

Magnitude of Formal and Informal Workers in India: Issues and Challenges

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To Cite this Article

Gaurav Bhatia & Tilak Raj (2024). Magnitude of Formal and Informal Workers in India: Issues and Challenges. *Indian Journal of Global Economics and Business*, 3: 2, pp. 87-99.

Abstract: The present study analyze the magnitude of formal and informal workers as per the data disseminated by Ministry of Statistics and Programming Implementation, Labour Bureau, Employees' Provident Fund Organization and Employee's State Insurance Corporation from the period 1999-2000 to 2022-23. An attempt has been made to provide sector wise as well as economic activity wise number of workers at all over India. The study also reviews the facts pertaining to workers as per 6th Economic Census 2013-14 and the estimates provided by Quarterly Employment Survey (2021) being conducted by Labour Bureau. Study concludes that in the present scenario, it has become a formidable task to provide decent quality of life and work environment to workforce especially in informal sector as this sector provides valuable contribution to the formal sector. At all India level, it is imperative to monitor the size of workers in the formal and informal sector over time for designing appropriate policies.

Keywords: Informal sector, workforce, employment, Indian economy.

INTRODUCTION

Formal sector employment refers to jobs in organizations that are registered and regulated by the government. These organizations adhere to labor laws, provide employment contracts, and offer certain benefits like Provident Fund (PF), Employee State Insurance (ESI), and gratuity. The formal sector in India has a limited capacity to absorb the growing working-age population, leading to high levels of unemployment or underemployment. Some argue that stringent labor laws can make it challenging for businesses to hire and fire employees, leading to reluctance to hire in the formal sector.

Informal sector employment consists of jobs that are not regulated by the government. These jobs often lack formal contracts and social security benefits.

Workers in the informal sector often face job insecurity due to the absence of formal employment contracts. Informal sector workers usually do not have access to benefits like health insurance, retirement funds, or other social security measures. Wages in the informal sector are often lower than those in the formal sector, contributing to poverty and economic vulnerability.

Indian economy is predominantly consisted of informal or unorganized sector both in terms of enterprises as well as workers. About half of the national income in India and more than 90 percent of workforce belongs to the informal sector (Government of India, 2012). Among the predominant South Asian countries, informalisation of workers is largest in India and Nepal (91 percent) followed by Pakistan (78 percent), Sri Lanka (61 percent) and Bangladesh (49 percent) (International Labour Organization, 2018). As per survey conducted in 2009-10 by National sample Survey Office, the organized and unorganized workers were 2.8 crore and 43.7 crores respectively at all India Level. Within the unorganized sector, 24.6 crores were in agriculture and remaining were in non-agricultural activities.

High growth trajectory of Indian economy in the light of various policy initiatives during the last few decades has led to increased informalisation. The mushrooming of informal sector vis-a-vis formal sector has detrimental effects on employment and income security for massive workforce. Major chunk of unorganized workers is engaged in home-based activities. They suffer from the phases of seasonal unemployment with unstable avenues of work. Moreover, their workplace is not only scattered but also fragmented. They have poor bargaining power, low productivity and they suffer from lack of social security benefits. For sustainable growth, it is imperative to address the aspirations and needs of these masses working in informal sector in India.

It has universally been accepted that dearth of reliable statistics on the informal sector has caused a major hurdle in understanding the dynamics of Indian Labour market (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector, 2007). Since the informal sector has inherent vulnerabilities, the study of this sector on the basis of reliable data sets can go a long way in formulation of policies and addressing the issues of informal labour market. With a view to strengthen the information base of Informal employment, need was felt at various platforms to collect and disseminate the data on formal and informal employment on regular basis. Although household based employment-unemployment and enterprise based surveys conducted by NSSO revealed some characteristics of informal employment, yet they are not adequate for framing sound policies. To bridge the data gaps, Labour Bureau has started All India Quarterly Establishment based Employment Survey (AQEES) by resuming the QES/AFES. The AQEES will be providing quarterly estimates starting from April 2021 for organized Sector (establishments with 10 or more workers) and for unorganized sector

(establishments with 10 or more workers) from Jan 2022. The AQEES survey will be one of its kind, as no other government agency is providing employment characteristics based on establishment survey with quarterly frequency.

In the Indian context, informality can be defined in terms of registration, contract, social security, tax net and category of workers (Economic Survey, 2018). The following most acceptable definition of informal /unorganized workers envisaged by National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) is appropriate in the sense that it is compatible with global standards.

“Unorganized workers consist of those working in the unorganized enterprises or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits, and the workers in the formal sector without any employment/ social security benefits provided by the employers” (NCEUS, 2007).

DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of the paper is to study the formal and Informal employment in India based on existing reliable datasets. The paper extensively analyzed the multiple data sources on formal and informal employment as available at all India level. Since informal sector is plagued with varied concepts and definitions having lack of uniformity; instead of using multiple definitions of informal workers, the paper primarily focused on the NCEUS classification of informal sector as per number of workers i.e. (less than 10 workers). Present study is undertaken as per the following secondary data:

- (a) Data related to employment-unemployment surveys for the period 2011-12 to 2016-17. (Data Source: Labour Bureau)
- (b) Data pertaining to Periodic Labour Force Survey for the period 2017-18 to 2019-20. (Data Source: MOSPI)
- (c) Data pertaining to quarterly employment surveys for the period 2021-2022. (Data Source: Labour Bureau)
- (d) Payroll data pertaining to EPFO, ESIC and NPS from the period 2017 to 2021. (Data Source: MOSPI)

Under the annual employment-unemployment survey, the labour force parameters have been estimated and expressed in the form of rates and per 1000 distribution of population aged 15 years and above. In order to depict these estimated rates in terms of absolute figures, population projection method has been applied by using population census data from 2001 to 2011 and corresponding decadal changes for population having age 15 years and above.

For the categories of persons at State/UT/All-India level, projected population based on the mid-survey date, has been derived by using the following formula:

$$A_t = A_0 * \{ [1 + (R/100)] ^ (M/120) \}$$

Where,

A_0 = Census population having age 15 years and above as on March 1, 2011;

R = Percentage decadal change in population (having age 15 years and above) between 2001 and 2011;

M = Number of months between census 2011 and mid-survey date;

A_t = Projected population having age 15 years and above as on mid-survey date.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Currently, India does not have a fixed definition of formal/organized and informal/unorganized sector/workers. The use of the term 'organized' and 'unorganized' as used in India is globally known as 'formal' and 'informal'. In the Indian context, the enterprise concept (i.e. to define the unorganized sector) and the employment concept (i.e. to define unorganized employment) lack in conceptual clarity and uniformity across the sub-sectors of the economy. Moreover, official statistics regarding formal/organized and informal/unorganized sector/workers and unincorporated non-agricultural enterprises are available only up to NSS 61st Round (2004-2005) and NSS 73rd Round (2015-16) respectively in the country.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various studies have been conducted on formal and informal employment in India. Few important related studies have thrown light on the relevance of formal and Informal sector in terms of employment. In India, this sector can be more vigorous than the formal one provided the right opportunities are to be ensured for its growth (Harris and Sinha, 2007). In order to garner benefits of globalization, it is necessary to develop integration and linkages between the two sectors (Mitra, 1998). There are strong reasons to believe that informal sector is dependent on the formal one with respect to output and employment (Chaudhary, 1989). In urban areas, this sector has witnessed much growth in comparison to formal sector. This growth is manifested primarily in developed areas due to complementariness of both sectors as the work is subcontracted by the formal sector to the informal one (Kundu, 1993). In the context of economic reforms, the need is felt to provide decent work with adequate social security benefits to the people working in informal sector (Juan, 2001). The informal sector generally comprises of self employed and casual workers who face income insecurities, low wages, no legal protection and above all discrimination (David, 1996). Women in the informal sector are more prone to discrimination due to poverty, inequality and male dominance (Sundaram, 1996). Growth-led strategy and social security mechanism in the informal sector can make a dent in strengthening the conditions of workforce in India (Dev and

Mooiji, 2002). Skill formation, micro credit, government interventions and information dissemination about informal sector can enhance the standard of living of the workforce (Mitra, 2006). From the above literature, it may be inferred that immense contribution of informal sector in the labour market cannot be ignored and sound policies based on available data sets can go a long way in strengthening this sector. Hence, considerable literature has been reviewed to reach the ultimate goal of the present study.

DISCUSSIONS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Informal sector is the nerve center of Indian economy. The study attempts to highlight sector wise and economic activity wise workers in India. Besides, an endeavor has been made to capture information on magnitude of workers and subscribers. Tables 1 to table 5 reveal data on the former while table 6 provide information on the latter.

SECTOR WISE TYPE OF WORKERS

Table 1 shows the sector wise types of workers in India. This table revealed that about 99 percent of informal workers were working in the informal sector during the period 2004-2005 and 1999-2000 whereas around 47 percent and 38 percent informal workers were working in the formal sector during the period 2004-2005 and 1999-2000 respectively. On the other hand, merely 0.4 percent of informal workers were working in informal sector during the corresponding period. It may be inferred from the NSSO data that considerable amount of informal employment in formal and informal sectors demands sound and dynamic policy interventions in the informal labour market.

Table 1: Sector wise Type of Workers

(In crores)

Sector/worker	2004-2005			1999-2000		
	Informal workers	Formal workers	Total	Informal workers	Formal workers	Total
Informal	39.35 (99.6)	0.14 (0.4)	39.49 (100)	34.13 (99.6)	0.14 (0.4)	34.26 (100)
Formal	2.91 (47)	3.34 (53.4)	6.26 (100)	2.05 (37.8)	3.37 (62.2)	5.41 (100)
Total	42.26 (92)	3.49 (7.6)	45.70 (100)	36.17 (91.2)	3.50 (8.8)	39.68 (100)

Source: NSS 61st Round (2004-2005) and NSS 55th Round (1999-2000).

Note: Data in parentheses denotes percentage of corresponding figures

SECTOR WISE WORKFORCE IN INDIA

Table 2 sheds light on sector wise workforce. The table 2 reports that about half of the workforce is engaged in the agriculture and allied activities whereas in the non

agriculture activities, construction, manufacturing and trade are the dominant sectors. Many countries exclude agriculture activities from the domain of informal sector as even 15th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS, 1993) had given the option to exclude agriculture and allied activities from the domain of informal sector surveys for practical reasons. Although, indicators on unincorporated sector enterprises are available from enterprise surveys of NSSO and Economic Census conducted by CSO, yet, both sources excluded workforce engaged in agriculture (i.e. crop production). Given the practical scenario, it is pertinent to mention here that majority of workers in agriculture activities are not within the coverage of employment-unemployment surveys (being conducted by NSO and Labour Bureau) for measurement of workers in informal sector/informal employment.

Table 2: Sector wise Workforce in India

(In crores)

Sector	2nd EUS (2011-12)	3rd EUS (2012-13)	4th EUS (2013-14)	5th EUS (2015-16)	6th EUS (2016-17)	PLFS (2017-18)	PLFS (2018-19)	PLFS (2019-20)
Agri& Allied	23.56 (52.84%)	21.98 (50.00%)	20.69 (46.79%)	21.57 (46.14%)	20.80 (42.90%)	19.08 (42.00%)	19.10 (40.89%)	22.25 (43.64%)
Manufacturing	4.73 (10.60%)	4.74 (10.80%)	4.86 (10.99%)	4.92 (10.52%)	5.38 (11.09%)	5.76 (12.68%)	5.78 (12.37%)	5.88 (11.53%)
Construction	3.88 (8.69%)	4.41 (0.01%)	4.99 (11.28%)	5.29 (11.32%)	5.19 (10.71%)	5.29 (11.64%)	5.66 (12.11%)	5.94 (11.65%)
Trade	3.43 (7.70%)	3.96 (9.01%)	4.24 (9.58%)	4.96 (10.61%)	6.06 (12.49%)	4.83 (10.63%)	5.23 (11.19%)	6.21 (12.18%)
Transport	1.55 (3.49%)	1.84 (4.19%)	2.12 (4.79%)	2.34 (0.92%)	2.42 (5.00%)	2.31 (5.08%)	2.36 (5.05%)	2.44 (4.79%)
Accommodation & Restaurant	0.58 (1.30%)	0.62 (1.41%)	0.70 (1.59%)	0.75 (1.60%)	0.93 (1.91%)	0.88 (1.94%)	0.90 (1.93%)	0.91 (1.79%).
IT/BPO	0.44 (0.99%)	0.4 (0.91%)	0.40 (0.91%)	0.37 (0.80%)	0.49 (1.01%)	0.49 (1.08%)	0.50 (1.07%)	0.52 (1.02%)
Education	1.73 (3.89%)	1.89 (4.29%).	1.86 (4.20%)	2.01 (4.30%)	2.23 (4.59%)	1.78 (3.92%)	1.86 (3.98%)	1.85 (3.63%)
Health	0.49 (1.11%)	0.44 (1.00%)	0.53 (1.20%)	0.51 (1.10%)	0.49 (1.01%)	0.58 (1.28%)	0.63 (1.35%)	0.60 (1.18%)
Others	4.19 (9.40%)	3.69 (8.39%)	3.83 (8.67%)	4.07 (8.71%)	4.51 (9.29%)	4.43 (9.75%)	4.71 (0.06%)	4.38 (8.59%)
Total	44.58 (100%)	43.95 (100.00%)	44.22 (100.00%)	46.75 (100.00%)	48.49 (100.00%)	45.44 (100.00%)	46.72 (100%)	50.99 (100.00%)

Source: Author's own Calculations based on various rounds of Employment-Unemployment Surveys conducted by Labour Bureau & MOSPI

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of the column total

WORKFORCE BY ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Table 3 highlights the workforce at all India level by economic activity. The table 3 reveals that considerable size of workforce in India pertains to self-employed followed

by casual and wage/salaried workers. As per conceptual framework of 17th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 2013; in NSO and Labour Bureau surveys, certain probing questions were asked on the conditions of employment such as job contract types, paid leave and availability/non-availability of social security benefits. Although these notable features throw some light on extent of formal/informal sector yet these parameters are not sufficient for designing appropriate policies for informal employment. Government of India at various platforms highlighted the need for incorporation of informal characteristics of employment in the designing of schedules so as to conduct the survey on real time basis.

Table 3: Workforce by Economic Activity

(In crores)

Economic Activity		2nd EUS (2011-12)	3rd EUS (2012-13)	4th EUS (2013-14)	5th EUS (2015-16)	6th EUS (2016-17)	PLFS (2017-18)	PLFS (2018-19)	PLFS (2019-20)
		Rural + Urban	Rural + Urban	Rural + Urban	Rural + Urban	Rural + Urban	Rural + Urban	Rural + Urban	Rural + Urban
Self Employed	Own account/ Employer	16.56	14.16	14.87	15.05	16.54	16.77	18.13	19.16
	Unpaid Family worker	5.74	6.95	6.77	6.41	6.15	6.18	6.21	8.10
Wage/salaried		7.29	7.22	6.60	7.36	8.39	10.36	11.12	11.67
Contract*		1.36	1.27	1.24	1.59	1.77	-	-	-
Casual labour		13.57	12.9	13.33	15.05	13.46	11.31	11.26	12.03

Source: Author's own calculations.

Note: *PLFS does not capture information under contractual category

From the above discussion, it is very much clear that labour force surveys being conducted by NSO and Labour Bureau do not reveal the extent of informal employment currently. The only alternative reliable data set available is the sixth Economic Census (2013-14). On the basis of NCEUS classification of informal sector as per number of workers i.e. (less than 10 workers), an endeavor has been made to capture the sector wise information for less than, equal to and more than 10 workers as per 6th Economic Census.

WORKERS AS PER SIXTH ECONOMIC CENSUS (2013-14)

Table 4 provides data on the number of workers as per sixth Economic Census (less than 10 workers i.e unorganized) and (10 and more workers i.e. organized) under different sectors of the economy. The data reveals that at all India level out of about 5.85 crore establishments employing 13.12 crores persons, about 98.6 percent establishments

were in the unorganized sector employing 79 percent workers and only 1.4 percent establishments were in the organized sector thereby employing 21 percent workers.

Table 4: Workers as per Sixth Economic Census ((in lakhs)

Sl. No.	Sectors	Establishments with less than 10 workers		Establishments with 10 and more than 10 workers		Total	
		No. of establishments	No. of Workers	No. of establishments	No. of Workers	Total Establishments	Total Workers
1	Manufacturing	101.20	200.10	2.10	103.47	103.30	303.57
2	Construction	9.60	18.08	0.10	5.22	9.70	23.30
3	Trade	179.00	296.04	1.10	27.04	180.10	323.09
4	Transport	29.80	42.55	0.20	7.93	30.00	50.47
5	Education	18.50	57.61	1.90	48.35	20.40	105.96
6	Health	9.50	20.38	0.30	14.60	9.80	34.98
7	Accommodation & Restaurants	24.00	50.79	0.40	10.07	24.40	60.87
8	IT /BPOs	0.90	2.17	0.10	8.23	1.00	10.40
9	Financial Services	7.10	16.64	0.60	11.74	7.70	28.38
10	Others	197.30	330.95	1.20	40.97	198.50	371.92
	Total	576.90	1035.31	8.00	277.63	584.90	1312.94

Source: Author's own calculations from 6th Economic Census (2013-14) based on National Industrial Classification 2008

SECTOR-WISE EMPLOYMENT ESTIMATES (10 & MORE WORKERS) IN INDIA

Table 5 depicts the formal sector wise employment estimates based on quarterly survey being conducted by Labour Bureau in 2021 by using 6th EC sampling frame. The

Table 5: Sector-wise Estimated Number of workers during and after Lockdown Period

(in Lakhs)

Sl. No.	Sectors	Prior to Lockdown (before 25th March 2020)	As on 1st July, 2020	As on 1st April, 2021	As on 1st July, 2021	As on 1st October, 2021	As on 1st January, 2021	As on 1st April, 2022	As on 1st July, 2022
1	Manufacturing	125.4	111.2	125.2	121.4	124.0	122.5	139.3	139.4
2	Construction	7.6	6.6	7.4	6.1	6.2	6.1	4.9	4.9
3	Trade	20.6	18.8	20.4	16.5	16.8	17.0	17.5	17.7
4	Transport	13.2	13	13.4	14.4	13.2	13.3	12.0	12.0
5	Education	67.7	64.9	67.3	68.5	69.2	69.0	52.6	53.3
6	Health	25.6	24.9	26.0	33.5	32.9	33.8	34.9	35.3
7	Accommodation & Restaurants	8.9	7.9	8.8	7.8	8.1	8.2	7.9	8.0
8	IT /BPOs	19.9	18.9	20.7	33.2	34.6	38.3	36.6	37.3
9	Financial Services	17.4	17	17.4	8.7	8.9	9.1	12.1	12.6
	Total	307.8	284.8	308.3	310.6	314.5	318.0	318.5	321.4

Source: Labour Bureau

table 5 and figure 1 reveal that as on July1, 2022, there were approximately 3.2 crore workers in nine selected sectors (comprising 85 percent of employment having more than 10 workers as per 6th EC) at all India level. Majority of workers were engaged in manufacturing followed by education, IT/BPO and health sectors. The table also highlights the quarter wise change in employment in the formal sector. Though the waves of COVID had strong repercussions in the informal sector, the table shows that considerable change was observed in formal sector as depicted in almost all the sectors.

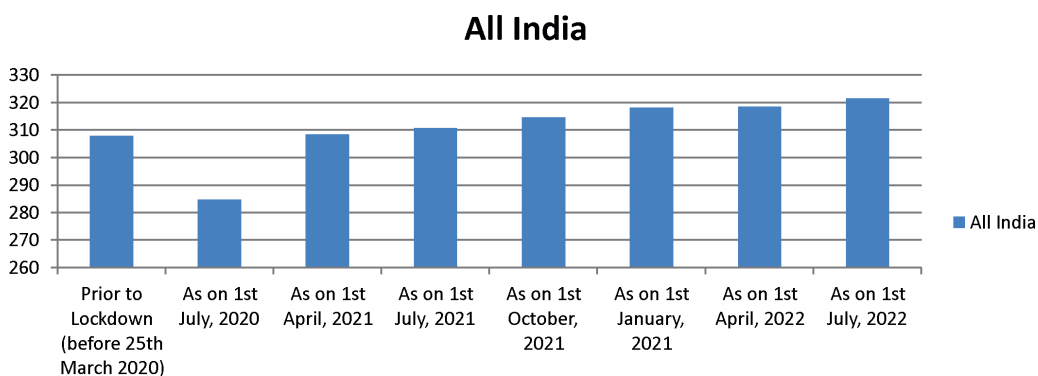


Figure 1: Sector-wise Estimated Number of workers at All India

Source: Labour Bureau

PROVISIONAL ESTIMATES OF SUBSCRIBERS IN INDIA

Since April 2018 Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has been providing employment statistics in the formal sector from September 2017 onwards. The information covered number of subscribers who have subscribed under three prominent schemes viz. Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme, Employees' State Insurance Scheme (ESIC) and the National Pension Scheme (NPS). ESI Scheme is an integrated scheme aimed at providing socio-economic protection to the workers in the formal sector as it pertains to establishments generally having 10 or more workers. The (EPF) is a mandatory scheme that covers establishments having 20 or more persons as employed in general sense. The number of members subscribing to ESIC, EPF and NPS gives an idea of the level of formal employment although not in strict sense. From Table 6 it is evident that about 943.8 lakh subscribers were reported from Sep, 2017-December, 2023 under ESIC, about 729.26lakhs under EPF and 49.48 lakhs under NPS.

After getting an appraisal of the magnitude of workers in India through various data sets, the issue of accurate, timely and relevant data on job creation in formal (organized) /informal (unorganized) can best be addressed by new household or preferably enterprise survey with an aim to accurately collect information on stock

Table 6: Provisional Estimates of subscribers in India

(In lakhs)

<i>Period</i>	<i>ESIC</i>	<i>EPFO</i>	<i>NPS</i>
	<i>No. of newly registered employees and paying contribution</i>	<i>New Subscribers</i>	<i>New subscribers</i>
Sep, 2017-March, 2018	83.36	84.57	4.53
April, 2018-March, 2019	149.66	139.44	7.5
April, 2019-March, 2020	151.45	110.41	7.57
April, 2020-March, 2021	115.05	85.49	6.28
April,2021- March,2022	149.12	108.65	8.79
April 2022 - March 2023	167.73	114.98	8.24
April 2023 - December 2023	127.43	85.72	6.57
Total (Sep,2017-December, 2023)	943.8	729.26	49.48

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation data on payroll, 2024.

and flow in the formal/informal labour market with Industry classification. Although seventh Economic Census and Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises and All India Quarterly Establishment based Employment Survey (AQEES) may bridge the data gaps associated with Informal employment in India.

There is often a gap between the skills possessed by the workforce and the skills demanded by employers, leading to unemployment or underemployment. Women often face challenges in accessing formal employment and are disproportionately represented in the informal sector. The absence of robust social security measures for both formal and informal workers can leave many vulnerable during times of economic uncertainty or crises. The informal sector contributes significantly to the economy but is often not fully integrated into mainstream economic policies, leading to a lack of recognition and support.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Indian government is making concerted efforts towards transition from informality to formality in India through legal and labour reforms (i.e. Labour codes), systematic transformation like eshram portal and direct benefit transfers, sectoral interventions by nourishing MSME's and promoting start ups , and above all through social protection measures. Various initiatives have been launched to address these challenges, such as Skill India, Make in India, and efforts to simplify labor laws. However, the effectiveness and impact of these initiatives may vary, and continuous efforts are required to achieve substantial improvements. Initiatives like Skill India aim to enhance the skills of the

workforce, making them more employable in both formal and informal sectors. The government has introduced labor reforms to simplify and streamline labor laws, aiming to promote ease of doing business. Efforts to promote financial inclusion, such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, aim to bring workers in the informal sector into the formal financial system.

It's crucial to consider that the dynamics of formal and informal sector employment can evolve over time based on economic policies, technological advancements, and other factors. For the latest and most accurate information, it's recommended to refer to recent reports and publications from relevant government agencies and research organizations. Many workers, especially in the informal sector, face challenges such as lack of job security, low wages, and limited access to social security benefits. There can be a gap between the skills possessed by the workforce and the skills demanded by employers. Women may face challenges related to unequal pay, limited opportunities, and workplace discrimination across various sectors. India's workforce is dynamic and continually evolving, influenced by economic trends, technological advancements, and government policies. The diversity in the types of workers reflects the multifaceted nature of the country's labour market.

CONCLUSION

Informal sector is the predominant sector in terms of informal employment as considerable numbers of informal workers are engaged across various industry groups in India. Although some reliable data sets are available in the Indian context to capture informal employment but data gaps are still prevalent in true sense to capture extent of informal workers in India. Much discussions and deliberations were made on various definitions and concepts of Informal sector/informal employment and their appropriateness at all India level. It is a well-recognized fact that dearth of reliable statistics on the informal sector has been a major impediment in understanding the dynamics of Indian labour market.

The present study concluded that suitable socio-economic policies couldn't be framed in true sense in informal sector, as limited data sets are available on size, contribution and composition of informal employment in India. The study of this sector based on reliable data sets can go a long way in formulation of policies and addressing the problems of informal labour market. Although sector wise policies may be designed on the basis of less than/more than 10 workers, still much needs to be required for capturing informal employment in India. Supply side and demand-based surveys may capture the extent of informality in the economy by designing schedules having attributes of informal sector and its employment.

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