

## Profile of the Transgender Population in India from Census to SMILE Portal

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### Abstract

Transgender individuals in India, historically marginalised and oppressed from the colonial era, were not included in the Indian census until 2011. This exclusion led to their omission from government schemes due to a lack of necessary documentation, resulting in widespread violence and discrimination. This study aims to trace the status of the transgender population following their first enumeration in post-independence India and examines the SMILE (Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) program, a government initiative designed to provide certificates and welfare measures to promote gender equity for transgender individuals. Data from the SMILE portal and the 2011 Census of India have been analysed. The results reveal a significant gap between the recorded transgender population and those benefitting from the SMILE program, particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which have substantial transgender communities. Comprehensive implementation of the SMILE program is urgently needed to address gender inequality and improve transgender well-being, which is crucial for achieving gender equity.

**Keywords.** Gender disparity, transgender, SMILE portal, profiling, India

### Introduction

The transgender population, though an important demographic subgroup, is often differentiated and marginalised in gender studies research. In India, this significant population group has faced various forms of discrimination and ill-treatment from the medieval period, when their gender identity was not given recognition. During the colonial era, transgenders were again oppressed through legal institutions in India.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, these discriminatory views and practises continued even after India gained independence, making it challenging for transgenders to gain recognition and be included in mainstream

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Hinchy, 'The Eunuch Archive: Colonial Records of Non-normative Gender and Sexuality in India,' *Culture, Theory and Critique/Culture, Theory & Critique* 58, no. 2 (2017): 127, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2017.1279555>.

society.<sup>2</sup> Hence, despite numerically comprising a sizeable proportion of the population in India, transgenders have never been formally enumerated in any of the censuses until 2011. From the first population Census of India in 1881 until the 2001 Census only males and females were enumerated, ignoring other gender identities. In 2011, after a long struggle for recognition, the Census of India allowed people to identify as transgender by creating a separate category of 'other' along with male and female.<sup>3</sup> It was a landmark event in the history of India's population since it revealed the large proportion of population who identified as 'other.' This watershed incident also brought forward various hurdles encountered by the transgender community, especially in health, education, and employment.<sup>4</sup> Gradually, this effort helped gain acceptance in the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) verdict as well as the transgender persons (Protection of Rights) Act. These legal milestones granted transgender individuals citizenship rights and marked a significant step towards their recognition and protection. Through such positive measures the Government of India has made significant progress in promoting the legal and social acceptance of transgender people.<sup>5</sup>

Along with these positive changes, another notable most recent venture in 2023 was the introduction of the 'Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise' (SMILE) program for enhancing the inclusivity of transgender people. The scheme emerged from the Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which guarantees transgender individuals constitutional rights, recognition of their gender identity, and non-discrimination in areas such as family, workplace, education, and healthcare. To effectively deliver these benefits, the SMILE program was launched. It addresses the socio-economic marginalisation faced by the transgender community. This holistic program covers various aspects of the well-being of the transgender community, such as rehabilitation, healthcare, education, skill development, and economic empowerment.<sup>6</sup> Considering the ongoing inclusive steps taken by the Government of India for the transgender community, in this paper we explore the demographic characteristics of transgender individuals in India and investigate the progress of well-being of transgender individuals through steps taken to ensure their inclusion by providing certificates and identity cards.

## Literature review

Societies throughout history, including India, have experienced inconsistent gender recognition, frequently due to patriarchal ideologies that strongly emphasises power and

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<sup>2</sup> Govind K. Bansal and Shibu John, 'Making Trans-Gender Healthcare a Priority in India—Journey Towards Social Inclusion,' *Indian Journal of Community Health* 32, no. 2 (2020): 327, <https://doi.org/10.47203/ijch.2020.v32i02.004>.

<sup>3</sup> K. Brindaalakshmi, 'Gendering of Development Data in India: Beyond the Binary,' *The Centre for Internet and Society*, 2020, <https://cis-india.org/raw/brindaalakshmi-k-gendering-development-data-india>.

<sup>4</sup> Satarupa Dasgupta et al., "'We Are Helpless, Hopeless and Living in Despair': Impact of COVID-19 on the Overall Health and Well-being, and Participation of the Transgender Community in India,' *The International Journal of Community and Social Development* 3, no. 4 (2021): 374, <https://doi.org/10.1177/25166026211050743>.

<sup>5</sup> Pawan Singh, 'Between Legal Recognition and Moral Policing: Mapping the Queer Subject in India,' *Journal of Homosexuality* 63, no. 3 (2015): 421, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1124700>.

<sup>6</sup> 'National Portal for Transgender Persons,' Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, <https://transgender.dosje.gov.in/>.

domination. During the colonial era, the transgender communities were considered a criminal minority.<sup>7</sup> Various acts of legislation were introduced to bring about their gradual annihilation. The first was the Indian Penal Code (IPC/1861), commonly known as section 377 of the IPC, enacted in 1861.<sup>8</sup> The second legislation was the Criminal Tribal Act of 1871-97.<sup>9</sup> Due to the legislation, societal stigma and discrimination against transgender people in India were strengthened.<sup>10</sup> This continued even after independence. The Indian constitution did not recognise the civil identity of transgender people. Since, to access various social benefits, such as legal services, health care, job opportunities, university admissions, and driving licences, individuals need official documents such as a birth certificate, passport, or ration card. However, these documents were hard to obtain for transgender persons. This deeply affected their well-being.<sup>11</sup> Our research identified some examples of transgender persons who struggled to get their certificates and identity cards, such as Shalu, a trans woman from Bihar. The district magistrate rejected her application.<sup>12</sup>

Vandana Bansal has demonstrated how the failure to record transgender persons leads to an incomplete list of crimes committed against them.<sup>13</sup> She asserted that police aggression against the transgender community, official prejudice, and a lack of knowledge about the process for obtaining transgender certification, all contribute to the underreporting of crimes against transgender individuals in India. Therefore, transgender certification is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed. In India, the recognition of the category 'transgender' through the NALSA judgement was the first step toward inclusiveness for transgender identity. Recognising them as a third gender, gave them the rights to having proper documents and certificates.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, the parliament of India enacted the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act to provide equal rights and protection. This provided the right to transgender persons to recognise themselves and it

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<sup>7</sup> Jessica Hinchy, 'Obscenity, Moral Contagion and Masculinity: Hijras in Public Space in Colonial North India,' *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (2014): 276, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2014.901298>.

<sup>8</sup> Geetanjali Misra, 'Decriminalising Homosexuality in India,' *Reproductive Health Matters* 17, no. 34 (2009): 22, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0968-8080\(09\)34478-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0968-8080(09)34478-x).

<sup>9</sup> Bansal and John, 'Making Trans-Gender,' 326.

<sup>10</sup> Dennis H. Li et al., 'Harassment and Violence Among Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM) and Hijras After Reinstatement of India's 'Sodomy Law,' *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 14, no. 3 (2016): 329, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-016-0270-9>.

<sup>11</sup> Venkatesan Chakrapani and Arvind Narrain, 'Legal Recognition of Gender Identity of Trans People in India,' *UNDP India*, 2012, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/in/legal-recognition-of-gender-identity-of-transgender-people-in-in.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Vandana Bansal, 'How Lack of Documentation of Transgender Persons in India Is Hindering Justice for Them,' *Scroll In*, 27 June 2022, <https://scroll.in/article/1026766/how-lack-of-documentation-of-transgender-persons-in-india-is-hindering-justice-for-them>.

<sup>13</sup> Vandana Bansal, 'Why Only 236 Trans Person Victims Of Crimes Were Recorded In India In 2020,' *India spend*, 23 June 2022, <https://www.indiaspend.com/gendercheck/why-only-236-trans-person-victims-of-crimes-were-recorded-in-india-in-2020-823034>.

<sup>14</sup> Amrita Arvind et al., 'Social Strain, Distress, and Gender Dysphoria Among Transgender Women and Hijra in Vadodara, India,' *International Journal of Transgender Health* 23, no. 1-2 (2021): 151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2020.1845273>.

also facilitated the certification of transgender persons with some provisions.<sup>15</sup> To integrate and provide necessary support to transgender persons, the Ministry of Social Justice has launched the SMILE program. It is a unique initiative that aims to provide legal recognition through certificates and identity cards as well as social welfare to transgender persons in India. However, there is a lack of empirical research on the implementation and impact of this scheme on the lives of transgender persons. This study will fill this gap by exploring the demographic profile of transgender persons and how they can obtain certificates and identity cards through the SMILE portal. By doing so, this study aims to understand the socio-demographic profile of the transgender population in India. It also aims to comprehend how the SMILE program is instrumental in providing the basic certifications and identity cards needed by transgender people so they can enjoy the same rights as other citizens in India.

### **Methodology:**

We analysed data from two main sources: the Census of India 2011, and the SMILE program. The Census of India 2011 issued a separate table for the first time as a Primary Census Abstract (PCA) for transgender people.<sup>16</sup> The Primary Census Abstract on transgender provided minimal information on socioeconomic aspects such as their population size, child age (0-6), caste composition, literacy, illiteracy, workers, and industry categories.<sup>17</sup> The National Sample Survey 75<sup>th</sup> round survey (2017–18) on Social Consumption and Education by the Government of India has included information about transgender persons. It is also used in analysis. The SMILE portal contained information on the applications and status of transgender identity cards and certificates in each state. It also provided information on *Garima Greh*, a pilot project to facilitate shelter homes for transgender people. The SMILE portal data was collected on 8 July 2023.

Based on the 2011 census, the descriptive statistics has calculated for different indicators of the transgender population, such as their percentage distribution, caste composition, literacy rate, and workforce participation. These are computed using Excel spreadsheets. For better representation of the data, a choropleth map is created using ArcMap software. The map depicts the spatial distribution of the transgender population across states and union territories in India and also the distribution of the transgender child population, scheduled castes (SC), and scheduled tribes (ST), literacy rates and workforce participation rates. Table and bar graphs were also used to display the numerical and percentage values of the transgender population. Using these data, we have examined the demographic, social, and economic features of the transgender community in India, as well as the status of their identity cards and welfare services.

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<sup>15</sup> Shamayeta Bhattacharya and Debarchana Ghosh, 'Studying Physical and Mental Health Status Among Hijra, Kothi and Transgender Community in Kolkata, India,' *Social Science & Medicine* 265 (2020): 4, 113412, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113412>.

<sup>16</sup> 'Primary Census Abstract Data, Census of India 2011,' Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner of India, [https://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/PCA/PCA\\_OTH\\_0000\\_2011.xlsx](https://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/PCA/PCA_OTH_0000_2011.xlsx).

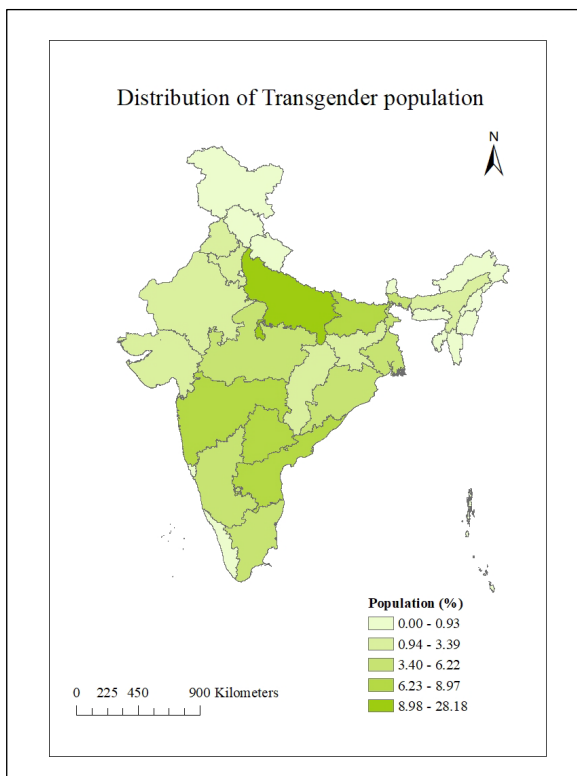
<sup>17</sup> Sibsankar Mal and Grace Bahalen Mundu, 'Spatial Disparities of Indian Transgender Population: A Censual Analysis,' *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* 4, no. 5 (2023): 6561, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371177693\\_Spatial\\_Disparities\\_of\\_Indian\\_Transgender\\_Population\\_A\\_Censual\\_Analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371177693_Spatial_Disparities_of_Indian_Transgender_Population_A_Censual_Analysis).

## Results

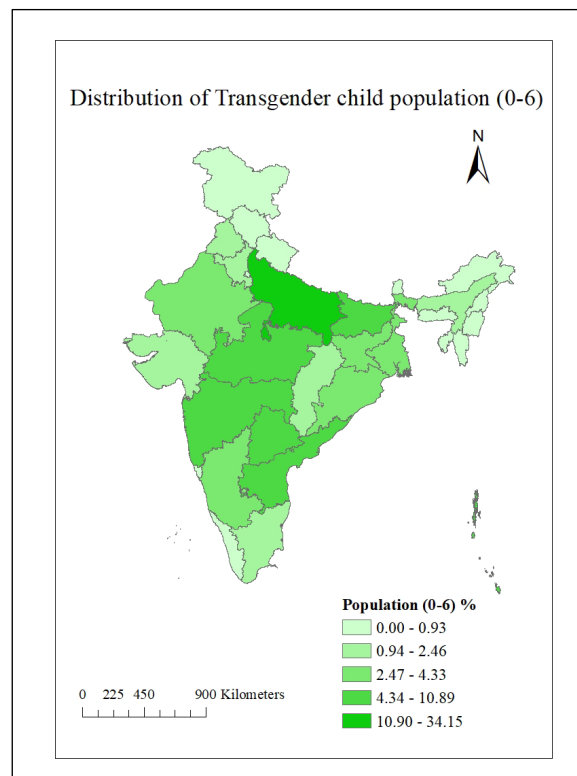
### *Spatial distribution of the transgender population in India*

Figure 1 displays the percentage distribution of transgender individuals in India’s states and union territories. The number of transgender persons was estimated at 488,000 in India. The highest proportion of transgender persons in the state was found in Uttar Pradesh, with 28.18 percent of the total population. After that, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Bihar have the highest ratio of transgender people (8.9 percent, 8.38 percent, and 8.37 percent, respectively).

These four states alone account for over half (54%) of the transgender population in India. Conversely, Puducherry, Goa, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Meghalaya each have the lowest proportions of transgender individuals, with only 0.1 percent in each of these states. Figure 2 demonstrated the percentage of the child population of transgender (0–6 years) in each state and union territories. The number of children is higher in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, where they account for 34.15 percent, 10.89 percent, 7.48 percent, 7.44 percent, and 6.21 percent of this age group, respectively. On the other hand, Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands have far smaller percentages of people in this age group, at zero percent, 0.02 percent, and 0.01 percent, respectively. This provides essential insights into the population distribution of transgender persons in India’s states and union territories.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of transgender population in India  
Source. Census of India, 2011



**Figure 2.** Distribution of transgender child population (0–6 years) in India  
Source. Census of India, 2011

## Spatial distribution of the caste composition of transgender population in India

The Census of India has tallied the number of transgender people belonging to Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) groups to understand how the social group dynamics interface with the transgender community. There is an intersectionality of disadvantageous groups, including transgender identity, SC, and ST populations. Figures 3 and 4 presented the scenario of transgender people who are members of the SC and ST groups, respectively, in all states and union territories, underscoring the need to tackle the issues these marginalised groups confront together. Figure 3 depicts the Scheduled Caste (SC) community which constitutes 20.98 percent of the transgender population. The largest share of the transgender SC population can be found in Uttar Pradesh, with West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra following closely. In contrast, states and union territories like Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh have no transgender individuals belonging to the SC category. Figure 4 shows that the transgender ST group makes up 8.86 percent. The most significant percentage is in Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh, while Chandigarh, Puducherry, Delhi, Haryana, and Punjab have the lowest ST transgender populations. Since population intersectionality provides a dual social disadvantage for both groups, these states need to be more sensitive in addressing the difficulties that transgender social groups face. To adequately address their unique issues, it is crucial to comprehend the distribution and intersectionality of the SC and ST communities within the transgender community.

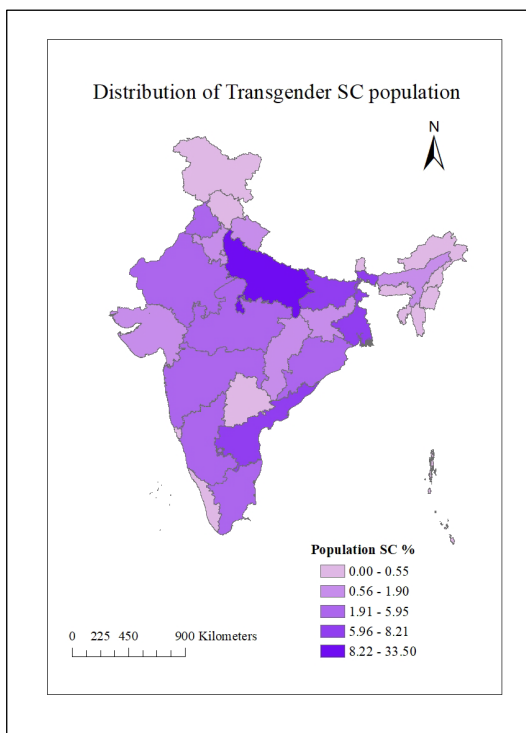


Figure 3: Distribution of SC transgender population in India  
Source: Census of India, 2011

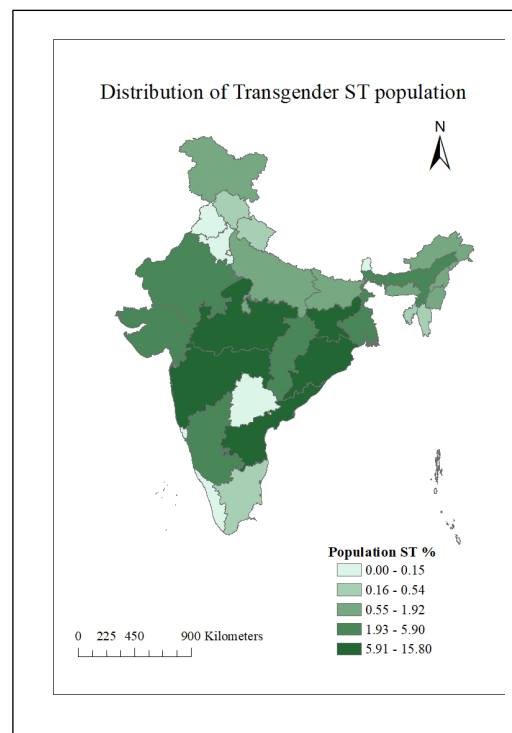
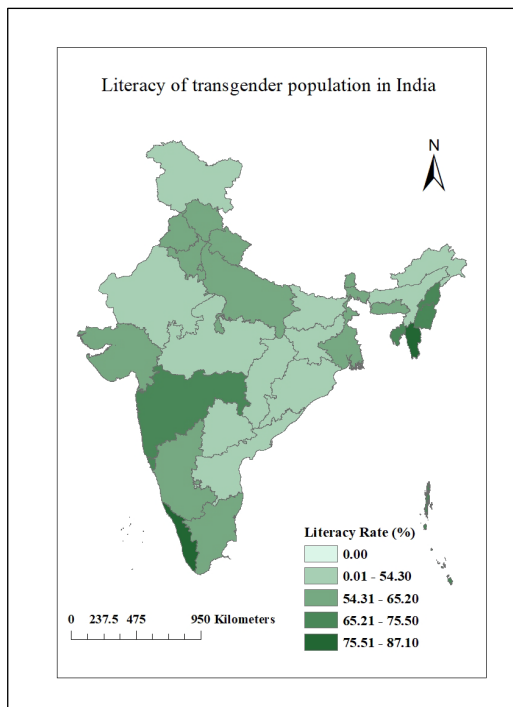


Figure 4: Distribution of ST transgender population in India  
Source: Census of India, 2011

### Literacy rate of the transgender population across various states in India

Figure 5 depicts the proportion of the population in each Indian state and union territories who are literate among transgender people. The figure revealed that transgender people face a huge gap in literacy, as only 56.1 percent of them are literate, compared to 73 percent of the total population, 80.9 percent being male, and 64.6 percent female. This indicates that transgender people are marginalised and discriminated against in terms of education.<sup>18</sup>

The states with the lowest rates of transgender literacy include Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, and Lakshadweep. In contrast, transgender people have the highest rates of literacy in states like Mizoram, Kerala, Daman and Diu, Goa, and Andaman and Nicobar. This highlights the differences in transgender people’s literacy rates throughout states and union territories of India. To raise the educational levels of transgender people, the states with lower literacy rates should concentrate on enacting stronger education laws and regulations to remedy the situation. Similarly, despite higher literacy rates in some states, further attention is required to address other challenges related to employment and livelihood opportunities for the transgender community.



**Figure 5.** Literacy rate of transgender population in India  
Source. Census of India, 2011

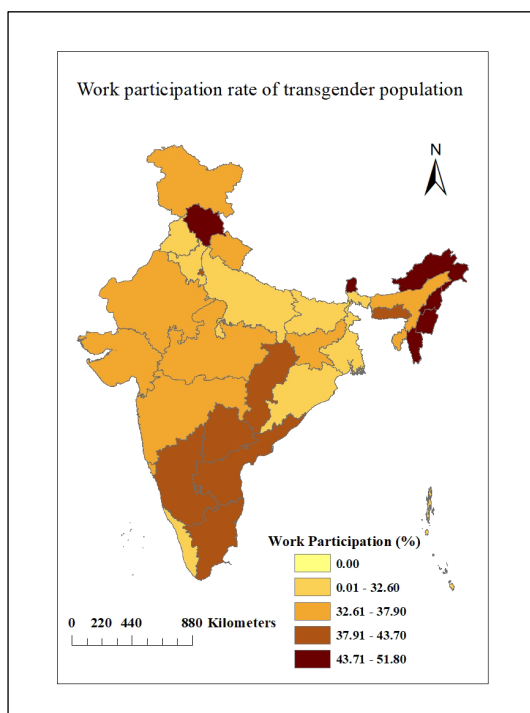
### Workforce participation rates of the transgender population in India

Figure 6 provides information on the workforce participation rate in India. The working population of transgender people is 34 percent, which is much lower than males who have 53.3 percent.<sup>19</sup> This shows a big difference in job opportunities for the transgender

<sup>18</sup> ‘Primary Census Abstract Data, Census of India 2011.’

<sup>19</sup> ‘Primary Census Abstract Data, Census of India 2011.’

community. The data for transgender people in union territories reveals that Lakshadweep has the worst unemployment rates compared to other states for transgender population. However, the states with the lowest employment rates for transgender people, are Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, and Punjab. Kerala has the lowest rate at 22.7 percent. These states show the challenges that the transgender community faces in finding suitable work opportunities and overcoming social barriers. There is a need to address the imbalance in job opportunities for the transgender population. States with low employment rates for transgender people should focus on making laws and developing programs to improve their education and career growth. Union territories and states, where transgender people face higher unemployment rates, need to have special attention and support to ensure that transgender people have access to and participate in fulfilling work. Our work suggests that by closing these gaps, India can create a more equal and inclusive society for people of all genders, promoting social progress and economic development.



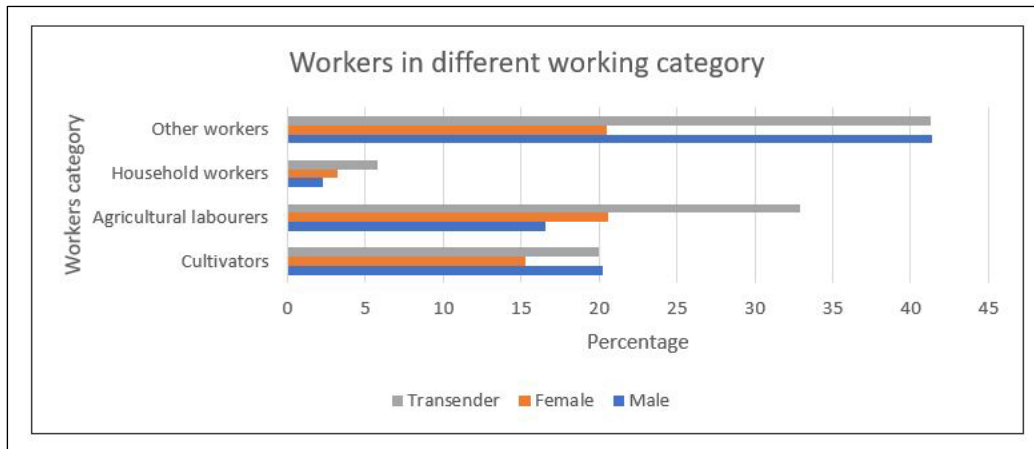
**Figure 6.** Work force participation of transgender population  
Source: Census of India, 2011

### Working categories of the transgender population in India

The 2011 Census showed the distribution of workers in different types of occupations in India. The workers are classified as cultivators, agricultural labourers, household industry workers, and other work. Figure 7 illustrates the profile of workers in these categories. As the data explains, only 20 percent of individuals are engaged in cultivation, while about 32.9 percent work as agricultural labourers. This occupation seems to dominate in almost all states. A smaller proportion, approximately 5.8 percent, are employed as household workers. This might indicate a certain level of development within this group. Strikingly, the highest percentage (41.3%) falls under the category of 'other' work in the census of India. Unfortunately, the data do not make it obvious what these 'other' jobs include. It is crucial



to go deeper into this wide range of careers and explore the different fields where transgender people seek their livelihoods to get a complete idea of the categories.



**Figure 7.** Workers in different working categories  
Source. Census of India, 2011.

### Limitations of census data on the transgender community

The data collected during the 2011 Census of India aimed at counting the third-gender population, but it had limitations in providing a comprehensive understanding of this population. It lacked specific data related to age groups, had a restricted scope when it came to the occupational profiles of transgender individuals, and did not specify various categories of work within this population. Furthermore, there was no information available regarding their access to basic amenities or their overall health. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate these necessary components in the upcoming Indian Census enumeration. This would enable a more comprehensive and holistic representation of transgender individuals, encompassing their broad socio-economic and developmental profiles. Such data would, in turn, facilitate formulation of appropriate policies and laws to enhance the well-being of the transgender community. This would be a significant achievement towards reaching Sustainable Development Goal five- Gender Equality.

### The visibility of the transgender population in the National Sample Survey (NSS)

The NSS 75<sup>th</sup> round survey (2017–18) on Social Consumption and Education by the Government of India has included some information about transgender persons. However, the sample size is very small. The table 1 shows the state-wise distribution of transgender individuals in India. The data covers only 15 states, and the sample size is 28 which is not representative. The dataset should expand its scope to accommodate the transgender population in enumeration and collect a representative sample. This can help to understand the needs of the community better and create more opportunities for their inclusion.

**Table 1.** The distribution of transgender population across states in India through NSS 75<sup>th</sup>

State	Transgender sample	Transgender population with weights
Uttarakhand	1	837
Delhi	1	1994
Rajasthan	1	3723
Uttar Pradesh	3	16436
Bihar	3	10840
Arunachal	1	106
Assam	2	7282
Jharkhand	3	2950
Chhattisgarh	2	1626
Madhya Pradesh	3	6852
Maharashtra	2	10321
Andhra Pradesh	1	9682
Karnataka	2	10142
Kerala	2	3650
Tamil Nadu	1	5355

Source. Generated by authors through micro data,  
<https://microdata.gov.in/nada43/index.php/catalog/151/study-description>

### **Recent government initiatives for providing certification through enumeration of transgender population: SMILE Portal**

The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment in India has a crucial role in improving the well-being of transgender individuals. To protect their legal rights, the government passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2019. Additionally, on 29 September 2020, the Ministry issued the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules to assist in the effective enforcement of this Act.<sup>20</sup> The Ministry launched the national-level umbrella scheme 'SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise' to empower marginalised people. This holistic scheme has two sub-schemes: one for the comprehensive rehabilitation of transgender people and another for those who are involved in begging.<sup>21</sup> The SMILE portal offers a platform for various initiatives for the

<sup>20</sup> Megha Kurian and Greeshma Manoj, 'Transgenders in the Mainstream: Welfare Schemes in Kerala—Kochi Metro Rail Project, Education Programme, Health Clinics, and Old-Age Pension,' *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 28, no. 2 (2021): 169, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971521521997961>.

<sup>21</sup> 'Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise (SMILE),' Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, <https://socialjustice.gov.in/schemes/99>.

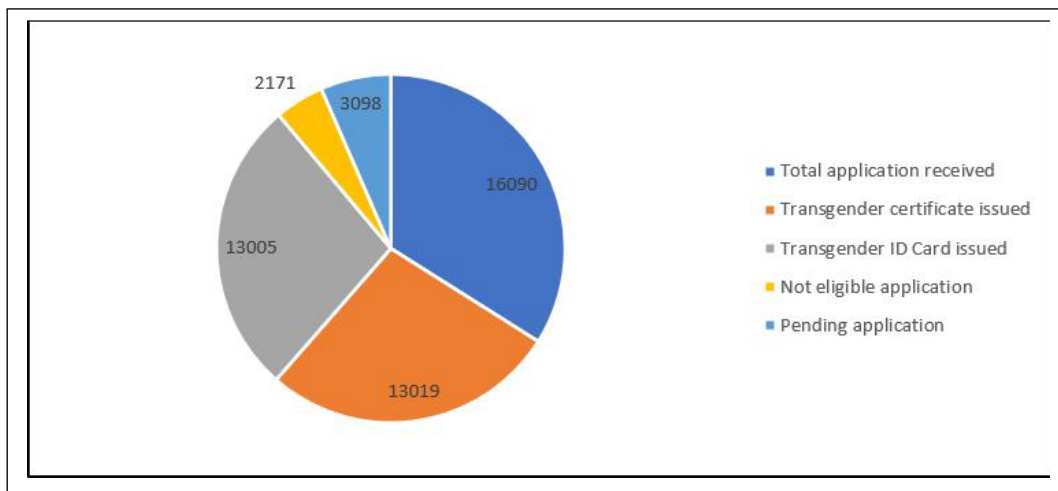
well-being of the transgender community. Figure 8 depicts the SMILE Portal program and various welfare initiative taken for the well-being of transgender population.<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 8.** SMILE Portal main page

Source. Adapted from Smile portal, <https://transgender.dosje.gov.in/>

These initiatives include economic opportunities, counselling, health care access, education, and rehabilitation.<sup>23</sup> To implement this scheme effectively, collaboration with various stakeholders is required, such as state governments, union territories, urban local bodies, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations.



**Figure 9.** Transgender certificates issued through SMILE portal

Source. Adapted from Smile portal, <https://transgender.dosje.gov.in/>

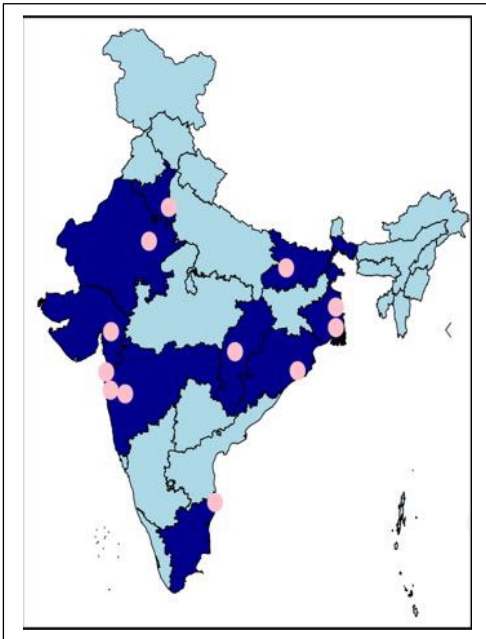
The SMILE portal provides necessary support to the transgender community, such as obtaining documents, certificates, and identity cards. As shown in Figure 9, the portal received 16,090 applications for transgender certificates; out of these, 13,019 certificates and 13,005 transgender Identity cards have been issued successfully. Some applications

<sup>22</sup> The SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise Program Portal can be accessed at <https://transgender.dosje.gov.in.>

<sup>23</sup> 'National Portal for Transgender.'

were rejected for certificates, while others are still pending. Moreover, the *Garima Greh* initiative, which is displayed in Figure 10, is a pilot project in 12 states.

This initiative aims to provide secure housing, nourishment, medical care, and recreational amenities for transgender individuals. It also offers support for tailored capacity-building and skill development initiatives to meet their specific requirements. These efforts demonstrate the government's dedication to enhancing the welfare and empowerment of transgender persons in India, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for their development and well-being.

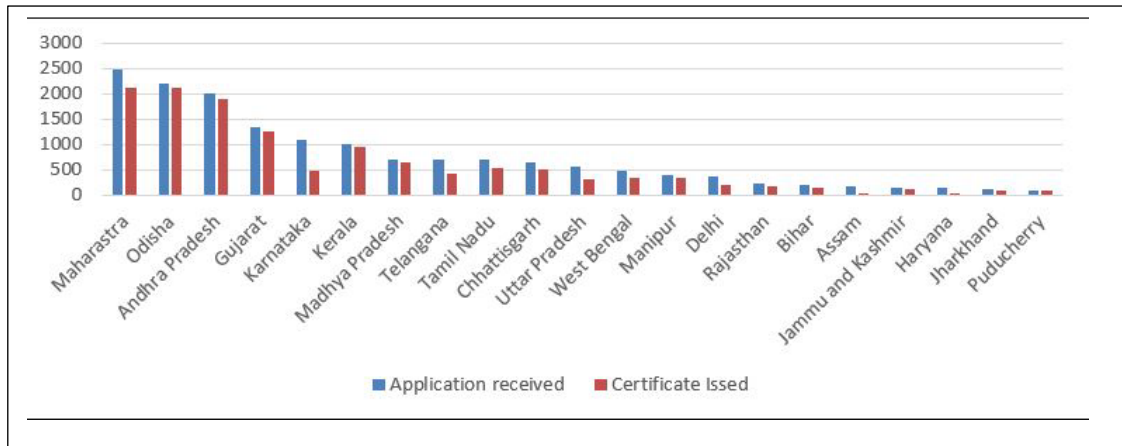


**Figure 10.** A pilot project in 12 states, Geotagged *Garima Greh*  
Source. Adopted from Smile portal, <https://transgender.dosje.gov.in/>

### **State's participation in providing certificates and identity cards for transgender persons**

Figure 11 illustrates the distribution of transgender certification and application profiles across the state, specifically focusing on those that have issued a minimum of 50 certificates. Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Lakshadweep, and Daman and Diu have not received any applications from all the states and union territories, indicating potential room for improvement in these regions. With several applications (2480) and certificates issued (2132), Maharashtra stands out as a state that actively supports transgender people. In addition to making admirable efforts, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh received 2212 and 2011 applications respectively and many transgender individuals were granted certificates. By accepting many applicants and awarding certificates, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, and Madhya Pradesh have also made progress towards transgender inclusiveness. Although Telangana has tried to work with the transgender population, a substantial gap exists between applications and certificates granted. With a significant proportion of certificates awarded compared to applicants, states like Tamil Nadu have demonstrated attempts to recognise transgender rights. Other states with smaller numbers, like Manipur, Delhi, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Jharkhand, show the need for further assistance and engagement for transgender people seeking official recognition. These initiatives are a

reflection of the continuous efforts made by different Indian governments to officially recognise and certify transgender people in order to encourage their involvement in society. To promote a more diverse and welcoming society for everyone, these initiatives must continue and develop.



**Figure 11.** The States that have participated in the SMILE scheme

Source. Adapted from Smile portal, <https://transgender.dosje.gov.in/>

## Discussion and conclusion

In this study we have delved into India’s journey towards adopting a more gender-inclusive approach for transgender people, particularly after recognising the third gender and the process of including transgender individuals in mainstream developmental initiatives. The demographic profile of transgender illustrates the characteristics of the community in India which helps in our comprehension of this process. As our findings indicate, the proportion of transgender individuals is notably higher in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand, based on data from the 2011 Census. Conversely, states like Mizoram, Gujarat, and Kerala display lower ratios of transgender individuals. It is worth noting that larger states like Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh may have higher absolute numbers of transgender people due to their larger populations, which can make the proportion of transgender individuals appear higher. The 2011 Census table of transgender is likewise demographically reduced, containing only age-specific information on transgender children between the ages of 0 and 6 years. The states with the highest percentages of transgender children are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh in terms of the total number of transgender children in each state. Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar, Dadra and Nagar, and Daman and Diu have the lowest percentage of transgender children.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, there is a notable disparity in the literacy rates of transgender people when compared to the general population. In states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Meghalaya, transgender individuals are significantly less likely to be literate than in other states. In Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, and Mizoram, the literacy rates for transgender individuals are almost on par with the national average, suggesting that all genders in these states have higher literacy rates.<sup>25</sup> The analysis further presents that Lakshadweep, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh,

<sup>24</sup> ‘Primary Census Abstract Data, Census of India 2011.’

<sup>25</sup> ‘Primary Census Abstract Data, Census of India 2011.’

Haryana, and Odisha have the lowest rates of workforce participation among transgender people. Even though Kerala and Lakshadweep have high literacy rates among transgender people, they still have low workforce participation rates, which suggests that they experience discrimination in the workplace.

Our study illustrates that transgender people in Kerala are more hidden than in other states, because they are afraid of being rejected by their families, dropping out of school, or losing their jobs.<sup>26</sup> Transgender people have better conditions in Tamil Nadu. The establishment of the Transgender Welfare Board in Tamil Nadu in April 2008 was aimed at addressing the social protection requirements of transgender individuals, potentially contributing to their increased engagement in the workforce.<sup>27</sup> Some other southern states in India, such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, have taken some measures to offer social support to transgender people. These states have partnered with NGOs that work for the well-being and empowerment of transgender people. This is why their work participation is higher. Apart from these, the north eastern states have also done well, with Nagaland having the highest work participation rate of any transgender population, followed by Sikkim, Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya. There is a gender inclusive environment or stigma free environment in these states.

Further analysis is needed to discern the inherent characteristics of workforce participation to ascertain the nature of work in which transgender population are involved. Unfortunately, the 2011 'other gender' table provides only four broad categories of work: cultivators, agricultural labourers, household industry, and 'other' employment. In most states, the majority of employed transgender people are cultivators and agricultural labourers. 'Other' is the occupation reported by 41 percent of all employed transgender people in India in the 2011 Census, which shows that, to a large extent, Indian transgender people have informal occupations.

The Census 2011 does not provide much detail about the characteristics of the work profile of transgender people in India. However, a study by the Kerala Development Society in 2018 gives some insight of the work profile. The study was conducted in two regions in India: Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. It reveals that around 65.33 per cent of the population is involved in the informal sector with work characteristics like 24.4 percent in Badhai, 10.44 percent in begging, 4.56 percent in sex work, 3.22 percent in the beauty industry, 13.11 percent are sellers, and 9.56 percent are in miscellaneous work. Apart from this, 6 percent of transgender people work in the private sector, while 15 percent have no work and 10 percent did not respond to the question.<sup>28</sup> So, there is need to provide formal employment and change structural constraints for better employment opportunities for those in the transgender community.

The SMILE scheme has given a comprehensive overview of how transgender certificates and identity cards are issued. It shows that only 13019 certificates have been issued in India, while 16090 applications have been received. This is a very low proportion of

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<sup>26</sup> Kurian and Manoj, 'Transgenders in the Mainstream,' 174.

<sup>27</sup> Venkatesan Chakrapani, 'The Case of Tamil Nadu Transgender Welfare Board: Insights for Developing Practical Models of Social Protection Programmes for Transgender People in India,' *UNDP*, 2013, <https://www.undp.org/india/publications/case-tamil-nadu-transgender-welfare-board-insights-developing-practical-models-social-protection-programmes-transgender-people>.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob John, 'Study on Human Rights of Transgender as a Third Gender,' *Kerala Development Society*, 2017, [https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Study\\_HR\\_transgender\\_03082018.pdf](https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Study_HR_transgender_03082018.pdf).

the total transgender population. The census shows that there are 487,803 transgender people in India, but only a small number have applied for the certificates. This means that most of the transgender population is living without proper documentation and is excluded from government schemes. The process of certification can be better understood by looking at the state-wise participation. No application has been received from the union territories of Andaman and Nicobar, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. This shows that these union territories have not provided necessary facilities for transgender people. Likewise, the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have a large proportion of the transgender population, but the number of applications for certification and identity cards is low. This could be attributed to a lack of awareness among the transgender people or to the kind of stigma and discrimination they face.

Maharashtra has a large population size and has shown more active participation with the SMILE program, which is due to the efforts of NGOs like Humsafar Trust and others to make the population aware of the schemes.<sup>29</sup> Other significant performing states are Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, since, these states have actively participated in transgender inclusive processes. Odisha was the first state to provide benefits to the transgender population, including pensions, housing, and food grains, beginning in 2016.<sup>30</sup> In 2022, Andhra Pradesh initiated various measures for transgender inclusion, including the establishment of the Transgender Protection Cell. The cell provides a one-stop solution for transgender communities by offering protection services from the police department and other services that ensure safety and security through networking and collaboration with other stakeholders.<sup>31</sup> Gujarat has given members of the transgender community them the right to vote in elections since 2017. According to the electoral list, there are 687 transgender registered in the election portal in Gujarat.<sup>32</sup> The state government of Karnataka has also said that 1 percent of teaching posts in the state will be designated for transgender individuals during the next recruitment. Karnataka is the nation's first state to employ transgender persons in the field of education.<sup>33</sup> The efforts these states have made have had a significant impact to actively include transgender people, which is why their participation is quite high for documentation and certification.

However, states like Manipur, Delhi, Rajasthan, and Jharkhand have not performed well in the application of transgender certificates. Delhi is still lagging behind in terms of having a transgender-sensitive health workforce and education system, despite its

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<sup>29</sup> 'Transcend Phase 1: Programmatic Report,' Humsafar Trust, [https://humsafar.org/site/assets/files/1644/transcend\\_phase\\_1\\_-\\_programmatic\\_report.pdf](https://humsafar.org/site/assets/files/1644/transcend_phase_1_-_programmatic_report.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Nita Bhalla, 'Odisha Becomes First State to Give Welfare to Transgender Community,' *India Today*, 2 June 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/indias-odisha-state-becomes-first-to-give-welfare-to-transgender-community-12032-2016-06-02>.

<sup>31</sup> 'Andhra Pradesh State AIDs Control Society,' For LGBTQ Community, <https://apsacs.ap.gov.in/for-lgbtq-community/>.

<sup>32</sup> Shorab Negi, 'Gujarat Polls: Centenarians, Transgenders Set to Play Major Role,' *The Statesman*, 28 November 2017, <https://www.thestatesman.com/india/gujarat-polls-centenarian-transgender-community-set-to-play-major-role-1502536297.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Tashafi Nazir, 'Gender Inclusion! Karnataka Becomes India's First State To Reserve Teaching Jobs For Transgender People,' *The Logical Indian*, 24 February 2022, <https://thelogicalindian.com/lgbtq/karnataka-first-state-reserve-teaching-jobs-transgender-34111>.

continuous efforts.<sup>34</sup> The reason for this needs to be further examined. The states of Jharkhand, Manipur, and Rajasthan need to create an inclusive environment for transgenders, so that they can participate actively in India's development. India is still on the path to a more gender-inclusive society, but there is a need to address the structural challenges highlighted in the profile of transgender to create a fairer and more welcoming environment.

In our study we have provided a comprehensive quantitative picture of the current status of transgender people in India, and we have identified the key areas that need to be improved to help them become part of mainstream society. We have emphasised the necessity for a more comprehensive approach to address structural barriers. This includes enhancing literacy rates, increasing participation in formal employment, and fostering social acceptance of transgender individuals. Furthermore, we advocate for greater awareness, inclusivity programs, and government assistance to streamline the processes involved in obtaining all the necessary documents and certificates for transgender individuals. By empowering the transgender community and improving their well-being, India can make significant progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 5: 'Gender Equality,' and Goal 10: 'Reduced Inequalities.' This aligns with the commitment of the 2030 Agenda to ensure that no one is left behind. We have made a compelling case for improving the quality of life for the transgender population by highlighting the structural constraints.

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<sup>34</sup> Mohammad Ibrar, 'Initiative to Educate Professionals on Transgender Health,' *The Times of India*, 30 June 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/initiative-to-educate-professionals-on-transgender-health/articleshow/84001394.cms>.



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