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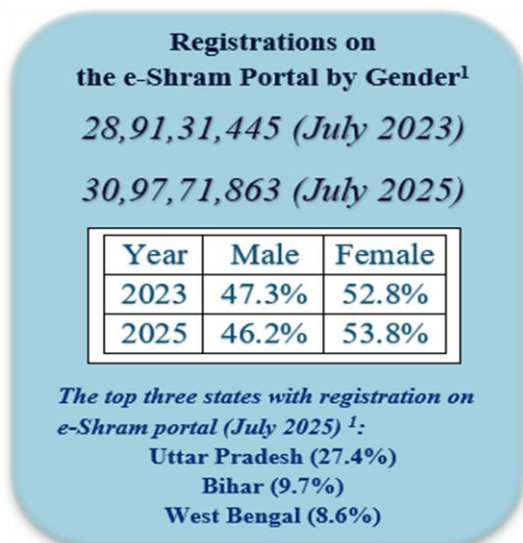
REGISTRATION OF INFORMAL MIGRANT LABOURERS ON E-SHRAM PORTAL: *Awareness, Implementation and Effectiveness*

Archana K Roy*, Kunal Keshri**, and Rukmi Pradeep***



Background

A migrant working in the informal sector faces many vulnerabilities related to their workplace, standards of living, and family, and the majority of these migrants do not have any social security benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted these vulnerabilities manifold and pointed out the need for a database of migrant workers in the informal sector so that we know who they are, where they are from, and where they are currently residing. Counting them is so important that it gives the magnitude of informal workers across the country. On 26 August 2021, the Government of India launched the e-Shram portal to register informal workers, assign them unique IDs, and build an Aadhaar-linked national database. Yet, key concerns remain: Are workers, especially migrants, registering? What challenges hinder registration? And what measures are needed to improve the system?



The e-Shram card serves as proof of identity for labourers, their employability, and facilitates their inclusion in social security schemes administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment. It aims to create a national database of unorganised workers, including migrant workers, construction workers, gig and platform workers, etc., and to streamline the delivery of these benefits to unorganised workers.

To capture on-the-ground realities, qualitative fieldwork was carried out through interviews at three labour chowks in Mumbai—the informal hubs where daily-wage workers gather in search of employment in 2023. As the financial capital of India and a key destination for migrant labour, Mumbai provided a relevant and dynamic context for the study. A semi-structured interview format was used, and responses were collected from 84 migrant participants. The research primarily explored migrant workers' awareness and registration on the e-Shram portal, their current employment status, and their knowledge of other social security schemes aimed at their protection and welfare.

Out of the 84 respondents, 73% were inter-state and 27 intra-state migrants, approximately 42% were aware of the e-Shram portal, yet only 26% had registered. Awareness was primarily spread through relatives or friends who had already registered and possessed an e-Shram card. Registration requires an Aadhaar number, an Aadhaar-linked mobile number, and a bank account. Among the respondents, 65% had a bank account, 38% owned a smartphone, while only 27% had internet access, and 13% used online payment services on their phones. Notably, none of

the registered respondents had received any benefits, nor were they aware of what benefits the e-Shram card offers.

As illustrated in *Figure: 1*, the key challenges identified were unawareness of the portal, lack of proper documentation, lack of motivation, limited financial and digital illiteracy, and exploitation by private intermediaries.

Reported Barriers to Registration on e-Shram Portal (Based on Fieldwork)



Figure: 1

Policy Framework

The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, defines unorganised workers as those who are either home-based workers, self-employed, or wage workers and are not members of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) or the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). The Act aims to provide welfare and protection to vulnerable informal workers².

Similarly, different states have introduced specific welfare schemes tailored to the needs of migrant workers. For instance, in Maharashtra, benefits provided by the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board include health camps, ₹5,000 assistance for purchasing tools, safety and essential kits, post-March 2020 kit distribution, and COVID-19 relief support.

Navigating Barriers and Pathways to e-Shram Registration for Migrant Workers

Low registration motivation

The e-Shram portal promises long-term benefits, including a pension after the age of 60. However, for workers aged 15–49, the prospect of waiting over a decade for returns offers little incentive. In the absence of immediate, tangible benefits, motivation to register remains low among this group.



A registered worker with his e-Shram card

Self-registration is not that easy

Self-registration on the portal requires a smartphone, internet access, and basic digital literacy. Addressing the widespread digital illiteracy among informal migrant workers is urgently needed.

Awareness about the portal

Migrant workers must first be made aware that e-Shram registration is free and informed about its potential benefits. When a family member or peer receives benefits, it often triggers a 'neighbourhood effect,' encouraging others to register.

Financial literacy

Another essential requirement for registration is having an active bank account. Migrant workers need to be informed about the banking services tailored to their needs. Enhancing their understanding of simplified procedures and improved access can help bridge the gap and reduce their sense of exclusion from the formal banking system.

Broadening cooperation between the Government, civil society, and various other sectors

Functioning of the e-Shram portal system for informal migrant workers requires interlinking and coordination among the Government, the private sector, and civil society. The Labour Department, bankers, NGOs, and private partners together share a role in delivering benefits through the portal.

Collective work between boards

Planning and coordination among the labour boards and the e-Shram portal are necessary to avoid duplication of registration and for an effective system of delivering timely social security benefits.

Recognition of volunteer labourers

E-Shram portal beneficiaries do not include volunteer labourers such as ASHA workers, community health workers, and Anganwadi workers who need to be linked to the e-Shram portal.

The role of stakeholders

E-Shram identifies various ministries, National Informatics Centre (NIC), departments of the central government, Workers Facilitation Centre and Field Operators, Unorganised Workers & Their Families, UIDAI, NPCI, ESIC & EFPO, CSC-SPV, Department of Posts Through Post Offices, and private sector partners as the stakeholders of the portal. The study identifies the following stakeholders who can be significant contributors not only in improving the registration of informal migrant workers on the e-Shram portal but also in delivering the services and benefits that are intended for them.

- a) **Ministry of Labour & Employment** – Ensure that every migrant worker possesses identification proof and other documents required for registration. Eliminate the portal's weaknesses to prevent the registration of ineligible registrants, as there is no proper way to filter the eligible beneficiaries currently on the portal.
- b) **Banks** - Educate informal migrant workers about the banking services and processes, primarily to open an account, activate the old account, and claim the benefits of schemes designed for them. Educate and enable the account holder to operate their bank from anywhere. Assign an official in the branch office to always check on their queries.

- c) **NGOs** – Play a role in the regular monitoring of their wages, living arrangements, cleanliness, and sanitation. On-site classes for enlightening them with basic digital and financial knowledge. Helping and assisting them in registration or addressing the challenges that workers face in registering, such as a lack of internet accessibility or documentation.
- d) **Employer** – Take initiative in targeted massive registration on the portal at construction sites or worker residential areas. Employers should be obliged to employ people who are registered, and make it mandatory.
- e) **Academic Institutions** – Academic and research institutions such as International Institute for Population Sciences can directly or indirectly engage in assisting migrant workers in registering by organizing a registration campaign at their campus, which is accessible and inclusive.
- f) **Private Partners** – They can build partnerships with Government agencies, NGOs, and trade unions to promote registration through the development of human resources and technology. They can assist in developing the portal to achieve its full potential.

Conclusion:

The e-Shram portal is a significant step towards recognising and supporting informal migrant workers, yet its impact remains limited due to low awareness, digital illiteracy, and a lack of benefit realisation. For the portal to be effective, coordinated efforts are needed across government, NGOs, and financial institutions to raise awareness, simplify registration, and improve digital and financial literacy. Only through such inclusive and collective action, e-Shram can truly reach and empower India's vulnerable informal workforce.

Notes

- 1 Ministry of Labour & Employment. (2025). *e-SHRAM dashboard*. Government of India. Retrieved [July 2025]. <https://eshram.gov.in/dashboard>
- 2 Ministry of Labour & Employment. (2025). Annual report 2024–25. Government of India. <https://labour.gov.in/annual-reports>

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