E-SHRAM: A GAME-CHANGER IN INDIA'S LABOUR WELFARE LANDSCAPE: PAPER III

The Indian government has launched a comprehensive initiative aimed at transforming the landscape of labour welfare in the country: the E-Shram portal, a One-Stop Solution for workers in the unorganized sector.

What is E-Shram?

E-Shram is an integrated portal designed to serve as a single platform that consolidates various social welfare schemes available for unorganized sector workers in India. The One-Stop Solution aims to bring together data and services provided by different central ministries and departments, thereby ensuring that workers can easily access multiple benefits without having to navigate the complexities of multiple bureaucratic systems.

As part of this initiative, the government has established a central repository of unorganised workers, which includes information on workers from diverse occupations such as street vendors, construction workers, domestic help, agricultural laborers, and more. The database enables the government to identify potential beneficiaries, track the implementation of social schemes, and plug any gaps in coverage.

With E-Shram, workers can access benefits from various social schemes such as Ration Card, PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G), PMAY-Urban, National Career Service Portal, Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan, National Disability Pension, National Widow Pension, PM Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), and the Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH). By integrating these programs under a single platform, E-Shram aims to simplify the registration and benefit-disbursement processes, making them more transparent and user-friendly.

Significance of E-Shram

The launch of E-Shram is a significant milestone in the realm of labour welfare and social security in India. Its significance can be understood from the following perspectives:

1. **Ensuring Inclusive Welfare Coverage**: The E-Shram portal has been designed to ensure that no worker is left out of the social security net. Given the fragmented nature of the unorganised sector, where workers often lack formal contracts or stable employment, it has historically been difficult to ensure coverage under government schemes. E-Shram seeks to address this by consolidating information about all workers into a central database, thereby enabling the government to identify and provide benefits to those who have so far been excluded.

2. **Ease of Access to Benefits**: By bringing multiple schemes onto a single platform, E-Shram reduces the administrative and logistical burden on workers. Previously, workers had to register separately for different schemes, often encountering bureaucratic hurdles and delays. With E-Shram, workers can complete a one-time registration and subsequently access various benefits seamlessly.

3. **Improving the Efficiency of Scheme Implementation**: The E-Shram database serves as a valuable tool for tracking the implementation of social welfare schemes. It allows policymakers to monitor the saturation levels of different schemes and identify regions or groups that require more targeted intervention. This can help improve the efficiency and impact of welfare programs.

4. **Data-Driven Policy Formulation**: The central repository created by E-Shram provides the government with a rich source of data regarding the demographic profile, employment conditions, and social needs of unorganised sector workers. Such data- driven insights are crucial for formulating policies that are tailored to the specific needs of different worker groups.

5. **Addressing Socio-Economic Disparities**: The E-Shram initiative represents a commitment to bridging the gap between formal and informal workers. It acknowledges the diverse and often precarious conditions faced by unorganised sector workers and seeks to bring them under the umbrella of social protection that is more commonly available to workers in the formal sector.

How E-Shram Revolutionizes Labour Welfare

The E-Shram portal is not merely an administrative reform; it represents a transformational shift in the approach to labour welfare in India. Here's how it is expected to revolutionize the sector:

1. **Inclusion of the Unorganised Workforce**: India has a vast unorganized sector, accounting for nearly 90% of the total workforce. The introduction of E-Shram enables the integration of these workers into the formal social security framework. It offers a sense of identity and recognition to millions of workers who previously had little to no access to social welfare schemes.

2. **Centralized and Transparent System**: The portal eliminates the need for multiple registrations and manual processing, which have been significant deterrents for workers. With a centralized digital platform, workers can now register themselves quickly, and the transparent system ensures that there is no scope for middlemen or corruption.

3. **Targeted Delivery of Benefits**: The data from E-Shram allows for more precise targeting of social security benefits, ensuring that those who are most in need receive assistance. This approach not only helps in reducing the leakage of benefits but also in maximizing the impact of government spending on social welfare.

4. **Empowerment Through Skill Development**: E-Shram integrates with the Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH), providing workers with access to skill development programs and employment opportunities. This enables workers to enhance their employability and productivity, leading to long-term socio-economic improvements.

5. **Support During Economic Shocks**: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of unorganised sector workers, who faced significant income disruptions and job losses. With a comprehensive database in place, the government can quickly roll out support measures during future economic crises.

E-Shram as a Component of Labour Reforms in India

The launch of E-Shram is part of a broader set of labour reforms being pursued by the Indian government. In recent years, the government has sought to simplify, consolidate, and modernize labour laws in the country through initiatives such as the Labour Codes, which aim to provide more uniform and streamlined regulations for employment.

1. **Simplification of Labour Laws**: The Labour Codes consolidate 29 existing labour laws into four codes: Wages, Industrial Relations, Social Security, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions. E-Shram complements these reforms by providing a platform for social security measures under the Social Security Code.

2. **Promoting Formalization of Employment**: E-Shram encourages the formalization of employment in the unorganized sector. By providing workers with a unique identification number linked to their social security benefits, the government can track employment patterns and promote formal employment contracts.

3. **Integration of Welfare Measures Across Sectors**: E-Shram brings together welfare measures from various sectors, including health, pensions, skill development, and housing. This holistic approach ensures that workers receive comprehensive support rather than fragmented benefits.

Way Forward and Conclusion

While E-Shram represents a significant leap forward in labour welfare, there are still challenges that need to be addressed to maximize its impact. Some of the key areas that require attention are:

1. **Awareness and Outreach**: To ensure that all eligible workers register on the E-Shram portal, there needs to be a sustained awareness campaign to inform workers about the benefits and the registration process. Community organizations, trade unions, and local governments should be involved in outreach efforts.

2. **Ensuring Data Accuracy and Security**: Given the sensitivity of personal data, it is crucial to ensure that the information in the E-Shram database is accurate, up-to-date, and secure from data breaches.

3. **Continuous Integration of New Schemes**: As more social welfare schemes are introduced, it will be essential to continuously integrate them into the E-Shram portal to expand the range of benefits available to workers.

4. **Periodic Evaluation and Feedback**: The government should establish mechanisms for

evaluating the performance of the E-Shram initiative and collecting feedback from workers to make necessary improvements.

In conclusion, E-Shram marks a major step towards ensuring social security for unorganized sector workers in India, it lays the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable labour welfare system. As the platform evolves, it has the potential to become a cornerstone of India's social protection framework, contributing to the vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" (collective efforts, inclusive growth). The success of E-Shram will hinge on effective implementation, continuous improvement, and a focus on reaching the most vulnerable workers in society.

Main Practice questions

Descriptive Question:

"Discuss the significance of the E-Shram portal in the context of labour reforms in India. How does it aim to transform the welfare landscape for unorganised sector workers? Highlight the challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the initiative's success. (250 words)"

Answer Guidelines:

1. **Introduction (30-40 words):**
   - Briefly introduce the E-Shram portal, explaining its purpose and the target audience (unorganised sector workers).
   - Mention its role in the broader context of labour reforms in India.

2. **Significance of the E-Shram Portal (100-120 words):**
   - Discuss how E-Shram consolidates various social welfare schemes, ensuring inclusive coverage for millions of unorganized workers who were previously outside the social security net.
   - Explain how the portal simplifies access to multiple schemes through a single registration process, thus promoting transparency and ease of access.
   - Highlight its potential to improve data-driven policy-making by providing a centralised database of worker demographics and needs.
   - Mention how E-Shram aligns with the goal of formalizing the workforce and bridging the gap between formal and informal workers.

3. **Challenges (70-80 words):**
   - Identify the main challenges, such as the need for widespread awareness and outreach to ensure maximum registration.

➢ Discuss data security concerns, given the sensitive nature of workers' information.

➢ Mention the need for continuous integration of new welfare schemes and periodic updates to maintain the database's accuracy.

4. **Conclusion (30-40 words):**

➢ Conclude with the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure the portal achieves its intended impact on social security and labour welfare in India.