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**Economics**

**INFORMAL SECTOR AND INFORMAL WORKERS IN INDIA**

**KEY WORDS:**

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**ABSTRACT**

The origin of the informal sector is attributed to a massive outflow of surplus labour from the countryside and inability of the industrial sector to absorb this surplus labour. Informal sector is often considered as 'shadow economy', 'underground economy', 'micro-enterprises' and 'petty commodity production units'. Informal sector serves as an appropriate employment strategy which suits the factor endowment of the least industrialised countries, as it is based on labour-intensive indigenous technology with minimum capital and managerial skills. A noteworthy feature of the urban informal sector is its complementary and/or subsidiary role played along with the formal sector without any state favours. Typical informal sector activities (unpaid work in a family enterprise, casual wage labour, home-based work, street vending) provide the only opportunity for many poor people to secure their basic needs for survival. In countries without unemployment insurance or other kinds of social benefits, the only alternative to being unemployed is engaging in informal sector employment.

**INTRODUCTION**

It is well known that a major part of the workforce in India and other developing countries work in informal sector. Informal sector has become an increasingly popular subject of study, not just in economics, but also in sociology and anthropology. Keith Hart was the first person to introduce the term Informal Sector. Hart distinguished formal and informal (both legitimate and illegitimate) income opportunities on the basis of whether the activity entailed wage or self-employment (Hart, 1973). Therefore the concept of informal sector used by Hart was limited to small self-employed individual workers. Although Harts concept of informal sector had some limitations, the introduction of this concept made it possible to incorporate activities that were previously ignored in theoretical models of development and in national economic accounts (Swaminathan, 1991). The term informal sector came in a broader sense in the academic literature only after the visit of an International Labour Organization (ILO) employment mission to India in 1972. The ILO then evolved a conceptual framework and guidelines for the collection of statistics on informal sector and presented the same in the Fifteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) held in February, 1993 in the form of a resolution. The resolution was then endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) and made a part of the "System of National Account (SNA) 1993" by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Though the term informal sector gained currency after ILO evolved a conceptual framework and guidelines for the collection of statistics on informal sector, there has not been any single definition of informal/unorganised sector in India. Informal sector is a matter of discussion among the academics, policy makers etc. from the beginning as a large chunk of workforce employed in this sector. Different criteria are used to identify the informal sector but none of them was universally applicable in different empirical situations (Papola, 1981). A study by Mitra (2001) based on fourth economic census of India took the criteria of own account enterprises and employment establishments employing one to nine workers to identify the informal sector. The different organizations of India like National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO).

**SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the paper is to study the informal sector employment and Informal employment scenario across sectors, states, industry group etc in India using the new definition of informal sector and informal worker proposed by National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised

Sector (NCEUS) and to show that the new definition is more suitable to study the informal sector.

**Data Source**

The study is based on secondary data collected by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) for 2019-2020.

**Magnitude of workforce engaged in the unorganised/informal sector**

Estimated number of Informal and formal workers by sector and sex in 2010-15 and 2016-20 are depicted in Table 1. Above 95 per cent of rural workers are informal workers. As per 2016-20 Employment-Unemployment survey 98.04 per cent of female workers are informal worker and it was 97.78 per cent in 2010-15. In urban areas also the share of female informal workers is higher than male at 85.01 per cent in 2016-20. Rural sector contributes 78.23 per cent of informal workers to total informal workers. It was observed in the case of informal sector workers that the share of female workers in the formal sector increase over the years but in case of informal workers across all population segment the share of informal workers increased between 2010-15 and 2016-20.

**Table 1: Distribution of informal and formal workers by sector and sex between 1999-2000 and 2016-20 (in millions)**

Sector	Sex	Informal Workers		Formal Workers		Total	
		2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20
Rural	Male	186.17	209.01	10.57	10.03	196.74	219.04
	Female	101.71	121.60	2.31	2.43	104.02	124.03
	Person	287.87	330.62	12.88	12.45	300.75	343.07
Urban	Male	58.33	71.60	18.72	18.80	77.05	90.40
	Female	15.53	20.40	3.43	3.60	18.96	24.00
	Person	73.87	91.99	22.14	22.40	96.01	114.40
Total	Male	244.50	280.61	29.28	28.83	273.78	309.44
	Female	117.24	142.00	5.74	6.03	122.98	148.03
	Person	361.74	422.61	35.02	34.85	396.76	457.46

Source: Computed from NSSO 55th (1999-2000) and 61st (2016-20) Round Survey on Employment-Unemployment.

Table 2 shows the average annual growth rate of workers in informal and formal workers category. It is observed here that the growth rate of female workers both in rural as well as in urban areas is greater than male workers growth rate and within the female workers growth rate of urban female informal workers (5.60 % is more than rural female (3.64 %) between 2010-15 and 2016-20. In case of formal workers the growth rate of male informal workers is negative. The absolute

number of male formal workers came down from 29.28 million in 2010-15 to 28.83 million in 2016-20. This negative growth is due to fall in formal employment in rural male segment. Female workers in formal workers category increase by around 1 per cent of growth rate both in rural as well as urban areas.

**Table 2: Average Annual Growth Rate of workers by sector and sex between 1999-2000 and 2016-20 (in per cent)**

Sector	Sex	Informal Worker	Formal Worker	Total
Rural	Male	2.34	-1.05	2.17
	Female	3.64	0.99	3.58
	Person	2.81	-0.67	2.67
Urban	Male	4.18	0.09	3.25
	Female	5.60	0.97	4.82
	Person	4.49	0.23	3.57
Total	Male	2.79	-0.31	2.48
	Female	3.91	0.98	3.78
	Person	3.16	-0.10	2.89

Source: Computed from NSSO 55th (1999-2000) and 61st (2016-20) Round Survey on Employment-Unemployment.

Table 3 gives the estimated number of informal workers, percentage share of informal workers to total workers and average annual growth rate of informal workers between 2010-15 and 2016-20. Around 61 per cent of informal workers are from agricultural sector and within the agriculture the share of informal sector to total workers is 98.89 per cent in 2016-20. Household and extra activities industry groups share of informal workers to total workers (99.23 % in 2016-20) is more than agriculture but the size is quite less in comparison to other industry group. Next to agriculture other industry groups whose share of informal workers to total workers is more than 90 per cent are Trade (98.11 %), Construction (97.33 %), Hotels & restaurant (95.02 %) and community activities (94.99 %) in 2016-20.

In the informal sector workers next to agriculture sector maximum number of workers worked in Trade sector but in the case of informal workers manufacturing industry group came after agricultural with 49.30 million and the 42.54 million in Trade in 2016-20. The growth rate of informal workers by industry group shows that highest growth rate was recorded at 22.08 per cent in the household and extra activities industry groups between 2010-15 and 2016-20. Other industry groups where more than 10 per cent growth rate of informal workers taken place between the study period are Finance (14.15 %), Real estate (10.75 %) and Education (10.32 %). Significant growth rate of informal sector recorded in Construction, Manufacturing, Hotel and Transport industry groups.

**Table 3: Estimated Number of Informal Workers, Percentage share of Informal Workers to Total Workers and Average Annual Growth Rate by Industry Group between 1999-2000 and 2016-20**

Sl. No.	Industry Group	Estimated Number of informal workers (in millions)		Share of informal workers to total (in %)		Growth Rate (%)
		2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20	
1	Agriculture	234.79	256.07	98.79	98.89	1.75
2	Mining	1.56	1.78	71.75	67.39	2.68
3	Manufacturing	36.85	49.30	83.65	88.38	5.99
4	Electricity	0.21	0.24	18.75	18.72	2.74
5	construction	16.90	25.32	96.40	97.33	8.42
6	Trade	35.41	42.54	96.69	98.11	3.74
7	Hotels	4.35	5.80	94.30	95.02	5.89
8	Transport	11.44	15.28	78.30	82.70	5.95
9	Finance	0.63	1.21	27.80	39.24	14.15

10	Real estate	2.24	3.73	83.73	80.09	10.75
11	Administration	1.60	1.19	15.27	13.46	-5.75
12	Education	3.24	5.29	38.22	46.28	10.32
13	Health	1.50	2.18	52.51	58.80	7.79
14	Community	9.28	7.97	95.15	94.99	-3.01
15	Household & Extra	1.74	4.72	93.86	99.23	22.08
	Total	361.74	422.61	91.17	92.38	3.16

Source: Computed from NSSO 55th (1999-2000) and 61st (2016-20) Round Survey on employment-Unemployment.

India is an emerging economy with 457.46 million workers in 2016-20. The size of workforce was 396.76 million in 1999-2000. A large chunk of the workforce was engaged in the informal sector. The estimated number of informal sector workers in 2016-20 was 394.90 million in India contributing 86 per cent of total workers. Table 4 shows the distribution of informal and formal sector workers by sector and sex between 2010-15 and 2016-20. In rural areas the share of informal sector workers in each population segment recorded more than 90 per cent and the share of female workers (94.50 %) is more than male workers (90.34 % in 2016-20. In 2010-15 the situation was same for rural area but over the years the percentage share declined in rural areas. Contrast to rural areas, in urban areas around 70 per cent of workers worked in the informal sector but between the study periods the share of informal workers in urban areas increased.

**Table 4: Distribution of informal and formal sector workers by sector and sex between 2019-2020 and 2016-20 (in millions)**

Sector	Sex	Informal Workers		Formal Workers		Total	
		2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20
Rural	Male	178.50	197.87	18.24	21.17	196.74	219.04
	Female	98.63	117.21	5.39	6.82	104.02	124.03
	Person	277.13	315.08	23.63	27.99	300.75	343.07
Urban	Male	51.62	61.94	25.42	28.46	77.05	90.4
	Female	13.89	17.88	5.07	6.12	18.96	24.0
	Person	65.51	79.82	30.50	34.58	96.01	114.4
Total	Male	230.12	259.81	43.66	49.63	273.78	309.44
	Female	112.51	135.09	10.46	12.94	122.98	148.03
	Person	342.64	394.9	54.12	62.57	396.76	457.46

Source: Computed from NSSO 55th (1999-2000) and 61st (2016-20) Round Survey on Employment-Unemployment.

Table 5 reports the average annual growth rate of workers by sector and sex in both informal sector and formal sector. The growth rate of total formal sector workers (2.94 % is little bit higher as compared to informal sector growth rate (2.88 per cent). It is observed from the table that the growth rate of formal sector workers in rural areas in all categories is higher than growth rate in informal sector workers but the reverse happened in urban area. The growth rate of urban informal sector is higher than formal sector workers. Highest growth rate recorded in the case of urban female at 5.18 per cent. In rural areas also the growth rate of female workers in informal sector is more than male workers. The growth rate of female workers is higher than male workers in formal sector also. It is concluded from the table that the growth rate of female workers is more than male workers but the growth is more in case of formal sector than informal sector.

**Table 5: Average Annual Growth Rate of workers by sector and sex between 2019-2020 and 2016-20 (in per cent)**

Sector	Sex	Informal Worker	Formal Worker	Total
Rural	Male	2.08	3.03	2.17
	Female	3.51	4.82	3.58

	Person	2.60	3.45	2.67
Urban	Male	3.71	2.28	3.25
	Female	5.18	3.82	4.83
	Person	4.03	2.54	3.57
Total	Male	2.46	2.60	2.48
	Female	3.73	4.34	3.78
	Person	2.88	2.94	2.89

Source: Estimated from Table 4

Table 6 gives the estimated number of informal sector workers and share of informal sector workers to total workers by industry group. Agricultural sector absorb 60 per cent of workforce in India in 2010-15 which came down to 57 per cent in 2016-20. The share of agriculture sector is more in informal sector workers; it is 68 per cent and 64 per cent for the respective periods. After agriculture, it is the service sector where 19 per cent of informal sector workers engaged in 1999-00 and this figure increases to 21 per cent in 2016-20. The share of industry sector in the informal sector workers also increased from 13 to 15 per cent in the same period.

If we look by industry group after agriculture it is trade and manufacturing sector where a sizeable number of informal sector workers engaged. Around three fourth of the trade sector workers are in the profession of merchants & shopkeepers, wholesale & retail trade and salesmen, shop assistants and related workers. The share of informal sector workers in the trade sector was 93.64 per cent in 2010-15 and it increase to 95.54 per cent in 2016-20. Whereas in manufacturing this share was 70.19 and 71.20 per cent in the respective years. Highest growth rate recorded in the sector household and extra activities (25.42 %) between the study periods. Other industry groups where the growth rate of informal sector workers is higher than others are Real estate (10.25 %), Finance (10.00 %) and Construction (8.77 %).

**Table 6: Estimated Number of Informal Sector Workers, Percentage share of Informal Sector Workers to Total Workers and Average Annual Growth Rate by Industry Group between 2010-2015 and 2016-20**

Sl. No.	Industry Group	Estimated Number of Informal workers (in millions)		Share of informal workers to total (in %)		Growth Rate (%)
		2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20	
1	Agriculture	232.21	252.83	97.70	97.65	1.72
2	Mining	0.88	0.89	40.55	33.74	0.22
3	Manufacturing	30.92	39.71	70.19	71.20	5.13
4	Electricity	0.09	0.09	8.35	6.59	-1.99
5	construction	12.92	19.66	73.66	75.58	8.77
6	Trade	34.29	41.43	93.64	95.54	3.85
7	Hotels	4.08	5.29	88.30	86.72	5.34
8	Transport	10.44	14.02	71.42	75.93	6.09
9	Finance	0.49	0.80	21.91	25.70	10.00
10	Real estate	2.02	3.29	75.66	70.74	10.25
11	Administration	0.80	0.08	7.66	0.90	-37.01
12	Education	2.29	3.07	27.04	26.88	6.04
13	Health	1.22	1.64	42.85	44.18	6.03
14	Community	8.47	7.40	86.82	88.20	-2.67
15	Household & Extra	1.51	4.70	81.58	98.72	25.42
	Total	342.64	394.90	86.36	86.32	2.88

Source: Computed from NSSO 55th (1999-2000) and 61st (2016-20) Round Survey on Employment-Unemployment.

Tables 7 illustrate the distribution of estimated number of informal sector workers per thousand populations and share

of informal sector workers to total workforce across states. In Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh the estimated number of informal sector workers per thousand populations was highest in descending order. But both in 2010-15 and 2016-20 the share informal sector worker was highest in Bihar followed by Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa. The mentioned four states are very poor in comparison to others states of India. The incidence of poverty or the percentage of poor living below poverty line in these states much above the national average. It seems there is a positive correlation between poverty and informal sector.

**Table 7: Estimated Number of Informal Sector Workers per Thousand Population, Percentage share of Informal Sector Workers to Total Workers and Average Annual Growth Rate by State between 2010-15 and 2016-20**

Sl. No.	Industry Group	Estimated Number of Informal workers (in millions)		Share of informal workers to total (in %)		Growth Rate (%)
		2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20	
1	Andhra Pradesh	420	443	88.45	88.28	1.01
2	Assam	267	326	76.70	84.41	7.17
3	Bihar*	313	315	93.71	93.59	1.53
4	Gujarat	380	386	85.06	82.83	2.32
5	Haryana	279	334	82.44	83.45	6.82
6	Himachal Pradesh	437	438	88.47	83.66	2.85
7	J&K	368	322	87.69	81.65	-2.87
8	Karnataka	378	424	84.51	86.58	2.88
9	Kerala	258	250	67.56	63.40	1.98
10	Madhya Pradesh*	384	398	90.47	89.24	2.52
11	Maharashtra	344	380	81.51	82.00	3.05
12	Orissa	362	393	89.62	90.08	3.25
13	Punjab	331	355	85.60	85.23	3.68
14	Rajasthan	373	393	91.04	91.16	5.51
15	Tamil Nadu	381	391	81.85	80.76	0.39
16	Uttar Pradesh*	306	338	90.95	92.20	3.91
17	West Bengal	312	327	86.79	85.42	3.65
18	Other North Eastern states	314	346	85.13	83.72	5.83
19	Other states & UTs	197	210	60.39	60.85	1.46
	Total	341	362	86.36	86.32	2.88

Note: Bihar include Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh include Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh include Uttarakhand

Source: Computed from NSSO 55<sup>th</sup> (1999-2000) and 61st (2016-20) Round Survey on Employment-Unemployment.

There is no clear pattern among the developed states in the share of informal sector workers. Except Gujarat in other developed states of Haryana, Maharashtra and Punjab the share of informal sector workers to total workers increased between 2010-15 and 2016-20 whereas in Gujarat the share decreased from 85.06 to 82.83 per cent in the respective time period. In Kerala the share of informal sector workers is the lowest among all states both in 1999-00 at 67.56 per cent and it further declined to 63.40 per cent in 2016-20. Highest growth rate in informal sector workers is record in Assam (7.17 %), Haryana (6.82%), Other North Eastern states (5.83 %) and



Rajasthan (5.51 %).

**Magnitude of unorganised/informal Worker**

The concept of Informal Worker is based on the personal characteristic of the worker rather than enterprise. The estimated number of informal workers is more than informal sector workers. In 2016-20, the estimated number of informal workers was 422.61 million and it was 361.74 million in 2010-15. Table 8 shows a cross tabulation of informal sector workers and informal workers in 2010-15 and 2016-20. More than 99 per cent of informal sector workers are informal workers but only 62.20 per cent of formal sector workers are formal workers in 2010-15 and it further slide down to 53.42 per cent in 2016-20. It appears that a large number of workers working in the formal sector by enterprise characteristics but there job is informal in nature. They did not have any social security, job security and other benefits which the regular wage employees getting in the formal sector and over the years the share of workers in this category increased from 20.46 million in 2010-15 to 29.14 million in 2016-20. This indicates that casualisation or the amount of contractual labour increases in the formal sector which is a matter of great concern for policy makers. Informal workers consist of 92.38 per cent of total workers in India in 2016-20.

**Table 8 : Distribution of Workers by Type of Employment and Sector (Millions)**

Sector	Informal Workers		Formal Workers		Total Workers	
	2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20	2010-15	2016-20
Informal Sector Workers	341.28 (99.60)	393.47 (99.64)	1.36 (0.40)	1.43 (0.36)	342.64 (100)	394.90 (100)
Formal Sector Workers	20.46 (37.80)	29.14 (46.58)	33.67 (62.20)	33.42 (53.42)	54.12 (100)	62.57 (100)
Total Workers	361.74 (91.17)	422.61 (92.38)	35.02 (8.83)	34.85 (7.46)	396.76 (100)	457.46 (100)

Note: Figures in bracket indicate percentages

Source: ibid.

State level analysis of informal workers depict in Table 9. In the poor states as stated earlier in the discussion of informal sector workers the share of informal workers is more than national average. Along with the poor state in the share of informal workers in Andhra Pradesh (93.95 per cent) is more than nation. Bihar has the highest percentage of informal workers (96.46 %) followed by Uttar Pradesh (95.53 %), Rajasthan (95.17 %), Madhya Pradesh (95.17 %) and Orissa (94.53%) in 2016-20. The share of informal workers is low in other states and UTs (75.18 per cent) followed by Kerala (81.27 %). The growth rate of informal workers between 2010-15 and 2016-20 is highest in Haryana (7.21 %) followed by Assam (6.30 %) and other north eastern states (6.25 %). Estimated number of informal workers per thousand populations in Himachal Pradesh was 45 and 472 in 1999-00 and 2016-20 respectively which is highest among all the states followed by Andhra Pradesh with 438 and 471 informal workers per thousand populations for the same period.

**Table 9: Estimated Number of Informal Workers per Thousand Population, Percentage share of Informal Workers to Total Workers and Average Annual Growth Rate by State between 1999-2000 and 2016-20**

State	Estimated number of informal worker per thousand population		Share of informal workers to total (in %)		Growth Rate (%)
	2010-15	2016-20	1999-00	2016-20	
Andhra Pradesh	438	471	92.23	93.95	1.42
Assam	297	349	85.36	90.19	6.30
Bihar*	319	324	95.45	96.46	1.77

Gujarat	408	426	91.44	91.59	2.90
Haryana	296	361	87.51	90.20	7.21
Himachal Pradesh	451	472	91.22	90.20	3.77
J&K	374	349	89.14	88.49	-1.62
Karnataka	410	450	91.51	91.90	2.47
Kerala	305	321	80.03	81.27	3.60
Madhya Pradesh*	401	423	94.36	94.93	2.92
M Maharashtra	368	415	87.25	89.61	3.47
Orissa	378	412	93.46	94.53	3.38
Punjab	349	378	90.26	90.88	3.91
Rajasthan	385	411	93.88	95.17	5.77
Tamil Nadu	416	435	89.27	89.89	0.80
Uttar Pradesh*	318	351	94.30	95.53	3.90
West Bengal	326	349	90.75	91.19	4.08
Other North Eastern states	325	365	87.97	88.26	6.25
Other states & UTs	233	260	71.31	75.18	2.38
Total	360	388	91.17	92.38	3.16

Note: Bihar includes Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh includes Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh include Uttarakhand. Source: ibid.

**CONCLUSION**

Informal sector accounts for a sizeable number of workers in India across different industry groups and states. The concept of informal sector and informal workers proposed by NCEUS is more appropriate in the context of Indian statistical system and it better compatible with international definition of informal sector. The estimated number of informal sector workers in 2016-20 was 394.90 million in India contributing 86 per cent of total workers. It is observed between the study period 2010-15 and 2016-20 that the growth rate of formal sector workers in rural areas in all categories is higher than growth rate in informal sector workers but the reverse happened in urban area. The growth rate of urban informal sector is higher than formal sector workers. The proportion of informal sector workers in the agriculture sector declined over the years but in industry and services sector the proportion of informal sector workers increased between 2010-15 and 2016-20. The percentage share of informal sector workers in the poor states is more than developed states. The definition of informal sector workers is more about the characteristics of the enterprise rather than the characteristics of the worker. Informal workers consist of 92.38 per cent of total workers in India in 2016-20. Around half of the formal sector workers are informal workers. This indicates that casualisation or the amount of contractual labour increases in the formal sector which is a matter of great concern for policy makers. Since the formal sector unable to absorb the vast labour force of India the policy makers should think to bring the workers in the informal segment to the mainstream.

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