

Jan Swasthya Abhiyan

Statement of Solidarity with the National Workers' Strike – 12 February 2026

Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA) expresses full solidarity with the nationwide general strike on 12 February 2026, called by ten Central Trade Unions (CTUs) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM). Over 250 million workers across sectors—including the health sector—are protesting the four new Labour Codes and recent trade deals that weaken protections and deepen precarity.

The new Labour Codes, consolidating 29 laws, replace direct inspections with self-certification, legalise "hire-and-fire" through fixed-term contracts, erode minimum wages, exclude huge numbers of scheme workers across India, and heighten risks in hazardous sectors. Passed despite mass strikes and trade union opposition, the legislation prioritises corporate interests over workers and public welfare. JSA particularly critiques the exclusion of scheme workers who play critical roles in delivering health, nutrition and social services to India's people, as well as dilution of protections for workers health and safety.

ASHAs, Anganwadi workers/helpers, and contractual health staff—who deliver maternal/child health, immunisation, nutrition services, and vital health information—are misclassified as "volunteers". The Labour Codes offer no protection to these millions of important workers who will continue to face meagre honoraria, being denied minimum wages and social security, and lack of job security despite full-time workloads and heroic contributions during the pandemic. Courts affirm their entitlement to living wages and security, yet the Codes structurally exclude them, exacerbating the undervaluation of women-dominated care work from marginalised communities.

Further, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020 is a serious challenge to the working people of India. This Code consolidates 13 different legislations into a single Code, and in doing so goes against the very essence of the previous legislations, which addressed the interests of diverse categories of workers based on the concrete differences of different trades, industries and types of work. The previous laws covered sectors like factories, mines, dockworkers, building and construction workers, plantation labour as well as employees in cinemas, motor transport and journalism. These legislations looked at the concrete working conditions of these respective trades and industries, and provisioned laws and rules accordingly.

The new Codes amalgamate these 13 legislations related to a wide variety of trades and industries, **ignoring the diversity and specificities of working conditions and creating a serious challenge for workers to navigate their health and safety.** This Code also increases the number of workers needed in an establishment before safety provisions apply—for example, safety and welfare measures now apply only in establishments with 20 workers (with power) and 40 workers (without power), majorly hiked from earlier lower thresholds under existing laws. This change effectively **excludes a huge number of**

smaller establishments from essential safety and welfare obligations, exposing millions of workers to risky working conditions.

The present Code requires each State to frame their own rules to make the Central legislation operational on the ground. This now exposes workers of the same industry and trade to being governed by different rules in different states, opening the door to inequities in protection of labour, unlike the previous situation of uniform basic protections.

Keeping in view this entire context, JSA supports the demands raised by Trade Unions and urges rejection of the new Labour Codes given their many negative provisions. Instead, health workers as well as the broader range of workers across India must be ensured justice by:

- Regularising ASHAs, Anganwadi staff, and contractual workers as employees with adequate living wages and timely payments.
- Extending full social security (PF, pension, healthcare) to all health and social sector workers, along with ensuring their workplace safety, training, and grievance mechanisms.
- Mandatory recognition of various occupational diseases, expanded frameworks for worker's health and safety protection (instead of their dilution), adequate employer-supported health oversight and compensation.
- Rolling back any revised thresholds which exclude workers in smaller establishments from OHS protections, ensuring adequate on-the-ground inspections, and strict prosecution for violations which are essential to protect the health and safety of all workers.

JSA supports ASHAs, Anganwadi Workers and Helpers, and contractual workers within the health and social sectors, in their fight for justice, dignity, and recognition. All health workers—permanent, contractual, scheme-based, or outsourced—must be assured equal and adequate protections, clear employer accountability, safe working hours, and full social security coverage. Instead of deregulation that prioritises employer interests, India requires a rights-based labour framework which guarantees enforceable occupational health and safety standards across all workplaces, irrespective of size or employment status.

To conclude, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan demands that the ill-conceived and corporate-oriented Labour Codes must be rolled back and replaced by provisions for dignified work and fair wages, for all health and social sector workers, and protection of workers' health and safety to be effectively ensured through adequate OHS systems, instead of the regressive Labour Code framework. Such an approach would be foundational to workers welfare, public health and social systems in India.