus of migrants after the lockdown was imposed.

Hiring locally available labour is an option. For instance, on June 15, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) issued an advertisement in regional newspapers saying it required masons, carpenters, fitters, welders, and electricians in the hundreds and thousands. MMRDA had over 10,000 labourers at several Mumbai metro sites before the exodus.

Officials at MMRDA said the advertisement was in line with the chief minister's call for hiring local labour. "The response has been good and is obviously intended for local

LOCAL BOOTS ON GROUND

■ **Construction companies face labour crunch** because of exodus of migrants to their native states due to the lockdown

■ **Firms considering putting out print ads** for walk-ins at project sites



■ **Some companies are also considering hiring call centres**

■ **L&T has an application that has data of around 1.5 million labourers**

labour. We also have had people qualified for clerical jobs applying for these posts... these calls are mostly from the interiors of Maharashtra," said a person with direct knowledge of the hiring who did not wish to be identified. MMRDA is not an exception. Companies, too, are experimenting with how they hire, especially because it is not feasible to do away with migrant workers completely.

Engineering conglomerate Larsen & Toubro (L&T), for instance, has an application that has data of around 1.5 million labourers. The data includes information on skill sets, contact details, including addresses. Company executives said the database was not

just of people who had worked with the company earlier, but also had fresh enrollments.

S N Subrahmanyan, managing director and chief executive officer of L&T, added that this allowed the firm to call for carpenters from within its own organisation.

Some other companies have considered hiring a call centre (to make and receive recruitment calls), only to discard the idea. "We considered setting up a call centre for this process for one of our infrastructure projects. We, however, later decided against it as it may lead to fake recruitment scams and other issues," said an executive of a large conglomerate, which also has a

construction subsidiary. The subsidiary is now considering putting out print advertisements announcing opportunities for walk-ins at different project sites.

Road construction companies, too, are faced with a similar problem. As road projects are location based, these companies are now hiring locally. "There is a labour shortage. We are now hiring local depending on where the project is. With the available labour we are prioritising pre-monsoon work," said a top executive from a road construction company.

States impacted by the reverse migration are also helping industry get labour back. Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala on Tuesday announced ₹1,500 would be given to each migrant worker engaged in construction sector who returns. Firms like IRB Infrastructure Developers that have many national highway projects say that some migrants are now willing to return.

"We have 60-80 per cent of labour available, for the rest, we are hiring through a mix of local and migrant labour," said Virendra Mhaikar, managing director of IRB.