

International leprosy charity bridging the hunger gap for those most vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis.

India, home to 1/3rd of the global slum population, is struggling with the burden of COVID-19. Lepra, a UK based, international charity, is working to provide food and adequate nutrition to the many thousands of people that suffer from leprosy and are forced to live in slum conditions.

The COVID-19 crisis has created an even steeper divide between those with leprosy and the rest of Indian society. Many live in swamped, crowded conditions. The slums are teeming with people, ill equipped for the sheer numbers.

Overcrowding, uncertainty of employment, spread of infectious diseases, lack of clean water, poor sanitation, low disease immunity and a lack of basic medical facilities contribute to the serious threat of COVID-19 in these areas.

Lepra does outreach work in slum areas, assisting those with communicable diseases like leprosy. The reproductive ratio for COVID-19 has been estimated at around 2 or 3 percent. In slums, this rate jumps to 20%.

Lepra is assisting 365 households along with support from Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI), each containing a person affected by leprosy and a further 259 households containing migrant workers from other states and districts who are forced to stay in slums and work in nearby factories.

Jayaram Parasa, Head of Programmes in India says: "COVID-19 is an unexpected situation which halted many people's lives, including those with leprosy and other neglected diseases. Most of them are unable to go out and earn their livelihood.

During these difficult times, timely emergency support from donors like APPI, helped us in addressing the immediate needs of the people from these vulnerable communities."

Nutrition remains a serious issue regarding leprosy as those affected often do not have access to adequate amounts of nutritional foods. Their diets lack fresh, organic fruit and vegetables and this can hamper immune strength and response.

Sudhakar, a painter, is one of the beneficiaries of LEPRAs food programme, in conjunction with APPI. He says: "I have no opportunity to work because of COVID-19. I am also a migrant worker, so I don't have a ration card to access the government food scheme. I have no help. The ration kit supplied by LEPRAs has helped me stay healthy and alive"