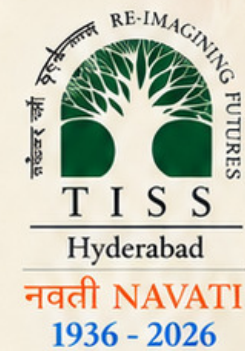


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FROM PRECARIETY
TO PROTECTION

*A Framework for Labour Security for
India's Marginalised Groups*

Vinod Kumar Mishra and Tarun Kumar
School of Public Policy and Governance, TISS Hyderabad

Working Paper No. 18
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From Precarity to Protection

A Framework for Labour Security for India's Marginalised Groups

Vinod Kumar Mishra^{*} and Tarun Kumar^{**}

Abstract

The article examines the precarity of labour in India with a particular focus on marginalised social groups. The article argues that precarity in the labour market is structurally embedded in social identities. Marginalised social groups face systematic barriers in accessing stable and secure employment opportunities. Labour market estimates analysed in the article indicate that, despite having higher work and labour participation rates, the workers from marginalised social groups are more precarious at work. The precariousness of labour has been analysed through eight indicators: no job contract, denial of paid leave, lack of social security, higher proportion of casual wage labour, no fixed work location, underemployment, years of education, and higher concentration of workforce in the informal and unorganised sector. Analysis of these indicators across social and religious groups indicates that marginalised groups bear a higher burden of precarity in the labour market in comparison to dominant social groups. Analysis of the Labour Market Protection Index (LMPI) highlights that, although labour-market vulnerability declined for several groups between 2017 and 2024, substantial inequalities persisted: Scheduled Caste and Muslim workers remained disproportionately concentrated in the highest vulnerability quintiles, workers aged 60 and above continued to face exceptionally high vulnerability, and women were more likely than men to experience very high vulnerability.

Keywords: precarity, labour vulnerability, social inequality, identity, informal employment, unorganised sector

1. Introduction

Labour markets in developing economies have undergone significant structural transformations over the past few decades, characterised by a weakening relationship between economic growth and

^{*} Associate Professor in Data Science, School of Public Policy and Governance, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Hyderabad. Email: vinod.mishra@ac.in.

^{**} Graduate Student, School of Public Policy and Governance, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Hyderabad.

employment generation. In the Indian context, Padhi and Sharma document a persistent decline in employment elasticity,¹ indicating that output growth has become increasingly decoupled from job creation. This phenomenon raises important concerns regarding the adequacy of conventional labour market indicators, such as the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR), and unemployment rate, which predominantly capture the quantitative dimensions of employment. While these indicators may suggest relative stability in employment levels, they fail to account for the qualitative deterioration of work, including income instability, absence of contractual security, and irregular or excessive working hours. As a result, they provide only a partial and often misleading picture of labour market conditions.

A central and enduring feature of labour markets in developing economies is the widespread prevalence of informal employment. Informality is typically characterised by the absence of formal contracts, limited regulatory oversight, and restricted access to social protection mechanisms. Challenging the notion that informality is merely a transitional phase, Mohapatra argues that it is better understood as a structural outcome shaped by institutional arrangements, regulatory frameworks, and firm-level strategies.² Complementing this perspective, Dobbelaere demonstrates that labour market institutions play a critical role in determining wage stability, employment security, and the distribution of risk between employers and workers.³ In India, informal employment continues to dominate across sectors, including those experiencing rapid economic growth, where employment often takes the form of casual labour, short-term contracts, self-employment or a higher proportion of casual wage labour. Such arrangements are typically associated with limited job security, absence of social insurance, and heightened exposure to economic volatility, thereby reinforcing structural inequalities within the labour market.

Within this broader context, the concept of labour precarity has emerged as a key analytical framework for understanding the nature and extent of employment insecurity. Precarious employment refers to work arrangements characterised by instability, uncertain and fluctuating earnings, and limited access to institutional protections. Guy Standing conceptualises the “precariat” as an ex-

¹ B. Padhi and H. Sharma, “Changing Contours of Growth and Employment in the Indian Labour Market: A Sectoral Decomposition Approach”, *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics* 67 (2023): 220–33, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.strueco.2023.08.004>.

² P. P. Mohapatra, “Regulated Informality: Legal Constructions of Labour Relations in Colonial India 1814–1926”, in *Global Histories of Work*, ed. A. Eckert (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 215–38, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110437201-009>.

³ S. Dobbelaere et al., “Organised Labour, Labour Market Imperfections, and Employer Wage Premia”, IZA Discussion Paper No. 13909 (Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics, 2020).

panding social class produced by processes of globalisation, labour market flexibilisation, and technological change.⁴ Workers within this category are marked by chronic insecurity, weak bargaining power, and fragmented occupational trajectories. Importantly, recent scholarship emphasises that precarity is inherently multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a single indicator such as employment status. It encompasses a range of interrelated dimensions, including income volatility, irregular and unpredictable working hours, lack of social protection, and weak enforcement of labour regulations. Efforts to operationalise this concept have led to the development of composite indicators of job quality. For instance, Hovhannisyan et al. propose multidimensional measures combining wages, working conditions, and employment stability,⁵ while Darvas highlights how economic shocks disproportionately affect workers in insecure employment arrangements.⁶ These contributions collectively demonstrate that traditional labour market indicators are insufficient for capturing the complexity of contemporary employment relations.

Labour market vulnerability is further intensified by the increasing frequency and magnitude of external shocks. Events such as economic crises, public health emergencies, and environmental disruptions tend to disproportionately affect workers in informal and precarious employment. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a stark illustration of this dynamic, as workers lacking formal contracts and social protection experienced severe income losses and livelihood disruptions during periods of lockdown and economic contraction. In addition to such episodic shocks, structural environmental changes are also emerging as critical determinants of labour market outcomes. Venugopal et al. show that rising temperatures and heat stress significantly reduce labour productivity, particularly in labour-intensive outdoor occupations such as agriculture and construction.⁷ These findings highlight the need to incorporate environmental risks into analyses of labour market vulnerability, thereby expanding the scope of precarity beyond purely economic dimensions.

Labour precarity in India is deeply embedded within broader structures of social inequality and exclusion. Marginalised social groups, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and religious minorities, continue to face systematic barriers in accessing employment, education, and income-

⁴ G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

⁵ S. Hovhannisyan et al., *Global Job Quality: Evidence from Wage Employment across Developing Countries*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 15565 (Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics, 2022).

⁶ Zsolt Darvas, "The Unequal Inequality Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic," Bruegel Working Paper No. 06/2021 (Brussels: Bruegel, March 2021), <https://www.bruegel.org/working-paper/unequal-inequality-impact-covid-19-pandemic>.

⁷ V. Venugopal et al., "Unveiling the Link between Occupational Heat Strain and Productivity Loss: Evidence from South Indian Informal Sectors", *Discover Public Health* 22, no. 1 (2025): 173.

generating opportunities. Thorat et al. provide evidence of persistent discrimination in hiring practices, wage determination, and workplace conditions, resulting in significant economic disadvantage for these groups.⁸ These patterns are rooted in historically entrenched hierarchies that continue to shape labour market outcomes despite formal constitutional safeguards. As Thorat and Newman argue, social exclusion in India operates primarily through ascribed identities, such as caste, religion and ethnicity, rather than through individual capabilities, thereby reinforcing inter-generational disadvantage and limiting social mobility.⁹

Labour markets represent a particularly important site for examining these dynamics. The expansion of informal employment, coupled with the erosion of labour protections, has intensified employment insecurity. Clert links social exclusion to the persistence of poverty, emphasising how unequal access to employment and productive assets constrains livelihood opportunities.¹⁰ Similarly, Held & McGrew argue that globalisation and neoliberal restructuring have contributed to the weakening of welfare institutions, the informalisation of labour, and the widening of socio-economic inequalities.¹¹ These processes have reshaped economies, generating both economic disparities and deepening social cleavages.

Precarious labour conditions may be defined as a lack of social and economic protection: lack of social security benefits, inconsistent income, no fixed work location, denial of paid and sick leave, and no job protection because there is no employment contract. Precarity is further aggravated in the absence of vocational training and protection against occupational health hazards.¹² Rapid economic growth over the last few decades has not improved the precarious condition of labour in India. Labour migration, particularly circular migration among informal workers, has further aggravated the precarity of labour.¹³ The precarity of labour extends beyond job security. Poor working and living conditions, discrimination, and exploitation in the workplace adversely affect the

⁸ S. Thorat, S. Madheswaran, and B. P. Vani, "Caste and Labour Market: Employment Discrimination and Its Impact on Poverty", *Economic and Political Weekly* 56, no. 21 (2021).

⁹ S. Thorat and K. S. Newman, "Caste and Economic Discrimination: Causes, Consequences and Remedies", *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 41 (2007): 4121–24.

¹⁰ C. Clert, "Evaluating the Concept of Social Exclusion in Development Discourse", *European Journal of Development Research* 11, no. 2 (1999): 176–99.

¹¹ D. Held and A. McGrew, eds., *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

¹² X. Feng, "The Making of Labour Precarity: Three Explanatory Approaches and Their Relationship", *Labour History* 62, nos. 5–6 (2021): 537–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2021.1994532>; A. Deshpande and J. Singh, *Dropping Out, Being Pushed Out or Can't Get In? Decoding Declining Labour Force Participation of Indian Women*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 14639 (Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics, 2021).

¹³ R. Srivastava, "Migration, Informality and the Growing Precarity of Work", *Social Change* 52, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00490857221125856>.

well-being of labour.¹⁴ Lack of social security such as health insurance pushes labour into precarious condition in the event of a health emergency. High out-of-pocket expenditure pushes labour into extreme poverty. Prolonged illness due to lack of timely treatment often pushes workers out of the labour market for longer durations, which causes loss of wages and adversely affects the economic and social well-being of labour.¹⁵

Precarity of labour in India cannot be explained in isolation. The nature of precarity is deep-rooted in the socio-economic and institutional framework.¹⁶ As discussed previously in this paper, workers from marginalised social groups experience identity-based exclusion and discrimination in accessing the labour market. Empirical studies on the labour market highlight structural denial of equal employment opportunities to the workers from marginalised social groups. Denial of equal wages, exploitative work conditions and so-called flexible work arrangements have exacerbated labour precarity in recent times. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates, nearly 58 per cent of the global labour force is in the informal sector.¹⁷ It can be argued that informality of the labour market across the globe is a major cause of precarity of labour. Changing labour market dynamics such as the rapid growth of the platform economy have aggravated the vulnerability of labour. Platform workers are exposed to unstable earnings, prolonged working hours and lack of social protection. The rapid rise of this sector after the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed labour welfare to the margins across the globe. The burden of precarity is unevenly shared by different groups. Marginalised and deprived groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women and persons with disabilities bear a large share of the burden of precarity.¹⁸

The mechanisms of economic exclusion are multiple and mutually reinforcing. They include out-

¹⁴ V. Soundararajan et al., "Caste, Social Capital and Precarity of Labour Market Intermediaries: The Case of Dalit Labour Contractors in India", *Organization Studies* 45, no. 7 (2024): 965, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406231175319>; L. Seubert et al., "Precarious Employment and Work: Understanding the Underlying Psychological and Social Processes and Advancing Research", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 34, no. 6 (2025): 621–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2025.2565932>.

¹⁵ N. S. Sabharwal et al., *Links between Social Exclusion, Health and Poverty in India* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2014).

¹⁶ B. Babajanian, J. Hagen-Zanker, and R. Holmes, *Can Social Protection and Labour Programmes Contribute to Social Inclusion? Evidence from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2014); Thorat, Madheswaran, and Vani, "Caste and Labour Market".

¹⁷ International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024), 14.

¹⁸ D. Grimshaw, *Informal and Precarious Work: Persistent Inequalities Exacerbated by the Global Pandemic* (London: King's College London, 2021); U. Huws, "Logged Labour: A New Paradigm of Work Organisation?" *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation* 10, no. 1 (2016): 7–26; Q. D. Mai, L. Song, and R. Donnelly, "Precarious Employment and Well-Being: Insights from the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Work and Occupations* 50, no. 1 (2023): 3–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07308884221143063>.

right denial of employment opportunities, discriminatory hiring practices, occupational segregation into low-paid and stigmatised work, wage discrimination, and exclusion from social security systems. Such forms of exclusion not only perpetuate income inequality but also contribute to the reproduction of labour market vulnerability across generations. Against this backdrop, there is a growing recognition of the need to move beyond conventional labour market metrics and adopt a multidimensional approach to analysing employment conditions. By integrating indicators of job quality, employment stability, working conditions, and social protection, as well as accounting for the role of social identity-based exclusion, it becomes possible to develop a more comprehensive understanding of labour precarity. This article seeks to contribute to this emerging body of literature by examining the multidimensional nature of labour precarity in India, with particular emphasis on the intersection between employment conditions and social inequalities.

2. Data and Methodology

The analysis in this article is based on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 to 2023-24 data collected by the National Statistical Office (NSO), Government of India.¹⁹ Indicators of the labour market have been calculated with statistical techniques. Apart from multivariate analysis, logistic regression models have been estimated to analyse the determinants of labour market outcomes. The logistic regression model has been explained in the section below.

2.1 Logistic Regression Analysis

In this article, the determinants of access to labour market outcomes have been analysed using a logistic regression model. Let $Y = 1$ if an individual has access to labour market outcomes such as LFPR, WPR, access to a job contract, access to paid leave and access to social security benefits and $Y = 0$ if the individual does not have access to these outcome variables. X_i represents explanatory variables, such as rural-urban, gender, social groups and religious groups.

$$Y_i = \beta_1 + \beta_2 X_i + U_i \quad (1)$$

In this model, it can be assumed that each individual has two alternatives: access to the labour market or not. Let us assume that U_{i1} and U_{i0} represent the utility that individual 'i' attaches to

¹⁹ National Statistics Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report, July 2023–June 2024* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2024).

access to the labour market outcome.

If the individual has access to the labour market outcome, then $U_{i1} > U_{i0}$; otherwise, $U_{i1} < U_{i0}$.

Similarly, if a rational individual maximises utility, in that case:

$$\text{Probability } [Y_i = 1] = \text{Probability } [U_{i1} > U_{i0}]$$

$$\text{Probability } [Y_i = 0] = \text{Probability } [U_{i1} < U_{i0}]$$

In such a situation, the probability for the individual can be written as:

$$P(Y_i = 1) = \frac{e^{\beta_1 + \beta_2 X_i}}{1 + e^{\beta_1 + \beta_2 X_i}} \quad (2)$$

2.2 Indicators for Measuring the Precarity of Labour

In this article, various labour indicators have been calculated from the Periodic Labour Force Survey Data 2023-24. Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Work Participation Rate (WPR) and Unemployment Rate (UR) have been computed to describe the status of workers in the labour market. LFPR, WPR and UR explain the proportional representation of workers from different social and religious groups in India. For measuring the precarity of the labour force in India, six indicators have been calculated: workers without a job contract, workers without eligibility for paid leave, workers without access to any social security benefits, workers without a fixed work location, workers in the unorganised sector and workers engaged in the informal sector.

2.3 Labour Force Participation and Work Participation by Social and Religious Groups

In this section, key employment and unemployment indicators such as Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Work Participation Rate (WPR) and Unemployment Rate (UR) for the usual principal status of labour have been analysed. Analysis of the labour market through these indicators brings out clear inter-group inequality in the labour market in India. It is essential to differentiate between workers and the labour force for a better understanding of the concept. As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey of India, persons who, during the reference period, are engaged in any economic activities are classified as workers. Persons who, during the reference period, owing

to lack of work, had not worked but sought work or are available for work are called unemployed. The workers and the unemployed population together constitute the labour force. Those persons who are neither working nor seeking nor available for work are called out of the labour force.

Table 1 provides an estimate of the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) by social and religious groups in India. Analysis by sector shows that LFPR is highest for the Scheduled Tribe and lowest for other social groups in rural areas. Among religious groups, Muslims have the lowest labour force participation rate in rural India. The urban sector also shows a similar picture, as labour force participation is better for the Scheduled Tribe and the Scheduled Caste, and lowest for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and other social groups. In urban areas, Muslims also have the lowest labour force participation rate in comparison to other religious groups.

Table 1: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) by Social and Religious Groups in India-2023-24

Social Group	LFPR-Rural	LFPR-Urban	LFPR-Total
Scheduled Tribe	54.1	43.3	53.0
Scheduled Caste	45.8	42.6	45.1
Other Backward Classes	46.1	40.1	44.4
Others	44.7	41.1	43.2
Religion			
Hindu	47.8	41.8	46.1
Muslim	39.3	36.2	38.2
Christian	49.8	42.8	47.4
Sikh	46.1	39.6	44.5
Others	50.3	42.2	46.8

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

Similarly, Table 2 shows the estimates of work participation rate among various social and religious groups by sector. Work participation rate also shows a similar pattern to the labour force participation rate. Work participation rate is highest for Scheduled Tribes and lowest for others, which constitute mostly the dominant upper caste. For the urban sector, the work participation rate is also higher for marginalised social groups, such as the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, in comparison to other social groups. Among religious groups, the work participation rate is lowest for Muslims, which is significantly lower than that of the majority religious group, i.e. Hindus.

Table 3 provides estimates of the unemployment rate in India. As per the PLFS 2023-24, the unemployment rate is low for both rural and urban areas. In the rural sector, the unemployment rate is highest for the upper caste (others) and lowest for the Scheduled Tribe. While for the urban sector, the scenario is different as the unemployment rate for the Scheduled Tribe and the Scheduled Caste is higher than for others. Lower unemployment rate in the rural sector for marginalised social

Table 2: Work Participation Rate (WPR) by Social and Religious Groups in India-2023-24

Social Group	WPR-Rural	WPR-Urban	WPR-Total
Scheduled Tribe	53.4	40.4	52.0
Scheduled Caste	44.6	40.3	43.6
Other Backward Classes	45.0	38.0	43.0
Others	43.3	39.1	41.5
Religion			
Hindu	46.7	39.7	44.7
Muslim	38.3	34.6	36.9
Christian	47.8	40.0	45.2
Sikh	43.4	37.2	41.9
Others	49.2	39.0	44.8

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

groups can be explained through the availability of various livelihood programmes, while the urban sector has very limited public livelihood programmes. Unemployment rate for Muslims is almost similar to Hindu in the rural sector. For the urban sector, Muslims have the lowest unemployment rate among various religious groups in India.

Table 3: Unemployment Rate (UR) by Social and Religious Groups in India 2023-24

Social Group	UR-Rural	UR-Urban	UR-Total
Scheduled Tribe	1.4	6.8	1.9
Scheduled Caste	2.7	5.3	3.3
Other Backward Classes	2.4	5.1	3.1
Others	3.1	4.7	3.8
Religion			
Hindu	2.4	5.1	3.0
Muslim	2.6	4.5	3.2
Christian	3.9	6.6	4.7
Sikh	5.7	6.2	5.8
Others	2.2	7.6	4.3

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

Analysis of employment type for social and religious groups in India highlights the prevailing inter-group inequality in the labour market. Discussion on the estimates of labour force, work force and unemployment rate in the previous section has highlighted that marginalised social groups such as the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims have higher access to the work force and a lower unemployment rate. However, analysis of the type of employment is necessary to analyse the quality of employment availed by various social and religious groups in India. The employment types have been analysed through three prominent categories- self-employment, regular salaries and casual wage labour. As per the estimate of employment type for rural areas shown in Table 4, self-

employment is lowest for the Scheduled Caste and Muslims among all social and religious groups. Regular wage salaries, which are considered better in terms of lower employment vulnerability, are lowest for the Scheduled Tribe and highest for the upper caste. Similarly, among religious groups regular salary is lowest for Muslims and highest for Sikhs. Casual wage labour, which is considered more vulnerable in terms of employment and income security, is highest among the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes and lowest for the high caste. Thus, inter-group inequality in the type of employment reveals that marginalised social groups are more precarious in the labour market.

Table 4: Employment Type by Social and Religious Groups in India-Rural-2023-24

Social Group	Self-employed	Regular Salaried	Casual Wage Labour
Scheduled Tribe	33.6	4.9	14.8
Scheduled Caste	22.5	5.8	16.3
Other Backward Classes	30.9	5.5	9.6
Others	31.2	7.1	5.0
Religion			
Hindu	33.2	5.9	10.5
Muslim	25.9	4.2	8.1
Christian	29.4	8.0	10.4
Sikh	22.8	9.3	11.3
Others	26.9	7.3	14.9

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

Estimates of employment types, as given in Table 5, indicate a different picture in the urban sector. In comparison to rural areas, the proportion of self-employment is lower in the urban sector across all social and religious groups. However, in the urban sector, the proportion of self-employed is lower for the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Caste in comparison to the upper caste. Among religious groups, Muslims have the highest proportion of self-employment. However, for Muslims, the proportion of workers engaged in regular salaried work is lowest. Similarly, Muslims also have the largest proportion of casual wage labour among all religious groups. Thus, a lower proportion of regular salaried and a higher proportion of casual wage labour make Muslim workers more precarious and vulnerable in the urban labour market.

Table 6, which provides estimates for employment types at the aggregate level, also shows that Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes have a lower proportion of regular salaried and a higher proportion of casual wage labour, which makes them precarious and vulnerable in the labour market.

Table 5: Employment Type by Social and Religious Groups in India-Urban 2023-24

Social Group	Self-employed	Regular Salaried	Casual Wage Labour
Scheduled Tribe	12.6	20.2	7.5
Scheduled Caste	12.6	19.1	8.6
Other Backward Classes	16.3	16.9	4.8
Others	16.7	19.8	2.6
Religion			
Hindu	15.4	19.9	4.5
Muslim	17.5	11.3	5.8
Christian	13.6	20.9	5.4
Sikh	17.1	16.9	3.0
Others	15.9	18.6	4.4

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

Table 6: Employment Type by Social and Religious Groups in India-Total-2023-24

Social Group	Self-employed	Regular Salaried	Casual Wage Labour
Scheduled Tribe	31.4	6.5	14.0
Scheduled Caste	20.1	8.9	14.4
Other Backward Classes	26.8	8.7	7.5
Others	24.9	12.5	3.9
Religion			
Hindu	26.0	9.8	8.8
Muslim	23.0	6.7	7.3
Christian	24.0	12.4	8.7
Sikh	21.4	11.2	9.3
Others	22.2	12.1	10.4

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

2.4 Access to Job Contracts

The nature of the job contract determines the security of the labour force in the job market. The workers without job contracts are more vulnerable as they are unsure regarding the security of job tenure and lack social security benefits. The workers without job contracts also face the fear of losing their jobs without prior notice, which adversely affects their economic and social well-being. In other words, the labour force without a job contract is highly precarious and vulnerable in the labour market. Periodic Labour Force Survey classifies labour into- without a job contract, job contract for less than one year, job contract for one-three years and job contract for more than three years. Table 7 provides estimates for the proportion of labour without a job contract. Analysis from Table 7 shows that marginalised social groups such as the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe have the highest proportion of workers without having any job contract. We can also witness a clear rural-urban divide in terms of job contracts. Workers in the rural sector have a higher proportion of workers without a job contract in comparison to urban areas. Among all social groups, the Scheduled Caste has the highest proportion of workers without a job contract. It is as high as 90 per cent in rural areas and 74 per cent in urban areas.

Table 7: Proportion of Workers without any job-contract by Social and Religious Groups in India-2023-24

Social Group	Rural	Urban	Total
Scheduled Tribe	87.5	65.0	84.3
Scheduled Caste	90.0	74.1	85.5
Other Backward Classes	84.6	66.6	77.7
Others	73.7	56.0	63.4
Religion			
Hindu	84.7	62.0	76.2
Muslim	88.9	82.5	86.2
Christian	72.0	52.5	63.5
Sikh	92.3	73.1	87.5
Others	80.2	62.5	72.4

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

Analysis of religious groups shows that in comparison to Hindus, Muslims have a higher proportion of workers without job contracts. Nearly 89 per cent of Muslim workers in rural areas do not have a job contract. For the urban sector, Muslims have the highest proportion of workers without a job contract. Thus, in terms of job contract, marginalised social groups such as the Scheduled Caste and Muslims have more precarious conditions in the labour market, both in the rural and urban sectors.

2.5 Eligibility for Paid Leave

Eligibility for paid leave for workers is crucial for the socio-economic well-being of labour. Access to paid leave protects the labourer from economic shocks during illness or other household emergencies. Table 8 provides sector-wise estimates of the proportion of workers having no eligibility for paid leave. Analysis shows that in the rural sector, the Scheduled Caste have the highest proportion of workers without eligibility to avail paid leave. Among all social groups, upper caste workers have the lowest proportion of workers without eligibility for paid leave. The pattern is similar for the urban sector also. Similarly, analysis by religious groups shows that Muslims have the highest proportion of workers without eligibility for paid leave. Thus, analysis of this section reveals that Scheduled Caste and Muslim workers are more precarious, as a very low proportion of workers are eligible for paid leave, which makes them more vulnerable to economic shocks during illnesses and any other emergency.

Table 8: Proportion of workers having no eligibility for paid leave by Social and Religious Groups in India-2023-24

Social Group	Rural	Urban	Total
Scheduled Tribe	85.5	56.0	81.4
Scheduled Caste	87.5	66.3	81.4
Other Backward Classes	81.0	58.8	72.5
Others	69.6	43.0	54.1
Religion			
Hindu	81.8	51.9	70.7
Muslim	86.0	76.6	82.0
Christian	68.1	45.1	58.1
Sikh	79.6	50.0	72.2
Others	79.6	50.1	66.6

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

2.6 Access to Social Security Benefits by Workers

Access to social security for workers has been estimated in Table 9. Analysis of the table highlights the precariousness of marginalised social groups in the labour market. Among social groups, the Scheduled Caste have the highest proportion of workers without any social security benefits. The pattern is similar for the rural and urban sectors. In the rural sector, nearly 87 per cent of Scheduled Caste workers do not have access to social security benefits. While in the urban sector, nearly 70 per cent Scheduled Caste workers do not have access to social security benefits. Upper caste workers have a higher proportion of workers with social security benefits. While more than half of the urban

workers from the upper caste have access to social security benefits, only 30 per cent Scheduled Caste workers have access to social security benefits. Similarly, among religious groups, Muslims have the highest proportion of workers without social security benefits. More than 80 per cent of Muslim workers in India do not have access to any social security benefits. Thus, analysis of this indicator also indicates the nature of precarity that workers from marginalised social groups experience in the labour market, both in the rural and urban sectors.

Table 9: Proportion of Workers having availed no social security by Social and Religious Groups in India 2023-24

Social Group	Rural	Urban	Total
Scheduled Tribe	86.6	61.3	83.0
Scheduled Caste	87.6	69.8	82.6
Other Backward Classes	80.6	62.2	73.5
Others	72.5	48.2	58.3
Religion			
Hindu	81.9	55.9	72.2
Muslim	87.2	80.2	84.2
Christian	72.7	51.7	63.6
Sikh	88.6	61.2	81.8
Others	77.6	55.5	67.8

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

2.7 Workers with No Fixed Work Location

Lack of fixed work location is another labour market indicator which adversely affects the well-being of labour and causes precarity and vulnerability of labour. Table 10 provides estimates of the proportion of labour having no fixed work location. Analysis of the table indicates that the proportion of workers with no fixed work location is higher for urban areas than in rural areas. Inter-group inequality is not much in the rural sector. However, in the urban sector, the proportion of workers with no fixed work location is higher among the Scheduled Caste in comparison to the upper caste. In comparison to Hindu, Muslims have a higher proportion of workers with no fixed work location. Thus, marginalised groups such as the Scheduled Caste and Muslims face higher precarity in the urban sector in comparison to privileged social groups.

2.8 Workers Engaged in the Organised and Unorganised Sectors

Table 11 provides estimates of the percentage of workers engaged in the organised and unorganised sectors. As discussed earlier, the organised sector offers better employment conditions to workers

Table 10: Proportion of workers having no fixed work location by Social and Religious Groups in India 2023-24

Social Group	Rural	Urban	Total
Scheduled Tribe	4.6	5.1	4.7
Scheduled Caste	3.4	6.7	4.4
Other Backward Classes	3.8	5.3	4.3
Others	4.0	3.9	3.9
Religion			
Hindu	3.6	4.3	3.9
Muslim	4.8	8.1	6.1
Christian	2.5	4.6	3.4
Sikh	7.6	5.9	7.1
Others	6.2	5.8	6.0

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

and thus reduces exposure to precarity. Sector-wise analysis of organised and unorganised sector workers reveals that the proportion of organised sector workers is higher for urban areas in comparison to rural areas. In rural areas, Scheduled Tribe workers have the lowest proportion of workers in the organised sector. The upper caste have highest proportion of workers in the organised sector. More than 90 per cent of workers from the Scheduled Tribe are engaged in the unorganised sector. For the urban sector as well Scheduled Caste have a lower proportion of work in the organised sector than the upper caste workers. Nearly 60 per cent of urban upper caste workers are engaged in the unorganised sector, while 68 per cent of the Scheduled Caste workers are in the unorganised sector. For religious groups, Muslims have the highest proportion of workers in the unorganised sector. Thus, analysis of the proportion of workers in the organised and unorganised sectors clearly indicates that workers from marginalised social groups are highly precarious and vulnerable due to the unorganised sector.

2.9 Informality of Labour in India

Table 12 provides estimates for the proportion of workers engaged in the formal and informal sectors in rural and urban areas. The formal sector provides better social security and protects labour from the economic and other shocks which affect the well-being of the labour force in India. While informality of labour makes the labour force more vulnerable and precarious. As far as the rural sector is concerned, there is not much difference among various social groups in terms of the proportion of workers engaged in the informal sector. However, in the rural sector, the upper caste has a comparatively higher proportion of workers in the formal sector. In the rural sector, Mus-

Table 11: Proportion of workers employed in organised and unorganised sectors by Social and Religious Groups in India-2023-24

Social Group	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Organised Sector	Unorganised Sector	Organised Sector	Unorganised Sector	Organised Sector	Unorganised Sector
Scheduled Tribe	9.8	90.2	35.7	64.3	11.8	88.1
Scheduled Caste	12.5	87.5	31.4	68.6	16.6	83.3
Other Backward Classes	10.2	89.8	30.6	69.4	15.3	84.6
Others	13.0	87.0	39.3	60.7	23.6	76.3
Religion						
Hindu	11.2	88.8	33.6	63.4	17.5	82.4
Muslim	8.0	92.0	18.2	81.8	11.3	88.7
Christian	18.8	81.2	42.9	57.1	26.1	73.9
Sikh	16.3	83.7	31.5	68.5	19.7	80.3
Others	16.3	83.7	37.5	62.5	24.3	75.7

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

lims have the highest proportion of workers in the informal sector. Less than 3 per cent of Muslim workers are in the formal sector, remaining are engaged in the informal sector. For urban areas, the Scheduled Caste has the highest proportion of informal sector workers, and the upper caste has the lowest proportion of informal sector workers. Among religious groups, Muslims have the highest proportion of informal sector workers. Thus, analysis of the informal and formal sectors also reveals that marginalised social groups are bearing the major burden of precarity.

Table 12: Proportion of workers employed in the formal and informal sectors by Social and Religious Groups in India-2023-24

Social Group	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Formal Sector	Informal Sector	Formal Sector	Informal Sector	Formal Sector	Informal Sector
Scheduled Tribe	4.3	95.7	25.4	74.6	6.2	93.8
Scheduled Caste	4.7	95.3	19.7	80.3	7.9	92.1
Other Backward Classes	4.8	95.2	20.7	79.3	8.7	91.3
Others	7.2	92.8	28.5	71.5	15.8	84.2
Religion						
Hindu	5.3	94.7	25.9	74.1	10.3	89.6
Muslim	2.8	97.2	8.9	91.1	4.7	95.2
Christian	9.8	90.2	30.8	69.2	16.1	83.9
Sikh	4.9	95.1	19.7	80.3	8.2	91.7
Others	9.7	90.3	26.0	74.0	15.8	84.2

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

3. Burden of Precarity in the Labour Market: Socio-religious Identity and Labour Insecurity in India

In this section, key labour market indicators have been analysed using a logistic regression model. Statistical significance of key labour market indicators has been explained through a logit model. The model also explains the odds of various labour market indicators for marginalised social groups such as the Scheduled Caste, the Scheduled Tribes and Muslims. The model also incorporates sector-wise and gender variables in explaining labour market outcomes. Table 13 depicts the logistic model for labour force participation. As explained in the model, females have a 68 per cent lower odds of being in the labour force than males. This indicates acute gender inequality in labour participation in India. In comparison to urban areas, people in rural areas have a 34 per cent higher odds of being in the labour force. Analysis of the model for social groups indicates that Scheduled Tribes have a 26 per cent higher odds of joining the labour force. In comparison to the upper caste, Scheduled Caste have a 4 per cent lower odds of joining the labour force. Similarly, in comparison to the reference group, Muslims have a 27 per cent lower odds (in comparison to Hindus). The model is also statistically significant, as indicated by p-values.

Table 13: Likelihood of Labour Force Participation -2023-24

LFPR	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P > z	95% conf. interval	
Female	0.3242449	0.0021098	-173.09	0.000	0.320136	0.3284066
<i>Sector</i>						
Rural	1.345808	0.0090547	44.14	0.000	1.328178	1.363673
<i>Social Group</i>						
ST	1.26119	0.0155807	18.78	0.000	1.231019	1.2921
SC	0.9649257	0.0099738	-3.45	0.001	0.9455741	0.9846733
OBC	0.982534	0.0080203	-2.16	0.031	0.9669395	0.9983799
<i>Religion</i>						
Islam	0.7327352	0.0069803	-32.64	0.000	0.719181	0.7465449
Christianity	0.8528145	0.0125475	-10.82	0.000	0.8285731	0.8777652
Sikhism	0.8896528	0.0207686	-5.01	0.000	0.8498643	0.9313041
Others	1.046303	0.0241054	1.96	0.049	1.000108	1.094631
Constant	1.262353	0.0101689	28.92	0.000	1.242579	1.282442

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

The logistic regression model for work participation rate also draws a similar picture. In comparison to males, females have a 67 per cent lower odds of being a worker. In comparison to the urban sector, the rural sector has a 42 per cent higher odds of joining the workforce. Similarly, in comparison to the upper caste, the Scheduled Caste has a 4 per cent lower odds of joining the workforce. For religious groups, in comparison to Hindus, Muslims have a 28 per cent lower odds of joining the workforce. The result of the logit regression model is highly significant, as shown by the p-value of

the model.

Table 14: Likelihood of Work Force Participation -2023-24

WPR	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P > z	95% conf. interval	
Female	0.3305089	0.0021609	-169.34	0.000	0.3263007	0.3347713
<i>Sector</i>						
Rural	1.420421	0.0096033	51.91	0.000	1.401723	1.439369
<i>Social Group</i>						
ST	1.262314	0.0156133	18.83	0.000	1.23208	1.293289
SC	0.9622259	0.00998	-3.71	0.000	0.942863	0.9819864
OBC	0.9879541	0.0081001	-1.48	0.139	0.9722051	1.003958
<i>Religion</i>						
Islam	0.7262313	0.0069669	-33.35	0.000	0.712704	0.7400153
Christianity	0.8181594	0.0120813	-13.59	0.000	0.7948198	0.8421843
Sikhism	0.8702571	0.0204186	-5.92	0.000	0.8311436	0.9112112
Others	0.9903127	0.0228541	-0.42	0.673	0.9465174	1.036134
Constant	1.123258	0.0090634	14.41	0.000	1.105633	1.141163

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

The logistic regression model given in Table 15 shows the vulnerability of being unemployed in India. In comparison with males, females have a 38 per cent higher odds of being unemployed. In comparison to the urban sector, the rural sector has a 58 per cent lower odds of being unemployed. Among social groups, while the Scheduled Caste has a slightly higher odds of being unemployed, the result is statistically not significant ($p=0.346$).

Table 15: Likelihood of being unemployed- 2023-24

UR	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P > z	95% conf. interval	
Female	1.387467	0.0338151	13.44	0.000	1.322749	1.455352
<i>Sector</i>						
Rural	0.4243153	0.0103815	-35.04	0.000	0.4044481	0.4451584
<i>Social Group</i>						
ST	0.893244	0.0398716	-2.53	0.011	0.8184179	0.9749112
SC	1.035637	0.0385126	0.94	0.346	0.9628387	1.113939
OBC	0.9309736	0.0273327	-2.44	0.015	0.8789147	0.9861161
<i>Religion</i>						
Islam	1.296108	0.0442397	7.60	0.000	1.212237	1.385783
Christianity	1.640497	0.0783231	10.37	0.000	1.49395	1.801419
Sikhism	1.415597	0.1110735	4.43	0.000	1.21381	1.650929
Others	1.711327	0.1152021	7.98	0.000	1.499796	1.952691
Constant	0.0541706	0.0014475	-109.11	0.000	0.0514066	0.0570832

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

The model suggests that in comparison to Hindus, all religious minorities in India have a higher odds of being unemployed. Muslims have a 29 per cent higher odds of being unemployed in comparison to Hindus. The model is highly statistically significant, as shown by the p-value.

As discussed in the previous section, the unavailability of job contracts increases the vulnerability of workers. The logistic regression model shown in Table 16 analyses the odds of being without a job contract for social and religious groups. In comparison to male workers, female workers have a 13 per cent higher odds of having a job contract. In comparison to the urban sector, workers in the rural sector have a 61 per cent lower odds of having a job contract. The logit model also highlights the precarity and vulnerability of workers from marginalised groups. In comparison to high caste, Scheduled Caste workers have a 64 per cent lower odds of having a job contract. Similarly, in comparison to Hindus, Muslims have a 50 per cent lower odds of having a job contract.

Table 16: Likelihood of having a job contract -2023-24

Job-Contract	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P > z	95% conf. interval	
Female	1.132019	0.021997	6.38	0.000	1.089716	1.175964
Sector						
Rural	0.3916295	0.0069988	-52.46	0.000	0.3781496	0.40559
Social Group						
ST	0.7658294	0.0233155	-8.76	0.000	0.7214685	0.8129179
SC	0.3600543	0.0095562	-38.49	0.000	0.3418034	0.3792798
OBC	0.5722647	0.0120306	-26.55	0.000	0.5491643	0.5963368
Religion						
Islam	0.5082011	0.0149901	-22.95	0.000	0.4796542	0.538447
Christianity	2.37555	0.0813414	25.27	0.000	2.221356	2.540448
Sikhism	0.511662	0.0377441	-9.08	0.000	0.4427841	0.5912543
Others	1.963099	0.1073284	12.34	0.000	1.763618	2.185143
Constant	0.9245465	0.0165375	-4.39	0.000	0.8926951	0.9575343

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

As discussed in the previous section of this article, the unavailability of social security benefits further aggravates the vulnerability of labour. The logistic regression model given in Table 17 explains the likelihood of availing social security benefits for social and religious groups in India. In comparison to male workers, female workers have a 13 per cent lower odds of availing social security benefits. Workers in urban sectors have a significantly higher odds of availing social security benefits. In comparison to Others, the Scheduled Caste have 64 per cent lower odds of availing social security benefits for workers. Similarly, Scheduled Tribe workers have a 30 per cent lower odds of getting social security benefits.

Table 18 provides a logistic model for the eligibility of paid leaves among workers in India. Analysis of the model shows that female workers have much lower odds of being eligible for paid leave. In comparison to urban areas, workers in rural areas have a 70 per cent lower odds of being eligible for paid leave. Among the social groups, Scheduled Caste workers have a 32 per cent lower odds of accessing paid leave. Similarly, Muslims have a 58 per cent lower odds of being eligible to get paid

Table 17: Likelihood of having social security for labour -2023-24

Social security	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P > z	95% conf. interval	
Female	0.8759754	0.0170335	-6.81	0.000	0.8432185	0.9100049
Sector						
Rural	0.3599703	0.0062818	-58.55	0.000	0.3478663	0.3724954
Social Group						
ST	0.7041575	0.0213657	-11.56	0.000	0.6635024	0.7473037
SC	0.3636396	0.0093704	-39.26	0.000	0.3457301	0.3824769
OBC	0.5874039	0.0121575	-25.71	0.000	0.5640524	0.6117221
Religion						
Islam	0.4359655	0.0127256	-28.44	0.000	0.4117238	0.4616345
Christianity	2.117458	0.0727212	21.84	0.000	1.979619	2.264896
Sikhism	0.6810161	0.0443525	-5.90	0.000	0.5994063	0.7737373
Others	1.814049	0.0994084	10.87	0.000	1.62931	2.019734
Constant	1.186615	0.0211335	9.61	0.000	1.145909	1.228767

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

leave in their employment.

Table 18: Likelihood of being eligible for paid leave -2023-24

Eligible for Paid Leave	Odds ratio	Std. err.	Z	P > z	95% conf. interval	
Gender						
female	0.3469809	0.0050538	-72.67	0.000	0.3372156	0.357029
Sector						
Rural	0.3083063	0.0044067	-82.32	0.000	0.2997891	0.3170654
Religion						
Islam	0.4257572	0.0102534	-35.46	0.000	0.4061278	0.4463353
Christianity	1.34159	0.0360632	10.93	0.000	1.272737	1.414167
Sikhism	1.012431	0.0477042	0.26	0.793	0.9231197	1.110383
Others	1.191074	0.0496637	4.19	0.000	1.097606	1.292501
Social Group						
ST	0.9348973	0.0231015	-2.72	0.006	0.8906982	0.9812898
SC	0.6890601	0.0143141	-17.93	0.000	0.6615684	0.7176941
OBC	0.7165284	0.0114849	-20.80	0.000	0.6943682	0.7393958
Constant	0.2207416	0.0029417	-113.37	0.000	0.2150506	0.2265831

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

Logistic regression model for workers having fixed work location (Table 19) provides another dimension of precarity of labour. In comparison to male workers, female workers have nearly 7 times higher odds of having a fixed work location. The model suggests that the difference between rural and urban areas is not statistically significant. In comparison to Hindus, the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes have a 25 per cent lower odds of having a fixed work location. Similarly, in comparison to Hindus, Muslim workers have a 37 per cent lower odds of having a fixed work location. Thus, analysis in this section reveals that marginalised group workers have a lower odds of having a fixed work location.

Table 19: Likelihood of having a fixed work location for labour

Work Location Status	Odds ratio	Std. err.	Z	P > z	95% conf. interval	
Gender						
Female	7.102795	0.4918829	28.31	0.000	6.201287	8.135359
Sector						
Rural	1.026247	0.0315491	0.84	0.399	0.9662376	1.089983
Religion						
Muslim	0.6360968	0.0247355	−11.63	0.000	0.5894176	0.6864728
Christian	1.406961	0.1135312	4.23	0.000	1.201147	1.648039
Sikh	0.4851577	0.0388331	−9.04	0.000	0.414716	0.5675642
Others	0.7189098	0.0698949	−3.39	0.001	0.5941795	0.8698235
Social Group						
ST	0.7433548	0.0454362	−4.85	0.000	0.6594289	0.8379621
SC	0.7533895	0.0351446	−6.07	0.000	0.6875625	0.8255187
OBC	0.8681989	0.0324845	−3.78	0.000	0.806809	0.93426
Constant	22.77779	0.7720563	92.22	0.000	21.31376	24.34239

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

Logistic regression model for organised and unorganised sectors (Table 20) provides an estimate of the odds of an organised sector worker. The model suggests that, in comparison to male workers, female workers have a lower odds of being employed in the organised sector. Rural workers have a 70 per cent lower odds of being employed in the organised sector. Similarly, in comparison to the upper caste, the Scheduled Caste have 17 per cent lower odds of being organised sector workers. In comparison to Hindus, Muslims have 50 per cent lower odds of working in the organised sector.

Table 20: Likelihood of working in the organised sector: 2023-24

Organised Sec	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Z	P > z	95% conf. interval	
Female	0.8558896	0.0113342	-11.75	0.000	0.8339607	0.8783951
Sector						
Rural	0.3025933	0.003801	-95.16	0.000	0.2952345	0.3101356
Social group						
ST	0.8036084	0.0182525	-9.63	0.000	0.7686189	0.8401909
SC	0.8300883	0.0156057	-9.91	0.000	0.8000583	0.8612455
OBC	0.763415	0.0115363	-17.86	0.000	0.7411359	0.786364
Religion						
Islam	0.5081894	0.0107252	-32.07	0.000	0.4875973	0.5296512
Christianity	1.429568	0.0366883	13.93	0.000	1.359439	1.503315
Sikhism	0.9917379	0.0437141	-0.19	0.851	0.9096564	1.081226
Others	1.168629	0.0465573	3.91	0.000	1.08085	1.263537
Constant	0.6224724	0.0082409	-35.81	0.000	0.6065284	0.6388355

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

4. Labour Market Protection Index

Labour market vulnerability is multidimensional, encompassing employment insecurity, earnings, working conditions and access to social protection rather than being confined to a single employment outcome.²⁰ The ILO treats decent work as a multidimensional construct requiring a set of statistical indicators covering employment opportunities, adequate earnings, working time, stability, social security and related dimensions.²¹ However, empirical studies have often relied on individual or non-integrated indicators, which can obscure the simultaneous accumulation of disadvantages within the same worker.²² The Labour Market Protection Index (LMPI) therefore combines these interconnected dimensions into a composite measure of labour-market vulnerability for each worker. The LMPI contributes to labour-market research by shifting attention from isolated outcomes and unitary vulnerability indicators to the distribution, intensity and ranking of multidimensional vulnerability. It generates a continuous score that allows workers to be ranked and compared across socio-demographic groups. This provides a new framework for examining labour-market dynamics not merely through changes in employment or earnings, but through changes in the protection measures embedded within the employment itself.

To facilitate interpretation of the continuous LMPI, the study employs two complementary classification approaches: pooled quintiles and standard-deviation (SD) thresholds. Quintiles capture the relative position of workers within the overall LMPI distribution. Workers are therefore ranked from Q₁, representing the least vulnerable 20%, to Q₅, representing the most vulnerable 20%. This facilitates comparisons of the relative concentration of vulnerability across socio-demographic groups, sectors and years. However, because quintiles allocate workers according to their rank, approximately one-fifth of the population falls into each category irrespective of the overall dispersion of LMPI scores. To complement this relative ranking, the study employs an SD-based classification that captures the intensity of vulnerability relative to the pooled mean. Workers are classified as very low (<-1.5 SD), low (-1.5 to -0.5 SD), moderate (-0.5 to 0.5 SD), high (>0.5 to 1.5 SD), or very high (>1.5 SD). Unlike quintiles, these thresholds do not impose equal population shares

²⁰ A. L. Kalleberg, "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition", *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 1–22; A. L. Kalleberg and S. P. Vallas, "Probing Precarious Work: Theory, Research, and Politics", in *Precarious Work*, ed. A. L. Kalleberg and S. P. Vallas, Research in the Sociology of Work 31 (Bingley: Emerald, 2018), 1–30.

²¹ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Decent Work Indicators: Concepts and Definitions*, ILO Manual, 1st ed. (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2012) [reference added; please confirm].

²² M. Olsthoorn, "Measuring Precarious Employment: A Proposal for Two Indicators of Precarious Employment Based on Set-Theory and Tested with Dutch Labor Market-Data", *Social Indicators Research* 119, no. 1 (2014): 421–41.

and therefore reveal the extent to which vulnerability is concentrated substantially above or below the average. Thus, the quintile measure establishes where the group stands in the vulnerability ranking, while the SD measure indicates how far vulnerability extends above the average. Using both approaches therefore provides a complementary basis for interpreting the distribution and intensity of LMPI vulnerability.

Socio-demographic pattern of labour-market vulnerability from LMPI Quintiles

The quintile distribution of LMPI indicates that labour-market vulnerability in India is unequally distributed across demographic and social groups. Women workers record a higher mean LMPI than men workers (0.161 versus 0.064), although their combined Q4–Q5 shares are similar. Women are substantially more concentrated in Q5 (27.93% versus 21.37%). As discussed in previous section, the gender disparities exist not merely in labour-force participation but also in earnings, education and access to economic opportunities, particularly in rural India. The rural–urban divide is similarly pronounced: rural workers have a mean LMPI of 0.237 and 48.84% are located in Q4–Q5, compared with 39.55% of urban workers.

Analysis of vulnerability by age also displays a distinctive pattern. Nearly half of workers aged 15–29 are in Q4–Q5, which indicates that India's youth are entering a labour market characterised by widespread informal employment, low earnings and limited social protection. At the other extreme, workers aged 60+ exhibit the highest mean LMPI (0.745), with 69.92% in Q4–Q5, suggesting that elderly workers face higher vulnerability with weak labour-market protection. The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) 2017–18 also suggests that older workers lack social protection and are therefore more vulnerable.²³

Inter-social group inequality is also evident from the LMP index. More than half (51.44 per cent) of Scheduled Caste workers are concentrated in the last two quintiles (Q4–Q5) while only one-third of general/upper-caste workers are in the last two quintiles of LMPI. As discussed in the previous sections of this article, marginalised social groups faced deprivation in most of the social protections indices of labour market such as job contracts, social security benefits, paid leave and formal employment. Similarly, in comparison to other religion, Muslim workers are more vulnerable with more than 60 per cent workers concentrated in last two quintiles of LMPI. More broadly, the results support the existing scholarly argument that economic inequality reflects structural differences in

²³ International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) et al., *Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) Wave 1, 2017–18: India Report* (Mumbai: IIPS, 2020).

access to opportunity and economic agency rather than income disparities alone. This is also in accordance with Bromley's multidimensional conception of vulnerable work, encompassing social protection, employment instability, low income, labour entitlements and working conditions.²⁴

Distribution of Labour-Market Vulnerability Using Standard Deviation-Based LMPI Categories

The standard deviation-based LMPI classification reinforces the socio-demographic concentration of labour-market vulnerability and carries important implications for labour and social-protection policy. Gender differences are particularly significant as women workers experience higher vulnerability in comparison to men. Although the combined incidence of high and very-high vulnerability is similar among men (43.42%) and women (43.02%), women are substantially more concentrated in the very-high category (11.37% compared with 2.88%). Thus, similar aggregate exposure can conceal significant differences in the intensity of labour-market disadvantage, which binary classifications of vulnerability may fail to identify.

Table 21: Distribution of Workers across Standard Deviation-Based LMPI Vulnerability Categories by Socio-demographic Characteristics (%)

Variable	Characteristic	Very Low %	Low %	Moderate %	High %	Very High %
Sex	Male	4	31.64	20.93	40.54	2.88
	Female	4.52	28.5	23.95	31.65	11.37
Sector	Rural	1.97	26.31	22.97	43.34	5.41
	Urban	5.67	34.21	20.68	34.96	4.48
Age-group	15–29	1.35	25.44	23.68	46.7	2.83
	30–44	4.6	32.83	22.01	36.22	4.34
	45–59	7.14	36.92	18.94	30.51	6.48
	60+	2.11	11.44	16.69	49.26	20.5
Social Group	ST	2.94	29.73	21.92	36.04	9.37
	SC	2.19	23.78	22.68	43.31	8.04
	OBC	3.32	28.6	21.49	42.33	4.26
	Others	6.36	37.73	21.19	31.72	2.99
Religion	Hindu	4.29	31.76	22.09	37.16	4.7
	Muslim	2.44	19.59	16.66	54.42	6.89
	Christian	4.99	42.14	24.69	25.81	2.37
	Sikh	3.21	22.53	19.96	46.65	7.64
	Others	4.65	38.8	21.9	30.87	3.79

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

The rural–urban divide is similarly pronounced, with 48.75% of rural workers classified as highly or very highly vulnerable compared with 39.44% of urban workers. Age of the workers produces

²⁴ R. Bromley and C. Gerry, "Who Are the Casual Poor?", in *Casual Work and Poverty in Third World Cities*, ed. R. Bromley and C. Gerry (London: John Wiley, 1979), 3–23.

an especially important policy distinction. Nearly half of workers aged 15–29 (49.53%) occupy the two upper vulnerability categories, suggesting that entry into employment does not necessarily translate into access to secure and protected work. At the other end, 69.76% of workers aged 60+ are highly or very highly vulnerable, potentially indicating the vulnerability associated with continued employment even at older ages.

Social inequalities are also reproduced within labour-market outcomes. Scheduled Caste (SC) workers record the highest upper-tail concentration among social groups (51.35%), compared with 34.71% among others. Similarly, 61.31% of Muslim and 54.29% of Sikh workers are classified as highly or very highly vulnerable, although these descriptive differences should not be interpreted as independent effects of religion without multivariate adjustment.

From a public-policy perspective, these findings demonstrate the limitations of treating employment status alone as an indicator of economic security. Even groups with similar employment rates can occupy different positions in the protection index. The LMPI therefore provides a basis for moving from welfare policies to targeting towards vulnerability-sensitive labour policy, enabling interventions to account for the cumulative deficits in employment stability, earnings, social protection, working conditions and human capital that distinguish degrees of labour-market vulnerability.

Temporal Variations in Labour Market Vulnerability, 2017–2024

The year-wise distribution of the LMPI indicates that labour market vulnerability in India is better characterised by structural persistence and unequal concentration across socio-demographic groups than by a uniform decline over time. Between 2017 and 2024, the share of workers in the two highest vulnerability quintiles (Q4–Q5) declined among several groups. For youth aged 15–29, it fell from 54.77% to 47.97%, while among urban workers it declined from 43.07% to 39.07%. However, these improvements did not substantially alter the relative positioning of vulnerable groups. Rural workers consistently recorded greater vulnerability than urban workers, with 49.19% remaining in Q4–Q5 in 2024 compared with 39.07% of urban workers. This is consistent with the consistently higher proportion of informal workers and distress employment in India, where low earnings and limited social protection remain important dimensions of the quality of employment. Temporal analysis by age also reveals a similarly persistent structure. Although vulnerability among workers aged 15–29 declined by nearly seven percentage points, almost half remained in the upper

Table 22: Share of workers in the two highest LMPI vulnerability quintiles (Q4+Q5), 2017–2024

Indicator	Category	2017	2019	2020	2021	2024
Sex	Male	45.81	42.95	42.47	43.42	43.25
	Female	46.11	42.03	40.88	42.38	44.47
Sector	Rural	50.09	48.37	47.06	49.4	49.19
	Urban	43.07	39.25	38.56	38.34	39.07
Age	15–29	54.77	49.17	49.19	48.21	47.97
	30–44	43.42	40.51	38.61	40.75	40.5
	45–59	35.19	34.94	36.34	38.05	39.86
	60+	72.05	68.43	69.56	66.99	72.27
Social group	ST	43.29	45.65	40.88	49.92	46
	SC	53.78	50.07	50.96	51.24	51.49
	OBC	49.43	46.76	45.64	45.73	46.53
	Others	38.73	34.32	33.31	33.8	34.34
Religion	Hindu	44.28	41.69	40.97	41.2	42.06
	Muslim	65.11	57.09	58.15	63.87	62.06
	Christian	29.82	27.81	28.19	29	26.88
	Sikh	53.01	51.31	51.24	58.5	57.11
	Others	39.4	36.06	35.52	37.09	26.68

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey- 2017-18 to 2023-24

two quintiles in 2024. This reinforces the distinction between labour-market participation and the quality and security of employment, particularly given India's longstanding challenge of generating gainful employment for its large young workforce. Vulnerability was most pronounced among workers aged 60 and above, whose Q4–Q5 share remained around two-thirds or higher throughout the period and reached 72.27% in 2024.

Social group inequality is quite distinct and persistent as far as labour market protection is concerned. SC workers recorded Q4–Q5 shares exceeding 50% in every year, compared with approximately one-third in the “Others” category by 2024. Muslim workers similarly remained highly concentrated in the upper vulnerability quintiles (62.06%) in 2024. Thus, more than half of the labour force from marginalised social groups faces higher vulnerability in labour market. Importantly, the 2020 observations provide no evidence of a generalised COVID-related increase in LMPI vulnerability; vulnerability declined or remained broadly stable for several groups between 2019 and 2020. The results therefore suggest that the labour-market challenge is not a temporary shock-driven deterioration, but the persistence of unequal access to secure, adequately remunerated and socially protected employment.

Temporal Patterns of LMPI Vulnerability using Standard Deviation

The SD-based classification confirms that the temporal patterns observed through LMPI quintiles are not driven by relative ranking alone. Despite some improvement between 2017 and 2024, vulnerability remained strongly differentiated across socio-demographic groups. Rural workers consistently experienced greater vulnerability than urban workers: the share classified as high or very high declined only marginally from 50.01% in 2017 to 49.10% in 2024, while the corresponding urban share fell from 42.96% to 38.99%. This pattern is consistent with the continuing concentration of informal, insecure and weakly protected employment within the Indian labour market.

Table 23: Temporal Distribution of High and Very High SD-Based LMPI Vulnerability across Socio-demographic Groups, 2017–2024 (%)

Indicator	Category	2017 H+VH	2019 H+VH	2020 H+VH	2021 H+VH	2024 H+VH
Sex	Male	45.73	42.83	42.37	43.34	43.16
	Female	45.96	41.9	40.76	42.21	44.37
Sector	Rural	50.01	48.23	46.96	49.32	49.1
	Urban	42.96	39.14	38.46	38.23	38.99
Age group	15–29	54.71	48.98	49.12	48.13	47.9
	30–44	43.31	40.38	38.51	40.63	40.39
	45–59	35.04	34.89	36.17	37.99	39.8
	60+	71.96	68.37	69.39	66.76	72.06
Social group	ST	43.3	45.63	40.86	49.88	45.86
	SC	53.73	49.92	50.94	51.2	51.34
	OBC	49.3	46.6	45.55	45.6	46.48
	Others	38.61	34.23	33.12	33.72	34.25
Religion	Hindu	44.18	41.56	40.85	41.11	41.97
	Muslim	65.01	56.99	58.01	63.74	62.04
	Christian	29.82	27.73	28.17	28.99	26.61
	Sikh	52.89	51.27	51.24	58.3	56.88
	Others	38.96	36.05	35.51	36.9	26.67

Source: Author's Calculation from Periodic Labour Force Survey-2023-24

Age differences were similarly pronounced. Among workers aged 15–29, high or very-high vulnerability declined from 54.71% to 47.90%, suggesting some improvement in the relative labour market protection of younger workers. However, workers aged 60+ remained exceptionally vulnerable, with 72.06% classified in the upper categories in 2024. Social inequalities also persisted: 51.34% of SC workers remained highly or very highly vulnerable in 2024 compared with 34.25% among Others. Muslim workers recorded an upper-category concentration of 62.04%. Importantly, the SD classification reveals differences in the severity as well as incidence of vulnerability. While male and female high-plus-very-high shares were similar in 2024 (43.16% and 44.37%), 10.10% of women were very highly vulnerable compared with only 2.12% of men. Similarly, the very-high share

among ST workers increased from 7.79% to 11.01%, despite a relatively smaller change in their combined upper-category share. The 2020 estimates again provide no evidence of a generalised pandemic-induced increase in LMPI vulnerability. Instead, the correspondence between SD-based and quintile classifications demonstrates the robustness of the principal result: improvements in labour-market vulnerability occurred without eliminating persistent inequalities in access to secure and protected employment.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The article analyses the precarity of labour in India with reference to marginalised groups. Precariousness in the labour market is highly skewed towards the Scheduled Caste and Muslims in comparison to dominant social groups such as the upper caste and Hindus. Labour force and work participation analysis suggest a higher proportion of labour among marginalised groups. However, higher work participation and lower unemployment rate for vulnerable groups do not ensure better performance in other labour market indicators. Labour market indicators such as the proportion of casual wage labour, workers without a job contract, workers without any social security, workers without eligibility for paid leave, workers without a fixed work location, and the proportion of unorganised and informal labour have been estimated in this article. The article analyses these labour market indicators for social groups and religious groups in India. Sector-wise analysis of these indicators indicates rural-urban inequality in terms of crucial labour market indicators. Multivariate analysis of these labour market indicators reveals the precariousness of labour in India. The analysis also indicates that marginalised social groups such as the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims face higher precariousness in the labour market in comparison to the upper caste and Hindus. Scheduled Caste and Muslims workers are more concentrated in casual wage labour and petty self-employment work, and a lower proportion in regular wage and salary employment. Thus, a higher proportion in casual wage work and a lower proportion in regular wage salary make the marginalised social groups more vulnerable and precarious in the labour market. Analysis of the type of job contract availed by workers further indicates the precariousness of marginalised social group labour. The proportion of workers without a job contract is highest among the Scheduled Caste and Muslims, both in rural and urban areas. In rural areas, nearly 90 per cent Scheduled Caste workers and 89 per cent Muslim workers are without any job contract. Needless to say, workers without a job contract are highly vulnerable to exploitation in the labour market, such as loss of job without notice and denial of other labour rights.

Access to social security benefits such as health insurance, provident fund, gratuity, and accidental insurance is crucial to ensure the socio-economic well-being of workers. The article provides estimates of the proportion of workers without any social security benefits. Analysis indicates that more than 80 per cent workers from the Scheduled Caste and Muslims are without any social security benefits, which is much higher than the upper caste Hindu social groups. Inter-group inequality in accessing social security benefits forces marginalised group workers to bear a higher burden of precarity in the labour market in comparison to dominant social groups. Similarly, proportion of workers without eligibility for paid leave is higher in rural areas. Scheduled Caste and Muslims have a higher proportion of workers without eligibility for paid leave. Lack of eligibility for paid leave further aggravates the precarity as well as vulnerability of workers from marginalised social groups. They face loss of wages during the period of illness or other emergency situations, which ultimately affects their economic and psychological well-being. Similarly, the proportion of workers with no fixed work location is also higher for marginalised social groups. Vulnerability of labour has been analysed through the estimates of the proportion of unorganised workers by social and religious groups. Unorganised workers are more prone to precarity in the labour market as they face insecure income, job insecurity, lack of social security, exploitation and lack of legal security. The analysis in the article shows that the majority of the workforce in India is working in the unorganised sector. However, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims have a higher proportion of workers in the unorganised sector. Similarly, the informal sector also lacks social and legal protection of labour against exploitation. In India, more than 90 per cent of the workforce is engaged in informal sector work. However, among all social and religious groups, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and Muslims have a comparatively higher proportion of informal workers and therefore face higher vulnerability in the labour market.

Determinants of inequality in precarity indicators of the labour market have been analysed through a logistic regression model. Analysis of the model for various indicators suggests that apart from rural-urban and gender, social and religious identity play a crucial role in labour market outcomes. Logistic regression models estimated for six indicators of precarity – workers without a job contract, workers without eligibility for paid leave, without any social security benefits, no fixed location of work and proportion of workers in the unorganised and informal sector indicate that social and religious identity matters in determining the outcome of these indicators. Logistic regression models suggest that Scheduled Caste and Muslims have higher odds of having no job contract, no eligibility for leave and no social security benefits. Similarly, estimates of the logit model suggest that

the Scheduled Caste and Muslims have a higher likelihood of getting work in the unorganised and informal sectors.

The analysis in this article clearly indicates inter-group inequality, such as the precarity and vulnerability experienced by marginalised social groups. Public policy measures are imperative to reduce the precariousness of labour in India, particularly those working in the unorganised and informal sectors. As the discussion in this article shows, marginalised social groups have to bear more burden of precarity. It can be argued that apart from the general public policies, it is imperative to formulate group-specific public policies for reducing precarious labour in India. Labour laws, particularly related to social security and occupational safety, health and working condition need to be fully implemented. There is need to design and implement a portable universal social security system for migrant labourers, especially for marginalised social groups. Long-term structural changes, such as the formalisation of informal sector work, are also needed. Since marginalised social groups face higher precariousness in the labour market, group-specific policies need to be designed and implemented to protect the workers.

Labour Market Protection Index has been calculated to analyse the composite nature of labour market vulnerability. The findings suggest a distinction between employment creation and protection within employment. Despite higher access to labour market, marginalised groups face higher vulnerability. The rural workforce is more vulnerable than the urban workforce. Most importantly, the temporal findings caution against equating declining extreme vulnerability with structural transformation. Between 2017 and 2024, several groups moved away from the most vulnerable category, but substantial concentrations remained below it. The emerging picture is therefore not one of uniform improvement or deterioration, but of uneven mobility within a stratified labour market. The contribution of the LMPI is to make that stratification visible: it shifts attention from whether workers have employment to the more consequential question of how much protection their employment actually provides.

From a policy perspective, the LMPI therefore identifies unequal access to protected employment, suggesting that employment creation alone is insufficient unless accompanied by improvements in job security, earnings, and social protection and working conditions.

The policy implication of the LMPI is therefore not that all workers classified as vulnerable require an identical intervention. Rather, a multidimensional measure can help distinguish who is vulnerable, how severely, and through which combination of deficits. Workers concentrated in the

upper tail may require combinations of income security, social insurance, employment stability and human-capital interventions rather than programmes triggered by a single employment status or income threshold.

Recent policy developments indicate a significant effort by the Government of India to broaden and institutionalise labour-market protection. The implementation of the four Labour Codes 2025²⁵ consolidates 29 central labour laws and introduces provisions addressing minimum wages, social security, occupational safety, fixed-term employment, migrant workers, and emerging forms of work. The Code on Social Security explicitly recognises the unorganised gig and platform workers and provides for a Social Security Fund, while the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code expands provisions on appointment letters, health examinations and portability for inter-state migrant workers. These regulatory reforms have been accompanied by institutional and digital interventions. By 22nd December 2025, e-Shram had registered over 31.42 crore (314.2 million)²⁶ unorganised workers and was integrated with employment, skilling and social-security platforms. The National Career Service (NCS) facilitated job matching, counselling and skilling. The Government has also initiated a framework for extending social-security coverage to gig and platform workers.²⁷ These measures indicate a positive transition towards more comprehensive and portable labour-market protection, although their effectiveness ultimately depends on implementation and coverage among workers experiencing multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities.

The socio-demographic gradients identified by the LMPI suggest that labour-market protection should move from uniform programme delivery towards risk-sensitive and multidimensional targeting. There is a need to adopt LMPI-based targeting of labour welfare. Existing policies largely identify workers through individual eligibility criteria. An LMPI-type dashboard could identify workers facing simultaneous disadvantages in earnings, employment stability, social security and working conditions, allowing benefits to be prioritised according to cumulative vulnerability. This could build on the existing e-Shram database, which is already intended to integrate unorganised workers with welfare delivery. The government should also make social

²⁵ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, “India’s Labour Reforms: Simplification, Security, and Sustainable Growth,” November 21, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2192524®=48&lang=2>.

²⁶ Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment, “Year End Review 2025 – Ministry of Labour & Employment”, 30 December 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2209767®=48&lang=2>.

²⁷ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, “Labour Reforms: Formalising and Safeguarding India’s Gig & Platform Workforce,” December 9, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/FactsheetDetails.aspx?Id=150554®=3&lang=1>

welfare measures portable across employment and location. Workers frequently move between informal, formal, self-employed and platform work, making scheme-specific eligibility restrictive. e-Shram's integration with multiple welfare and employment systems provides an institutional foundation for portable entitlements. Internationally, the European Union's (EU) social-security coordination system preserves workers' entitlements when they move across countries. It is also imperative to prioritize high risk groups through specific interventions targeted on them. The particularly high vulnerability observed among older workers, rural workers, SC workers and Muslim workers warrants targeted combinations of income support, social insurance, skilling and employment services rather than a single universal intervention. The existing National Career Service already demonstrates differentiated employment support through dedicated centres for SC/ST workers and persons with disabilities. There is an urgent need to create an integrated labour-market early-warning system. PLFS-based LMPI measurement could be institutionalised as a monitoring tool to identify emerging concentrations of vulnerability across states, sectors and demographic groups. Such a system could connect PLFS, e-Shram, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) and NCS information to identify workers losing social-security coverage or moving towards unstable employment. The Government's move towards digital interoperability through e-Shram and NCS provides an existing institutional precedent. It is important to shift from scheme coverage to labour protection adequacy. Registration alone does not necessarily imply effective protection. Policy evaluation should therefore track whether workers actually receive adequate wages, social security, health protection and employment stability. The Labour Codes provide a useful regulatory foundation through minimum-wage guarantees, occupational safety provisions and social-security provisions for unorganised and gig workers. The next policy step should be to evaluate these provisions against multidimensional vulnerability rather than scheme enrolment alone.

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