



EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE AND UNEVEN LABOUR-MARKET CONDITIONS IN NORTH- EAST INDIA

Dr. James Dev Verma

Assistant Professor

Department of Geography

Swami Vivekananda Mahavidyalaya

Mohanpur, West Tripura, Tripura

email:jameskarma@gmail.com

Abstract

Employment in North-East India differs considerably across states and between different groups of workers. This study examines the employment structure of the eight North-Eastern states, focusing on self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. It also examines differences by gender and rural-urban location and considers informal-sector employment among non-agricultural workers as an additional aspect of employment conditions. The study uses secondary data from Women & Men in India 2024, published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, and follows a descriptive and comparative approach. The analysis compares the distribution of workers across employment-status categories and examines gender and rural-urban differentials in employment and informal-sector participation. The results indicate considerable variation in employment structure across the eight states. Self-employment accounts for a large share of employment, particularly among rural women, while regular wage or salaried employment is generally more common in urban areas. Casual labour has a relatively high share in Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura, especially in rural areas. Women are generally more concentrated in self employment, whereas men have greater representation in regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour, although the size of these differences varies across states. Informal sector participation also differs substantially by state, gender and rural-urban location. These patterns indicate that selected aspects of employment conditions and vulnerability in North-East India vary across states and population groups and cannot be understood through a single employment category. The study points to the need for employment policies that take account of the differing employment structures and conditions found across the region.

Keywords: Employment structure, labour-market vulnerability, self-employment, regular wage or salaried employment, casual labour, informal-sector employment, North-East India.

1.Introduction

Employment is an important component of economic development because it provides livelihoods and contributes to the productive use of human resources. However, labour market conditions cannot be understood only from the number of people participating in economic activity or the proportion of the population engaged in work. The forms of employment in which workers are engaged are also important for understanding the structure and functioning of a labour market. Employment structure is therefore an important dimension of labour market analysis (Papola, 2008; Papola and Sahu, 2012).

Employment takes different forms, including self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. Self-employment is an important source of livelihood, particularly where agriculture,

household enterprises and other small-scale activities provide a substantial share of available work. Regular wage or salaried employment generally provides greater continuity than casual work, although the conditions of such employment may vary. Casual labour, in contrast, is generally less regular and may involve greater uncertainty in the continuity of work. Examining the distribution of workers across these categories therefore provides an indication of the structure of employment within a labour market (Papola and Sahu, 2012; Mehrotra, 2019).

Employment conditions also vary according to gender and rural-urban location. Men and women may be distributed differently across self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour because of differences in employment opportunities, occupational choices, household responsibilities and the availability of suitable work. Rural and urban areas also have different economic structures. Rural employment is closely associated with agriculture, self employment and household based activities, while urban areas generally provide greater opportunities for wage and salaried employment, although self employment and casual work also remain important. Informal sector employment provides an additional perspective, particularly among non-agricultural workers, by showing the extent to which employment takes place outside the formal sector (Mehrotra, 2019; International Labour Organization, 2018).

North-East India provides an important context for examining these differences. The eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura, differ in their economic structures, demographic characteristics, degree of urbanisation and employment opportunities. These differences may be reflected in the composition of employment across the states. An inter-state comparison is therefore useful for understanding the diversity of labour market conditions within the region rather than treating North-East India as a single labour market. Recent research also points to differences in female labour-force and employment patterns within the region (Rani et al., 2025).

Though employment in the North-Eastern states has been examined from different perspectives, much of the available analysis has focused on female employment, informality or specific aspects of labour market conditions. Studies of rural labour markets in Assam, in particular, have examined employment patterns and the role of non-farm employment, while recent research has highlighted changing female labour-force structures and employment challenges in the North-East (Roy and Dey, 2010; Saikia and Goswami, 2013; Rani et al., 2025). Such studies are important, but they do not fully show how workers are distributed among different forms of employment across all eight states. A comparison of self-employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour, along with gender and rural-urban differences, can therefore provide a clearer picture of employment structure across the region. Information on informal-sector employment further helps to examine selected differences in employment conditions (Mehrotra, 2019).

The present study therefore examines the employment structure of the eight North-Eastern states, with particular attention to differences across states, gender and rural-urban location. It analyses the distribution of workers among self-employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour and supplements this analysis with information on informal-sector employment among non-agricultural workers. The study thus focuses on the forms of employment in which workers are engaged and the ways in which these patterns differ across the North-Eastern states.

2. Review of literature and Research gap

Employment structure is an important entry point for understanding labour market conditions because the form in which people work is closely related to the continuity, security and organisation of employment. In India, the large share of workers engaged in self employment and informal work has long been recognised as a defining feature of the labour market. Papola (2008) argued that India's employment challenge extends beyond the creation of jobs to the quality and conditions of work, particularly in the informal economy. This shifts attention from the volume of employment to its structure and the circumstances in which work is undertaken. Mehrotra (2019) similarly showed that informal employment has remained a major component

of the Indian labour market, even as the composition of employment has changed across sectors, gender groups and rural–urban settings. Employment status is therefore not merely a way of classifying workers; it provides a basis for examining the extent to which labour is distributed across different forms of work.

Research on employment structure has further highlighted the importance of distinguishing among forms of employment rather than treating employment as a homogeneous category. Papola and Sahu (2012) examined changes in India's employment structure and emphasised the significance of shifts among self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. These categories reflect different forms of attachment to the labour market, although they do not by themselves provide a complete measure of employment quality. Self employment, for instance, encompasses both relatively secure own-account activities and forms of work associated with limited earnings and economic vulnerability. Similarly, regular wage or salaried employment may provide greater continuity than casual work but does not necessarily imply uniform access to employment-related benefits. The International Labour Organization (2018) therefore placed employment conditions, wages and decent work within a broader framework for assessing labour-market outcomes. The literature suggests that employment status is best used as a structural measure through which differences in the nature of work can be examined, rather than as a direct proxy for job quality.

Informality adds another dimension to this analysis. The persistence of informal employment in India indicates that the employment relationship cannot be understood solely from workers' employment status. Mehrotra (2019) documented the continuing significance of informality, particularly in non-agricultural employment, while the Economic Survey 2024–25 noted the continuing structural changes and challenges affecting India's labour market (Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 2025). The two dimensions are related but conceptually distinct. Employment status identifies how workers are engaged through self employment, regular wage or salaried work or casual labour, whereas informality captures characteristics of employment that may cut across these categories. Considering the two together therefore provides a more useful picture of labour market structure than relying on either measure alone.

The distribution of employment is also shaped by gender and place of residence. Women's participation in the labour market has historically differed from men's in both the level and composition of employment, with self-employment and unpaid or family based work occupying an important place in women's employment in many parts of India. Rural-urban differences are similarly significant. Rural employment remains strongly connected with agriculture, household-based activities and rural non-farm work, whereas urban labour markets generally provide a wider range of wage and salaried opportunities. Lanjouw and Shariff (2004) demonstrated the importance of rural non-farm employment in shaping livelihood opportunities, while studies from Assam have drawn attention to the changing composition of rural and non-farm employment and associated gender differences (Saikia and Goswami, 2013; Roy and Dey, 2010). These findings indicate that employment structure is produced through the interaction of labour-market opportunities with gender and spatial context rather than through a single national pattern.

These considerations are particularly relevant to North-East India, where substantial differences exist among the eight states in economic structure, livelihood systems and labour-market conditions. Evidence from the region points to gendered employment patterns and continuing employment challenges for women (Rani et al., 2025), while studies focusing on Assam have identified differences in rural employment and the development of non-farm activities (Saikia and Goswami, 2013; Roy and Dey, 2010). Such findings caution against treating the North-East as a uniform labour market. The eight states differ in the relative importance of agriculture and non-farm activities, the scale of urbanisation and the organisation of economic activity, making state-level comparison important for understanding the region's employment structure.

Despite these contributions, an important empirical gap remains. Existing studies have generally addressed employment structure at the national level, examined particular dimensions such as female

employment or informality, or focused on individual states or specific aspects of the North-Eastern labour market. What is less evident is a common comparative framework covering all eight North-Eastern states and examining how workers are distributed across the three major employment-status categories of self-employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. The gap is more significant when these patterns are considered simultaneously by gender and rural-urban location. A systematic state wise comparison along these dimensions can reveal whether the employment structure of the region reflects a broadly shared pattern or substantial inter-state differences. The present study addresses this gap by comparing the employment structure of the eight North-Eastern states across employment status, gender and rural-urban residence, with additional attention to informal employment among non-agricultural workers.

2.1 Research Gap

The main gap addressed by this study is the limited comparative treatment of employment structure across all eight North-Eastern states within a common analytical framework. Existing studies provide useful evidence on female employment, informality, employment status and state-level labour-market conditions, but these dimensions are often examined separately or for individual states. This limits a broader understanding of how the major forms of employment are distributed across the region and how their distribution differs between men and women and between rural and urban areas.

The present study addresses this gap by placing employment structure at the centre of the analysis. It examines self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour across the eight states and compares their distribution by gender and rural-urban location. Information on informal sector employment among non-agricultural workers is used as a complementary measure to examine selected aspects of employment conditions. The study does not treat any single category as a direct measure of labour market vulnerability; instead, it considers employment structure and informality together to identify differences in employment conditions across the region.

3. Objectives of the study

The present study seeks to:

1. Examine the employment structure of the eight North-Eastern states by analysing the distribution of workers among self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour.
2. Analyse inter-state differences in employment structure and identify variations in the relative importance of different forms of employment.
3. Examine gender and rural-urban differences in employment structure across the eight North-Eastern states.
4. Examine selected dimensions of labour-market vulnerability through employment-status patterns and informal-sector employment among non-agricultural workers.

4. Data and methodology

4.1 Data and sources

The present study is based on secondary data relating to employment structure and selected aspects of labour market conditions in the eight North-Eastern states of India namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The analysis focuses on the distribution of workers across three broad employment-status categories: self-employment, regular wage or salaried employment, and casual labour.

The principal source of data is the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), as reported in *Women & Men in India 2024*, published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India (2024). State-wise data on the percentage distribution of workers by broad employment status for the period July 2023 to June 2024 are used to examine differences in the composition of employment across the eight North-Eastern states. The data are available separately for males and females and for rural and urban areas, enabling an examination of variations in employment structure by gender and place of residence.

To supplement the analysis of employment conditions, the study also uses state-wise data on the proportion of workers engaged in the informal sector among non-agricultural workers in usual status (principal status plus subsidiary status) during 2023-24. This indicator is used to provide an additional perspective on differences in employment conditions across states and between rural and urban areas and males and females. Wherever the source reports a dash because no sample observation is available for a particular category, the value has been treated as missing and not as zero.

For the purpose of the study, employment structure refers to the distribution of workers among self employment, regular wage or salaried employment, and casual labour. These categories provide the principal basis for examining differences in the composition of employment across the states and among different population groups. At the same time, employment status alone cannot be treated as a complete measure of employment quality. Self-employment includes a wide range of activities, from own account enterprises to contributing family work, while regular wage or salaried employment does not necessarily imply formal employment or access to social security benefits. Casual labour, because of its relatively irregular nature, may also be associated with greater uncertainty in employment.

The analysis of informal-sector employment is therefore used as a supplementary indicator for understanding selected dimensions of labour-market conditions. It is interpreted alongside the employment-status distribution rather than as an independent or comprehensive measure of labour-market vulnerability.

4.2 Method of analysis

The study adopts a descriptive and comparative analytical approach. The employment structure of the eight states is examined through the percentage distribution of workers across self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. The analysis compares the relative importance of these employment status categories across states, gender and rural-urban locations. Selected measures are also used to quantify gender differences in employment structure and differences in informal sector employment.

4.2.1. Employment-status share

Employment structure is examined using the percentage distribution of workers across self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. These distributions are compared across the eight states, by gender and between rural and urban areas.

The employment status share is conceptually expressed as:

$$\text{Employment status share, ES}_{ij} = \frac{W_{ij}}{W_i} \times 100$$

Where W_{ij} represents the number of workers in employment-status category j in state i , and W_i represents the relevant total number of workers in state i .

4.2.2. Gender gap

For each employment status category, the gender gap is measured as:

$$GG = P_m - P_f$$

Where P_m represents the percentage share of male workers and P_f represents the percentage share of female workers. A positive value indicates a higher share among males, whereas a negative value indicates a higher share among females.

4.2.3. Informality differential

(i) Differences in informal sector employment between rural and urban workers are measured using the rural-urban informality differential:

$$ID = I_r - I_u$$

Where I_r represents the proportion of workers engaged in the informal sector in rural areas and I_u represents the corresponding proportion in urban areas. A positive value indicates a higher proportion of informal-sector workers in rural areas, whereas a negative value indicates a higher proportion in urban areas.

(ii) The gender informality differential is measured as:

$$IDG = I_m - I_f$$

Where I_m represents the proportion of male workers engaged in the informal sector and I_f represents the corresponding proportion of female workers. A positive value indicates a higher proportion among males, whereas a negative value indicates a higher proportion among females.

These measures facilitate systematic comparison of employment structure, gender differences and informal-sector employment across the eight North-Eastern states. Rural-urban differences in employment structure are examined through direct comparison of the percentage distributions presented for rural and urban workers. The results are presented through comparative tables and interpreted in relation to the structure and selected dimensions of labour-market vulnerability.

The study does not construct a composite labour-market vulnerability index. Instead, selected dimensions of labour-market vulnerability are examined through the combined evidence from employment status and informal-sector participation. These indicators are interpreted as complementary dimensions of employment conditions rather than as complete or independent measures of labour-market vulnerability.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Employment Structure across the Eight North-Eastern States

Employment structure in North-East India differs considerably across states, gender and rural-urban locations. Self employment accounts for the largest share of rural employment in most states, whereas regular wage or salaried employment is more prominent in urban areas. Casual labour has a smaller overall share, although it is relatively more important in Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura.

Table 1 shows considerable variation in rural employment structure across the eight states. Self-employment accounts for the largest share of rural employment among both men and women in every state, but its share is generally higher among women. Among rural male workers, the share ranges from 47.2 per cent in Meghalaya to 72.9 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh, while among rural female workers it ranges from 64.3 per cent in Meghalaya to 94.5 per cent in Mizoram. Female self-employment is particularly high in Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland. Regular wage or salaried employment has a relatively smaller share among rural women, remaining below 23 per cent in all eight states.

Table 1. Rural Employment Structure by Gender and State, 2023-24 (%)

State	Male			Female		
	Self employed	Regular wage/salaried	Casual labour	Self employed	Regular wage/salaried	Casual labour
Arunachal Pradesh	72.9	19.9	7.2	93.1	6.4	0.5
Assam	54.0	17.2	28.8	77.3	15.2	7.5
Manipur	66.7	25.8	7.5	89.7	9.7	0.7
Meghalaya	47.2	12.9	39.9	64.3	11.6	24.1
Mizoram	66.4	25.0	8.6	94.5	5.5	0.0
Nagaland	60.1	31.9	8.0	85.6	13.7	0.7
Sikkim	55.9	31.9	12.2	76.1	22.5	1.3
Tripura	58.3	11.3	30.4	71.2	8.2	20.7
India	59.4	15.8	24.9	73.5	7.8	18.7

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2024), *Women & Men in India 2024*, Government of India. *Note: Figures are based on the usual status approach and include principal status and subsidiary status workers of all ages.*

The rural-urban difference is more pronounced in Table 2. Urban employment has a more diversified structure, with regular wage or salaried work accounting for a larger share than in rural areas. Among urban male workers, regular wage or salaried employment exceeds 40 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim. Among urban female workers, the share reaches 55.4 per cent in Sikkim and 49.0 per cent in Meghalaya. However, self-employment remains dominant among urban women in Manipur and Mizoram, accounting for 77.0 and 75.1 per cent, respectively. Thus, the shift towards regular wage or salaried employment in urban areas is not uniform among women.

Table 2. Urban Employment Structure by Gender and State, 2023-24 (%)

State	Male			Female		
	Self employed	Regular wage/salaried	Casual labour	Self employed	Regular wage/salaried	Casual labour
Arunachal Pradesh	44.9	47.5	7.6	58.7	39.6	1.7
Assam	46.9	40.7	12.5	48.9	47.9	3.2
Manipur	55.0	36.2	8.7	77.0	22.4	0.6
Meghalaya	31.4	48.5	20.1	33.4	49.0	17.6
Mizoram	47.3	42.1	10.6	75.1	24.4	0.5
Nagaland	37.5	50.3	12.2	68.3	30.6	1.1
Sikkim	41.4	46.8	11.8	44.0	55.4	0.5
Tripura	52.7	28.7	18.6	52.2	33.9	13.9
India	39.8	46.8	13.4	42.3	49.4	8.3

Source: *Women & Men in India 2024*, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India. *Note: Figures are based on the usual status approach and include principal status and subsidiary status workers of all ages.*

The comparison of Tables 1 and 2 shows a clear rural-urban difference in employment structure. Regular wage or salaried employment generally has a greater presence in urban areas, while self-employment remains particularly important in rural areas and among women in several states. Casual labour also varies across states, with relatively high shares in Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura.

5.2 Gender Differences in Employment Structure

Gender differences are pronounced in the employment structure of the eight states, although their extent varies across states and between rural and urban areas. As shown in Table 3, women generally have higher shares of self employment, while men are more strongly represented in regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. The size of these gender gaps differs considerably across the states.

Table 3. Gender Gaps in Employment Structure by State, 2023-24 (percentage points)

State	Rural self employed	Rural regular wage/salaried	Rural casual labour	Urban self employed	Urban regular wage/salaried	Urban casual labour
Arunachal Pradesh	-20.2	13.5	6.7	-13.8	7.9	5.9
Assam	-23.3	2.0	21.3	-2.0	-7.2	9.3
Manipur	-23.0	16.1	6.8	-22.0	13.8	8.1
Meghalaya	-17.1	1.3	15.8	-2.0	-0.5	2.5
Mizoram	-28.1	19.5	8.6	-27.8	17.7	10.1
Nagaland	-25.5	18.2	7.3	-30.8	19.7	11.1
Sikkim	-20.2	9.4	10.9	-2.6	-8.6	11.3
Tripura	-12.9	3.1	9.7	0.5	-5.2	4.7

Source: Calculation based on Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2024), *Women & Men in India 2024*, Government of India. Note: Gender gap = male share - female share. Positive values indicate a higher male share, while negative values indicate a higher female share.

The rural figures show a clear concentration of women in self-employment. Female shares exceed male shares in every state, with the largest gap in Mizoram at 28.1 percentage points, followed by Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh at 25.5, 23.0 and 20.2 percentage points, respectively. Tripura records the narrowest gap at 12.9 percentage points, but the female share remains higher. A contrasting pattern appears in rural regular wage or salaried employment, where male shares are higher in all eight states. The differences are particularly large in Mizoram (19.5 percentage points), Nagaland (18.2 percentage points) and Manipur (16.1 percentage points). Casual labour also has a higher male share in every state, with the largest differences in Assam (21.3 percentage points) and Meghalaya (15.8 percentage points). The rural employment structure therefore shows a clear gender difference, with women more concentrated in self employment and men more represented in regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour.

The urban pattern is less uniform, particularly for regular wage or salaried employment. Female self-employment remains higher than male self-employment in seven of the eight states, with especially large gaps in Nagaland (30.8 percentage points), Mizoram (27.8 percentage points) and Manipur (22.0 percentage points). Tripura is the only state where the male share is marginally higher, by 0.5 percentage points. Urban regular wage or salaried employment shows a different pattern: male shares are higher in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, while female shares are higher in Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura. Urban casual labour remains more strongly represented among men in all eight states, with the gap ranging from 2.5 percentage points in Meghalaya to 11.3 percentage points in Sikkim. Nagaland and Mizoram also record relatively large gaps of 11.1 and 10.1 percentage points, respectively.

The gender gap results show a clear difference in the forms of employment undertaken by men and women. Women's employment is more heavily concentrated in self employment, particularly in rural areas, while men have greater representation in regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. The size and, in some urban cases, the direction of the gaps vary across states, showing that gender differences in employment structure are not uniform across North-East India.

5.3 Employment Structure and Labour-Market Conditions

Employment structure provides useful evidence for examining selected aspects of labour-market vulnerability in North-East India. The three employment status categories should not, however, be treated as direct or complete measures of employment quality. Self employment covers a wide range of activities, from relatively productive own-account enterprises to low-return and subsistence work. Regular wage or salaried employment may provide greater continuity, but it does not necessarily imply formal employment, social-security coverage or access to other employment related benefits. The relatively high shares of casual labour in Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura are therefore relevant when considering potential employment insecurity,

particularly because casual work is generally less regular and less continuous than regular wage or salaried employment.

Informal sector employment among non-agricultural workers provides an additional perspective on employment conditions. Table 4 shows substantial variation across the eight states and between rural and urban areas. Assam records particularly high proportions, with 78.1 per cent of rural and 68.4 per cent of urban non-agricultural workers engaged in informal-sector employment. Tripura also records high proportions, at 71.6 and 66.6 per cent, respectively. Meghalaya has the lowest rural proportion at 40.5 per cent, while Nagaland has the lowest urban proportion at 43.8 per cent. The rural-urban comparison shows no uniform pattern. Informal-sector employment is higher in rural areas in Assam (+9.7 percentage points), Arunachal Pradesh (+7.0) and Tripura (+5.0), while the urban proportion is higher in Sikkim (-15.4), Meghalaya (-4.9), Manipur (-3.2) and Nagaland (-0.8). Mizoram records almost no rural-urban difference (+0.9 percentage points). The direction and size of the differential therefore vary across the states.

Table 4. Informal-Sector Employment among Non-Agricultural Workers in North-East India, 2023-24 (%)

State	Rural	Urban	Rural-Urban gap	Male	Female	Gender gap
Arunachal Pradesh	58.2	51.2	+7.0	53.1	63.8	-10.7
Assam	78.1	68.4	+9.7	79.4	62.6	+16.8
Manipur	68.3	71.5	-3.2	63.3	79.8	-16.5
Meghalaya	40.5	45.4	-4.9	46.3	34.4	+11.9
Mizoram	58.2	57.3	+0.9	50.9	73.3	-22.4
Nagaland	43.0	43.8	-0.8	37.9	54.9	-17.0
Sikkim	49.3	64.7	-15.4	59.7	39.6	+20.1
Tripura	71.6	66.6	+5.0	82.1	39.8	+42.3
India.	78.9	66.2	+12.7	76.8	61.2	+15.6

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2024), *Women & Men in India 2024*, Government of India. Note: Rural-urban gap=Rural-Urban; gender gap=Male-Female. Positive values indicate higher rural or male proportions, while negative values indicate higher urban or female proportions.

Gender differences add another dimension to the regional pattern. Informal-sector employment is higher among men in Assam (+16.8 percentage points), Meghalaya (+11.9), Sikkim (+20.1) and Tripura (+42.3). In Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, the female proportion is higher, with gender gaps of -10.7, -16.5, -22.4 and -17.0 percentage points, respectively. Tripura records the widest male-female difference, with 82.1 per cent of male non-agricultural workers engaged in the informal sector compared with 39.8 per cent of female workers. Mizoram shows the opposite pattern, with a substantially higher female proportion. Thus, the distribution of informal sector employment varies considerably by gender across the states. The results also suggest that a high share of self-employment should not be interpreted in isolation, since the conditions associated with such employment may differ across states and population groups.

The rural-urban and gender differences in informal-sector employment show that employment conditions vary within as well as between states. Employment status and informal-sector participation therefore provide complementary evidence on selected aspects of labour-market vulnerability. Neither measure alone is sufficient to assess employment quality, but together they show differences in the forms of employment and the extent of informality across states, genders and rural-urban locations.

5.4 Inter-State Variation in Employment Structure

The eight North-Eastern states differ considerably in the composition of employment, although self-employment remains an important component across the region. The nature of this pattern, however, varies by state and by gender and rural-urban location. The strongest concentration of self-employment is found among rural women in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, where the shares range from

85.6 per cent in Nagaland to 94.5 per cent in Mizoram. Meghalaya presents a contrasting pattern, with the lowest rural male self-employment share (47.2 per cent) and comparatively high shares of casual labour among both rural and urban workers. Assam and Tripura also have relatively high casual labour shares, particularly in rural areas. Thus, while self employment provides a common feature of the regional employment structure, its relative importance alongside casual labour differs substantially across states.

Sikkim represents a comparatively stronger urban wage-employment orientation, with regular wage or salaried employment accounting for 46.8 per cent of urban male employment and 55.4 per cent of urban female employment. Relatively high urban shares are also observed in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Meghalaya. In contrast, self employment remains dominant among urban women in Manipur and Mizoram, indicating that urbanisation does not produce a uniform shift towards wage employment across the region. The informal sector evidence further complicates this comparison. Assam and Tripura combine relatively high informal-sector participation among non-agricultural workers with comparatively high casual labour shares, whereas Sikkim combines a relatively strong urban wage employment orientation with a high urban informal sector share. Employment status and informal sector participation therefore do not necessarily move together across the states.

The comparison points to different employment configurations rather than a single North-Eastern pattern. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland are distinguished by particularly strong female self-employment, especially in rural areas; Meghalaya has a more pronounced casual labour component, Assam and Tripura combine relatively high casual labour and informal sector participation and Sikkim shows a comparatively strong urban wage employment orientation. These configurations also vary by gender and rural-urban location, as demonstrated by the different informal sector patterns across the states. The inter-state evidence therefore suggests that labour market conditions in North-East India are shaped by distinct combinations of employment status and informality, rather than by a common regional employment structure.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the structure of employment and selected dimensions of labour-market vulnerability in North-East India, focusing on self employment, regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour across the eight states. The analysis also considered differences by gender and rural-urban location. The findings show considerable variation in employment structure across the region, indicating that the eight states cannot be treated as a single labour market. Self-employment remains a major component of employment, particularly among rural women, while regular wage or salaried employment has a greater presence in urban areas. Casual labour is relatively more prominent in Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura, especially in rural areas. The gender analysis shows that women are generally more concentrated in self-employment, whereas men have greater representation in regular wage or salaried employment and casual labour. However, the size of these differences varies across states and between rural and urban areas. The rural-urban comparison also shows that the greater presence of regular wage or salaried employment in urban areas is not uniform, particularly among women, as self employment remains important in some states.

Informal-sector employment among non-agricultural workers provides another perspective on employment conditions. Its prevalence varies considerably across states, rural and urban areas, and gender groups. These differences show that employment status alone cannot adequately describe employment quality or vulnerability. Self employment may represent different forms of livelihood, while regular wage or salaried employment does not necessarily imply formal employment or access to social-security benefits. Labour-market vulnerability in North-East India therefore takes different forms across states and population groups. The findings suggest that employment policies should take account of these inter-state and group differences rather than follow a uniform regional approach. Greater attention is needed to stable employment

opportunities, the productivity and security of self employment, less regular forms of work, and protection for workers in informal employment. Overall, the study highlights the diverse employment conditions within North-East India and the need for approaches suited to the specific circumstances of its different states.

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