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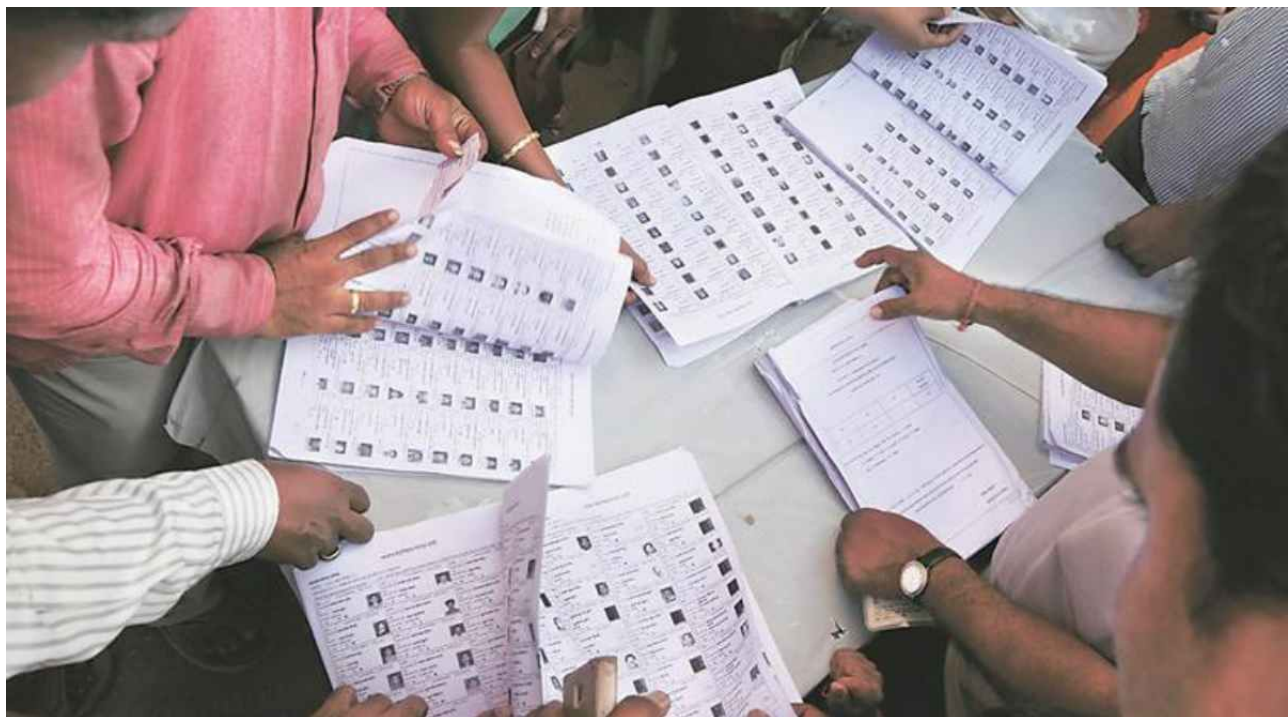
Premium

# Election Commission says ready to roll out pilot for migrants to vote remotely

As per Census 2011, 45.36 crore or 37% of population are migrants

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(RVM) that can facilitate voting for different constituencies from a single remote polling booth.

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Election Commission says ready to roll out pilot for migrants to vote remotely

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Underlining the problems faced by domestic migrants in travelling back to their home constituencies to vote, the Election Commission of India (ECI) Thursday said it is ready to pilot remote voting, a move that will also result in better voter turnouts.

In a statement, the ECI said it has developed a multi-constituency Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM) that can facilitate voting for different constituencies from a single remote polling booth.

“Migration-based disenfranchisement is indeed not an option in the age of technological advancement. The voter turnout in General Elections 2019 was 67.4% and the Election Commission of India is concerned about the issue of over 30 crore electors not exercising their franchise and also differential voter turnout in various States/ UTs,” the ECI said in a press note.

Inviting political parties for a discussion on January 16, the ECI pointed out as per Census 2011, 45.36 crore Indians, or 37 per cent of the population are migrants, but 75 per cent of them are migrants on account of marriage or other family-related reasons. It said, “Amongst the many reasons like urban apathy and youth apathy, inability to vote due to internal migration (domestic migrants) is also one prominent reason contributing to low voter turnout.”

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The Election Commission Thursday said that approximately 85 per cent of the internal migration is within the states.

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The idea behind RVM is to ensure these migrant voters participate in the electoral process. While the ECI data shows though the voter registration and turnout has increased over the decades, the concern of participation stagnating is manifest. Between 2009 and 2019, registered voters increased by almost 20 crores to 91.20 crores. Voter turnout too increased to 67.4 per cent from 58.21 per cent during the period, but almost 30 crore adults did not vote.

## EXPLAINED

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### Voter turnout & migrants

One key reason for low voter turnout (over 30 crore do not vote) could be migrants not going home to exercise their franchise. The poll panel proposes to address this by using technology so that migrants can vote remotely and also stay connected with their roots.

Noting that internal migration (domestic migrants) is one of the prominent reasons to be addressed to improve voter turnout and ensure participative elections, the ECI said there were multifarious reasons for a voter not opting to register in a new place of residence.

“... many times, they are reluctant to get themselves enrolled at their place of work for various reasons such as frequently changing residences, not enough social and emotional connect with the issues of area of migration, unwillingness to get their name deleted in electoral roll of their home/native constituencies as they have permanent residence/property etc,” the ECI’s press note said. The remote voting initiative, if implemented, can lead to a social transformation for the migrants and connect with their roots, it said.

The ECI will **demonstrate the functioning of the remote EVM** on January 16 to the eight national and 57 state political parties. It has also sought their written views by January 31. In its letter to parties, the EC identified broad issues for

consultation ranging from identifying who a domestic migrant is and the duration of migration to how to implement the Model Code of Conduct in remote locations where the election process is not going on.

While there is no accurate number of migrants, the Economic Survey in 2017 stated that annually inter-state labour mobility averaged 5-6 million people between 2001 and 2011, yielding an inter-state migrant population of about 60 million and an inter-district migration as high as 80 million.

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As per Census estimates, the annual rate of growth of labour migrants nearly doubled between 2001-2011 compared to the previous decade. The survey also found a doubling of the stock of out-migrants to 11.2 million among those aged 20-29 years.

A 2017 Report by the Working Group on Migration by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, had identified 54 districts that account for half the male inter-state out-migration in the country.

In 2017, the ECI had told the Supreme Court that it was not feasible to track movement of domestic migrants to allow remote voting. The demand was made when the EC was considering options to allow NRIs to vote from overseas.

The EC said it had explored several alternative voting methods like two-way physical transit postal ballots, proxy voting, early voting at special Early Voting Centres, one-way or two-way electronic transmission of postal ballots (ETPBS), Internet-based voting system etc before landing on the remote EVM model.

The move would involve amendment of Section 20 of the Representation of People Act, 1950 which defines a person who is “ordinarily resident in a constituency.” Every person above the age of 18 who is also an “ordinarily resident in a constituency” is eligible to register as a voter in that constituency.

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