

# Out of work, migrant workers head home

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SURAT: Recession for the last two months and indefinite strike by textile traders against Goods and Services Tax (GST) on fabrics have forced thousands of migrant textile workers to move out of the Diamond City.

The textile markets, powerloom sector and textile dyeing and printing mills together employ over 10 lakh workers in total. Indefinite strike in the textile markets, which has been continuing since July 1, has compelled powerloom weavers and textile processors to cut down on production by 85%.

If industry experts are to be believed, around 50,000 migrant workers have moved out of the city in the past one month. Chances of the migrant workers' returning are bleak due to the ongoing strike and production cut by the weavers and textile processors.

Pandesara Weavers' Cooperative Society Ltd (PWCSL) president Ashish Gujarati said, "Around 20% workforce in the powerloom weaving sector had moved out of the city. We fear that prolonged strike by textile traders will further worsen the situation. Migrant workers won't come before August. The powerloom sector is operating at less than 20% capacity due to the traders' strike since the last 18 days. Most small weaving units have literally cut down 90% of production and are running only one shift in their units."

There are 30,000 powerloom units in Pandesara, Udhana, Limbayat, Bhestan, Sachin, Katargam, Ved Road and other parts of the city. There are about 6.5 lakh powerloom machines manufacturing around 4 crore metre fabrics per day.

The powerloom sector is staring at production losses to the tune of over Rs 900 crore due to disruption in the last fortnight. Traders have blocked over Rs 3,500 crore worth of payments for grey fabric due to the ongoing strike. Apart from this, grey fabric stock worth around Rs 2,500 crore is lying in godowns of powerloom units.

On the other hand, the textile processing sector is also facing difficult times due to the traders' strike. The processing sector is facing daily losses to the tune of Rs 200 crore. There are 400 textile processing units in the city.

"We are worried for our migrant workers. The traders' strike has brought the processing sector to a standstill. Many workers have left for their hometown in the last few days," South Gujarat Textile Processors' Association president Jitu Vakharia said.