

HOME-BASED WORKERS ON E-SHRAM: EVIDENCE FROM DELHI

SEWA Delhi & HBW

Since 1999, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has been organizing women home-based workers in Delhi to bring them out of the shadows, support their livelihoods and lift them out of poverty. SEWA Delhi's main programmes are built around livelihood, microfinance, skills development and education, and outreach centres. At the core of the SEWA's approach is to organize informal women workers to achieve their goal of self-reliance and full employment.



Home-based workers have historically been invisibilised from labor statistics, both in terms of their numbers and their contributions to the economy. The E-Shram initiative, designed to register unorganized sector workers, presented a crucial opportunity to enumerate home-based workers (HBWs) and consequently strengthen their access to social security. SEWA Delhi, thus, conducted a **sector-wise scoping study** on registration of HBWs on E-shram with the objective to assess how effectively HBWs are captured in the E-Shram database.

*Using SEWA's membership data, detailed information on nearly **70000 women home-based workers in Delhi** was analyzed. These workers engage in **68 distinct occupational sub-trades**, reflecting the diversity & scale of this workforce.*

By comparing E-Shram data with SEWA's extensive records and fieldwork findings, this study identifies key gaps and

inconsistencies in HBW registration, highlighting areas for improvement in E-Shram registration.

HOME-BASED WORKERS

Home-based workers are those workers who undertake productive or remunerative employment from within their own home or adjacent premises. Home-based workers are engaged in many branches of industry and represent a significant share of urban employment, especially in India.

*There are an estimated **74 million home-based workers—14% of all workers, including 44 million women (29% of women workers) and 8% of men workers (Raveendran, 2024)—** though activists suggest this is an undercount.*

Most home-based workers fall into a grey intermediate zone between being fully independent and being fully dependent (Chen, 2014). Some home-based workers are independent self-employed workers who take entrepreneurial risks. Other home-based workers are dependent on a firm or its contractors and referred to as sub-contracted workers.

Their work supports household incomes, city economies, and global value chains by producing low-cost goods and services. However, despite their contributions, home-based workers in India remain invisible and unrecognized as their work is often dismissed as an extension of domestic labor rather than market production. As a result, they are often overlooked in policy design, regulations, and service provision.

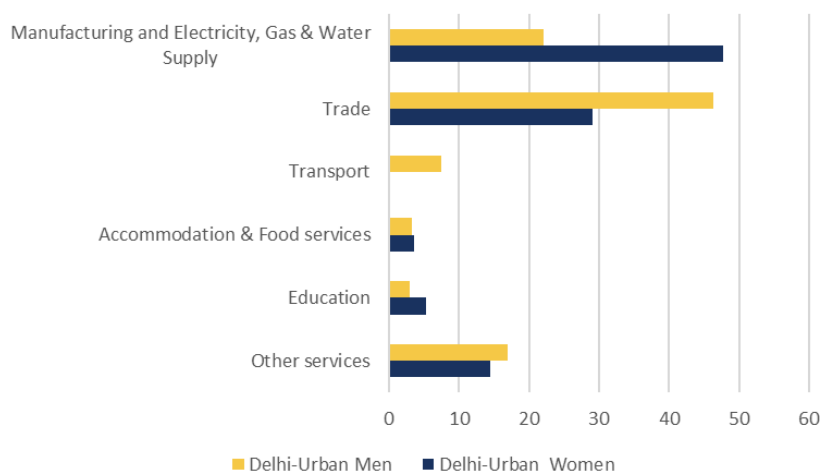
HOME-BASED WORK IN DELHI

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022-23, there are 5.12 lakh home-based workers in Delhi.

5.12 Lakh

2.52 Lakh women home-based workers in Delhi; i.e. 23 percent of the total employment in 2022-23

Home-based workers by industry group, sector and sex in Delhi in 2022-23 (in percent)



»» OBJECTIVES

The objectives of E-shram portal as laid out by MoLE (PIB, 2024) are to:

- Establish a **centralized database** of unorganized workers for effective policy implementation.
- Enhance access to **social security** schemes and benefits for workers in sectors such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, and street vending.
 - Facilitate **job matching** and skill development opportunities.
 - Strengthen labor market resilience by integrating unorganized workers into the formal economy.
 - Promote **financial inclusion** through direct benefit transfers and digital payments.

»» REGISTRATION

- The workers need to register using their Aadhar, linked phone number and bank account.
- Those aged between 16-59 and are not a member of Employees' State Insurance Corporation, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation or the National Pension System are eligible to register.

E-SHRAM AND HISTORY

»» ABOUT

Launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) on 26th August 2021, E-shram portal was created as a comprehensive **National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW)** with the primary goal of ensuring targeted delivery of social security entitlements to India's vast population of unorganised workers. The database maintains details of name, occupation, address, occupation type, educational qualification, skill types etc of the registered workers who receive a **Universal Account Number (UAN)** linked to their Aadhar, to enable access to social security and welfare schemes in one place.



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON E-SHRAM

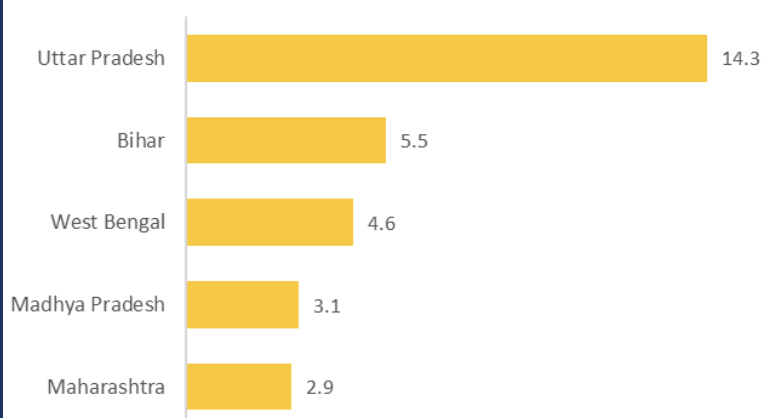
At launch, the long-term benefits of E-Shram registration were largely unclear, especially in terms of linkages to social security. However, during 2023-24, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) **integrated 12 schemes** covering a range of welfare measures, including pension, insurance, credit, skill development, and housing.

In another major move, MoLE announced the **inclusion of gig and platform workers** alongside other unorganised workers in September 2024. The Budget 2025 also outlined plans to facilitate their registration and the issuance of identity cards.

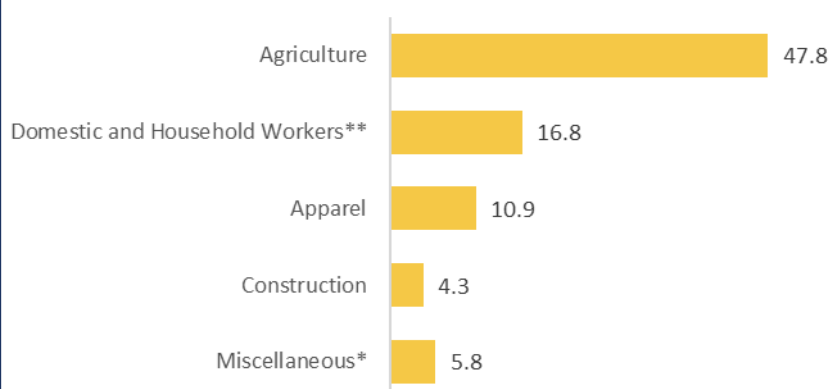
KEY TRENDS FROM E-SHRAM DATA

- Till January 2025, over **30 Cr** unorganized workers had enrolled on E-Shram.
- **More women than men have registered.** According to the latest figures (February 2025), 53.67% of the total registrations were by female workers.

Top 5 States with Highest Registration by Women Workers as of Jan2025 (in percent)



Top 5 Industry Groups with Highest Registration by Women Workers as of Jan 2025 (in percent)



- In the context of abysmally low levels of women's workforce participation rate in India, the high rate of women's registration on E-shram suggests that more women may be economically active than previously recorded. This observation highlights long-standing concerns regarding the inadequacy of labor statistics in capturing the full range of women's work—a trend that warrants further investigation using E-shram data.

KEY FINDINGS

ABSENCE OF "HOME-BASED WORKER" AS A REGISTRATION CATEGORY

To register on E-shram, workers need to choose their occupation from a list of 383 occupations. However, there is **no specific category** for "home-based workers," making it difficult for them to register

accurately.

Additionally, the portal collects data on workers' gender, age, state of residence, and disability status but does not capture information about their place of work. As a result, it is impossible to determine the number of home-based workers registered on E-Shram or gather meaningful insights about them.

LACK OF DIFFERENTIATION AMONG WORKER TYPES IN E-SHRAM REGISTRATION

The E-Shram portal does not distinguish between different types of workers within an occupation sector. Casual workers in factories, those employed in workshops (karkhanas), and home-based workers are all grouped under the same occupational category.

For example, a tailor—whether employed in a garment factory, a

karkhana, or working from home—is simply registered as a "Tailor." This broad classification overlooks significant differences in working conditions, income levels, and vulnerabilities. A factory worker may earn ₹5,000 per month, while a home-based worker, reliant on piece-rate wages, may only earn ₹2,000. Their economic, social, and livelihood insecurities vary widely.

Without granular data distinguishing these worker types, it becomes challenging to address

**Domestic and Household workers' Includes the categories of cooks, domestic and related helper, cleaners and laundered, others, kitchen porter, pantry man on E-shram.

*Miscellaneous' includes domestic housekeepers, street vendors, other salesman, wholesale trade/distributor salesman, distributor sales representative, etc on E-shram.

their specific needs and vulnerabilities, ultimately hindering their effective inclusion in social protection programs.

Limited Recognition of Home-Based Worker Categories on E-Shram

According to documentation by SEWA Delhi, nearly 70,000 home-based workers (HBWs) are engaged in 68 distinct occupational categories. However, **only 27 of these 68 categories are listed** on the E-Shram portal, leaving many types of home-based work unrecognized.

Several absent categories engage a smaller yet significant number of HBWs. These include bindi making (3.91%), thread cutting (1.47%), stone/bead embellishment work (5.62%), and garland making (3.64%).

Sr no.	Categories captured under SEWA Membership	In E-shram
1	Fabric cutting	Yes
2	Zari/stone/bead work	Yes
3	Sewing	Yes
4	Embroidery	Yes
5	Thread cutting	No
6	Button work	Yes
7	Machine elements making	No
8	Bangle making	No
9	Electronic Lead assembly	No
10	Garland making	No



RELATED CHALLENGES IN REGISTRATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF HOME-BASED WORK CATEGORIES ON E-SHRAM

MISCATEGORISATION OF HBW

It was found that women home-based workers' occupations are frequently misclassified. This misclassification occurs when the appropriate occupational categories are absent from the E-Shram portal. Even when the correct categories are available, errors persist when women self-identify as housewives during registration at Common Service Centres (CSCs) or E-Shram camps.



SEASONAL AND SHIFTING WORK

Home-based work is often seasonal largely due to change in weather and festivals. Rain and dampness during monsoon may force workers to suspend or reduce production due to the fear of damage to goods or the need for dry conditions for the production (in case if incense sticks rolling). During monsoon, procurement of raw materials is made difficult due to water logging and decreased accessibility to roads as it often occurs in informal settlements where HBWs typically reside. Festival seasons, in contrast, are periods of high demand and production. Home-based workers intensify or diversify their production before and during festival seasons – to take advantage of the increased demand and might engage in trades like Diwali lamps, garlands, flag making, etc.

RECOMMENDATION

E-Shram must incorporate a distinct category for home-based work rather than attempting a sector-wise classification.

The absence of a "Home-based worker" category on the E-Shram portal creates a major barrier for home-based workers to access social security benefits. Without a clear registration category, HBWs may struggle to identify the appropriate classification for their work, leading to underrepresentation in labor databases and exclusion from policy frameworks and benefits. A dedicated category for home-based workers is crucial to ensuring their visibility and access to entitlements.

Given the unique nature of home-based work—characterized by diversity across sectors and frequent movement between industries—it is vital to establish a proper classification system. Home-based workers have already been comprehensively defined under the **Code on Social Security 2020**. This brief, therefore, advocates for a separate category for home-based workers on E-Shram.

Since home-based work is predominantly undertaken by women and comes with multiple livelihood challenges, their inclusion in E-Shram must be prioritized to extend meaningful social protection to this vulnerable workforce.



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